

Introduction

“Workers + Warriors”

Black Acts and Arts of Radicalism, Revolution, and Resistance

Past, Present, and Future

by Celeste-Marie Bernier and Nicole Willson

Lest We Forget: The Strength of Tears, ~~t~~he Fragility of Smiles, ~~F~~he Fierceness of Love. So reads the title of Betye Saar’s powerful mixed-media assemblage that she created as part of her *Workers + Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima* series exhibited ~~over two decades ago~~ in New York in 1998, over two decades ago.¹ A triptych she constructed from historical washboards used by laboring African American women, enslaved and free, Saar’s work bears witness to acts and arts of Black female radicalism as borne not only of the body’s physical endurance—~~and~~ as communicated by centuries of domestic servitude, both during slavery and in a post-emancipation era—but of ongoing death-defying acts of spiritual resistance, creative revolution, and political activism. These recycled artifacts function as altars of worship and ancestral veneration in which Saar ~~she~~ memorializes untold genealogies of Black women’s lives. For Saar, the salvaged artifact of the disused washboard is integral to her protest aesthetic by providing “a format to depict the plight of slaves and their struggle to endure hard labor and lynchings.”² As she declares, “B~~t~~y recycling them, I am honoring the memory of that labor and the working woman upon whose shoulders we now stand.”³ Simultaneously refusing to flinch from the white

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supremacist acts of death and destruction as perpetuated against Black lives on a massive scale, and acting as a reminder not only of chattel slavery but of “hard labour and lynchings,” Saar’s vertical positioning of these washboards is visually evocative of grave markers in a cemetery. She exacerbates these traumatic associations by including a series of emotionally unequivocal phrases—“THE STRENGTH OF TEARS/OF THOSE WHO TOILED,” “LEST WE FORGET/THE FRAGILITY OF SMILES/OF STRANGERS LOST AT SEA” and “THE FIERCENESS OF LOVE/EXTREME TIMES CALL FOR EXTREME HEROINES”—which she types onto the surfaces of her assemblages-turned-headstones where the names of individuals would typically appear. As a hard-hitting testament to lives as lived beyond the pale of official commemoration, Saar’s work exposes the tragedies of those “who didn’t survive” {please add citation for quote} no less than those who did survive by any and every means necessary. As she bears witness in her rallying cry: “EXTREME TIMES CALL FOR EXTREME HEROINES.”

The horrifying realities of Black lives lost to history are reinforced not only by Saar’s inclusion of poetic text in her mixed-media assemblage but by the juxtaposition of three different images of Black womanhood that she inserts onto the battered surfaces of the washboards. For the first washboard, Saar reproduces a black and white photograph of a Black woman hunched over a sink washing clothes. The especially worn surface of this recycled historical artifact ensures that her face is only partially visible. Here Saar does hard-hitting justice to missing histories of Black female labor in visceral as well as symbolic ways by suggesting a direct relationship between the surface of these damaged artifacts and the skin of wounded bodies. Regarding the second washboard, Saar returns viewers to the “slave ship imprint” by reproducing a cross-section of the

Brooks, [an](#) eighteenth-century slave ship built in Liverpool, U.K., [that had a potent afterlife once its slaving days were finally over](#).⁴ Diagrammatic renderings of the [maritime vessel](#) circulated in broadsides on both sides of the Atlantic to become an ur-image for suffering, enslaved bodies within white abolitionist iconography. Saar's decision to insert this diagram onto the washboard, whose metallic surface symbolizes the sea—and as such is a talismanic signifier of the Middle Passage—exposes the extent to which white philanthropic recreations of the *Brooks* exerted no small collateral damage by annihilating all trace of individualism in the interests of the antislavery cause. Black bodies appear as anything but human, circulating as barely decipherable and homogenous signs at best and as bodies of evidence and specimens of victimization at worst. As Frederick Douglass insisted all his life, his body and soul [were](#) bought and sold not only on the slaveholding auction block of the U.S. South but on the abolitionist podium of the seemingly free North. No capitulator to white racism, he led an ongoing war against white activists who remained intent—all pretensions to social and moral reform to the contrary—on endorsing discriminatory and persecutory practices not only against him but against all peoples of color. On the final washboard, Saar takes centuries-long white racist discriminatory iconography to task by making the radical decision to include a grotesque caricature of Black womanhood. She inserts the plantation stereotype [figure Aunt Jemima](#), as represented with a red-spotted bandana, enlarged eyes, reddened lips, and excessively blackened skin color. Ultimately refusing to capitulate to forces of white supremacy, however, Saar empowers her Black female subject by including a sticker on her dress [with](#) the political slogan “LIBERATE AUNT JEMIMA” [and](#) [placing](#) a toy replica of an automatic rifle in her hands.

“I recycled derogatory images of Blacks and combined them with political slogans to reverse the negative connotations of racism,” Saar summarizes.⁵ She defines her early art-making processes in ways that are still relevant to her practice today by observing that “slavery was declared illegal in 1862, but since then African Americans still ‘served’ in white homes in the form of images on cookie jars, dish towels and salt and pepper shakers, in addition to countless other household objects.”⁶ Call to Arms, another assemblage in the Workers + Warriors series that she created in 1997, comes to grips with these disturbing political legacies as visibilized in dominant material cultures in yet more revealing ways.⁷ Here

⁷ Here she juxtaposes a “Black collectible” {if this is a quote, please clarify where it comes from, and if not, please remove quote marks to avoid ambiguity} grotesque figurine with emotionally powerful text that testifies {consider another word here or in the following sentence to avoid repetition} bears witness? to atrocities she chose not to graphically represent: “I’ve been victim The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo They lynched me in Texas.” As a means to testify not only to unending cycles of white racism but to generations of Black resistance, she explicitly riffs off her mixed-media work *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, produced in 1972.⁸ Her Black figure is similarly accompanied not with one but multiple rifles as well as bullets, and holds her hands in the shape of clenched fists. For Saar, the manufacture, display, and sale of mass-marketed “Aunt Jemima” figurines as cheap commodities “symboliz[e] the painful, ancestral memories of the Middle Passage, of slavery, of Jim Crow, of segregation, and of continuing racism.”⁹ Ultimately, *Workers + Warriors* signals the continuation of Saar’s life’s work of self-confessedly transforming “a demeaning mammy figure into an empowered warrior,” a practice she began decades

earlier in the wake of her “creative retaliation” inspired by the “murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”¹⁰ A radical call to arms, Saar’s series lays bare her lifelong commitment to visualizing untold stories of Black acts and arts of resistance, radicalism, and revolution against all the odds.

“Monday was wash day. Tuesday was ironing day. Wednesday was the day we delivered the clothes to the white people. Thursday was cleaning day. Friday was yard day. Saturday was grocery day. And on Sunday we all went to church.”¹¹ So reads Bessie Harvey’s summary of her childhood upbringing in the rural U.S. South, in which she not only undertook hard labor in the service of whites but participated in familial domestic and religious rituals. As an artist who shared Saar’s determination to do powerful justice to hidden histories of Black women’s labor and to memorialize a Black collective fight for survival, she created her sculpture *The First Washing Machine*, also titled *Monday* in honor of “wash day,” in 1986.¹² In this work, an anonymous Black woman wears a beautifully ornate, flower-patterned dress and head wrap while she washes clothes in a silver bowl that Harvey constructed from foil packaging. As she testifies, the “first washing machine” is no automated piece of equipment but found in the back-breaking labor of Black women. As is customary across her sculptures, Harvey constructs her female protagonist’s torso from twigs, minimally worked so that the figure has only stumps for hands and feet. While the washing line behind this female laborer shows multicolored and multipatterned pants and dresses—most likely belonging to her own family members of all ages—Harvey includes only white items of clothing in the washing bowl and in a pot positioned over a fire. The stark contrast between the vividly colored clothing of these personal garments and the uniform whiteness of the items in her basket suggests very strongly

that Harvey's unnamed protagonist is fulfilling domestic duties by washing sheets for "the white people."

In this sculpture, Harvey works with valueless materials—discarded foil [I moved "discarded" here from the above paragraph because "silver foil" does not on the surface sound "valueless"], clothing scraps, and salvaged wood—to honor the lives of anonymous Black women who not only labored within plantation slavery but were and continue to be hired out to domestic service. For Harvey, the labor of the Black woman artist exists on a continuum with the labor of enslaved and free Black women. Choosing to sign her name in large letters on the base of the salvaged wooden board, she celebrates her own artistry at the same time that she testifies to the hidden histories of Black women's work. Dramatically to the fore in this sculpture is her conviction regarding the changing social and political contexts according to which "woman is lifted up high."¹³ "There was a time that a woman couldn't do the job you doin' now," she informed one of her white interviewers, "Couldn't adopt a child if it wasn't a man. She couldn't even have credit without a man."¹⁴ [the citation in the footnote here is for Lonnie Holley. Is Holley quoting Harvey?] Ultimately, in her sculpture *The Hanging Tree*, [this hasn't been discussed—do you mean one of the other works mentioned above?] Harvey like Saar celebrates radical feats of female resistance. These run a gamut from a Black woman's irrefutable ownership over her maternal rights to her right to profit from her own labor and artistry.

Lonnie Holley shares this determination to create art as a space of salvation and survival: "Art was my savior. Art kept me from killing myself. My art was my new love affair. It was my retreatment to myself, not mistreating myself."¹⁵ Across

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¹⁵ Across his mixed-media assemblages and installations, as for Betye Saar and Bessie Harvey, art-making is an act of creativity that operates not only as a bulwark against self-destruction but as a stimulus to self-respect, self-transformation, and self-examination. “Art made you forget everything, and that’s the fulfillment of life,” he insists, observing, “It takes you from one frame of thought, erases everything, and puts everything on hold and allow[s] you to successfully achieve your mission and do something else with the brain.”¹⁶ Serving as a safety-valve, a portal, and a conduit for public and private memories, histories, and narratives, art-making for Holley guarantees the “fulfillment of life.” He develops his practice to find new ways to access social, political, cultural, emotional, intellectual, and imaginative freedoms that otherwise remain off-limits within a white racist imaginary.

Repeatedly incarcerated within a discriminatory judicial system, Holley turned to art-making as a life-saving strategy and as an escape from persecution. As he describes regarding a harrowing period of imprisonment he endured in Memphis, Tennessee, “In my cell I had started doing art out of pieces of old soap I found in the shower, and toilet paper, and straws from the broom that had got left in the cracks in the floor.”¹⁷ Sharing Bessie Harvey and Betye Saar’s practice of “making something out of nothing,” [please clarify where the quote is from, or else remove quote marks to avoid ambiguity] he relies on inventive aesthetic techniques to transform waste materials into allegorical and fantastical human and animal forms: “I made faces and fishes and birds, anything I could design.”¹⁸ He takes pride in the instant approbation he received from his audiences, emphasizing, “The guard and the prisoners was saying, ‘Wow’, and listening to me because I was teaching them how to use their minds and their skills.”¹⁹ Over the decades, Holley retains his early commitment to the role of the artist as educator as well as oral

historian and storyteller. Working to instill pride among Black audiences by raising awareness of the value of “their minds and skills,” Holley creates artworks to stimulate dialogue and exchange. As an artist who lays bare centuries of Black resistance in his practices, he confides his conviction, “We was communicating.”²⁰

A breathtaking array of political, aesthetic, cultural, and imaginative acts and arts of resistance are endorsed not only by Lonnie Holley, Betye Saar, and Bessie Harvey but by centuries of African diasporic artists, authors, and activists. Living and dying as “workers + warriors,” these women, children, and men, enslaved and free, are the focus for the contributors writing in this special issue as they each work to do justice to their revolutionary “call to arms.”²¹

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* {Consider inserting a descriptive heading} | “The Strength of Tears, The Fragility of Smiles, The Fierceness of Love”: Invisibilized Multitudes and New Languages of Resistance

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For this special issue, *Workers + Warriors: Black Acts and Arts of Radicalism, Revolution, and Resistance, Past, Present, and Future*, we bring together an array of interdisciplinary international scholars who are working across the fields of Black studies, African diasporic studies, slavery studies, American studies, and memory studies. They debate, destabilize, interrogate, and recreate [reshape?] existing [widely known and accepted?] methodologies [the phrasing here implies that after challenging these methodologies they are ultimately reproducing them as they existed before; if that’s not the intention, consider a different word for “recreate”] within literary studies, memory studies [intentional repetition from previous sentence?], art history, visual culture, history, intellectual

history, politics, sociology, and material and print cultures in order to do justice to the hidden histories, untold narratives, and buried memories of African diasporic freedom struggles over the centuries. This collection is the result of a symposium that we held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2018 as part of a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council project titled *Our Bondage and Our Freedom: Struggles for Liberty in the Lives and Works of Frederick Douglass and His Family (1818–1920)*.²² The inspiration for this project, which we launched in 2018 on the two-hundredth anniversary of Frederick Douglass’s birth, emerged from a determination to revisit his legendary life and pioneering works. A world-renowned **freedom fighter** **[see following note]**, inspirational social justice campaigner, mythologized liberator, exemplary philosopher, breathtaking orator, and beautiful writer, Douglass **fought all his life for all freedoms [dedicated his life to the fight for Black liberation?], [consider rephrasing here or above to avoid repetition]** by any and every means necessary. As he repeatedly maintained in the motto he endorsed for his radical newspaper, the *North Star*, “Right is of no sex—Truth is of no color—God is the Father of us all, and we are brethren.”²³

Staggering to note, however, is that while Frederick Douglass not only was a famous figure in his own lifetime but endures to this day as a world-renowned icon, the political activism of his wife, Anna Murray Douglass (1813–1882), and of his daughters and sons—Rosetta Douglass Sprague (1839–1906), Lewis Henry Douglass (1840–1908), Frederick Douglass Jr. (1842–1892), Charles Remond Douglass (1844–1920), and Annie Douglass (1849–1860)—has been subjected to widespread erasure, eradication, and annihilation within a mainstream imaginary.²⁴ While they were inspirational activists, reformers, historians, orators, literary writers, social commentators, and political theorists in their own right, their

lives have all remained biographically, socially, politically, culturally, historically, intellectually, and philosophically off-limits {not sure about this word choice here—it implies that people were aware of their existence but were prevented from accessing them. Unexplored, perhaps?}. As they dedicated their lives to creating an as yet unexamined archive, they produced writings and speeches that reveal powerful sociopolitical analysis and literary accomplishments and testify to their commitment to a staggering array of reforms. Even a very brief glance into their biographies reveals that no topic was off-limits {if “off-limits” remains in the sentence above, consider a different word here. But I think it works better here than there} in their determination to combat not only the legal reality of U.S. “chattel slavery” but also the survival of slavery’s “spirit” in a post-emancipation era that granted freedom in name only. {Please clarify the specific sources of the quotes or else remove the quote marks}

Among their many revolutionary accomplishments, all members of the Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass family delivered speeches and wrote essays on women’s rights, discriminatory legislation, scientific racism, lynch law, prison reform, capital punishment, unfair housing, segregated schooling, and prejudicial transportation networks. They wrote for and/or managed numerous newspapers while organizing and/or holding memberships in Black literary societies, professional sports leagues, Civil War veterans’ organizations, and national reform movements. As formally trained or self-taught educators, typographers, printers, proofreaders, business correspondents, officer managers, seamstresses, and domestic carers, Anna Murray, Rosetta, Lewis Henry, Frederick Jr., Charles Remond, and Annie Douglass each contributed not only to Douglass’s private life but to his public career as an activist, newspaper editor, orator, statesman, diplomat, and author.

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It is no exaggeration to state that without their self-sacrificing heroism, there would be no Frederick Douglass.

Through engaging with the narratives, poetry, speeches, songs, oral testimonies, correspondence, essays, photography, drawings, paintings, and sculptures produced by and/or representing Douglass and his family members, it becomes newly possible to do justice to the psychological, imaginative, and emotional realities of iconic and unknown Black lives as lived during slavery and into the post-emancipation era. Two hundred years after Douglass's birth, in the era of Black Lives Matter, there can be no doubt that the Douglass we need now is no icon of the self-made man but a fallible individual who relied on the help of others [feel free to improve my suggested phrasing here—just trying to ensure parallel meanings in the contrast]. The onus is on academics, archivists, artists, and activists to harness every intellectual tool available in order to tell the stories not only of the enslaved but of Black women and men experiencing the illusory freedoms of the post-emancipation era. For Douglass's rallying cry "My Bondage and My Freedom" it is possible to read "Our Bondage and Our Freedom."²⁵

Still more revealingly, the scholarly brilliance, intellectual range, political radicalism, and literary power in evidence across the bodies of work authored by Rosetta, Lewis, Charles, Frederick Jr., and Annie Douglass testify to the existence of a previously unmapped history of African American literature and cultural production. As the researchers writing in this special issue confirm as they debate key strategies of Black acts and arts of radicalism, revolution, and resistance over the centuries, the invisibilization of the Douglass family within the official archive betrays a stark reality: if the contributions

[rephrased to avoid repetition with the following sentence, but feel free to improve

the phrasing] of the wife and children of the most renowned African American liberator are subjected to scholarly neglect, how much more must this be the fate suffered by untold millions for whom no official records are extant. While Douglass maintained that “genealogical trees do not flourish among slaves,” our research into the lives and works of Anna Murray and their daughters and sons confirms that familial patterns of influence and exchange have remained equally impossible to map for unimaginable numbers of Black women, men, and children fighting for survival in the African diaspora.²⁶

As we argue in this special issue, it is not only Frederick Douglass himself but the Anna Murray/Frederick Douglass family that presents a revealing case study from which to develop an alternative methodology regarding unexamined Black acts and arts of self-expression. The aim of this special issue is to pioneer a cross-, multi-, and interdisciplinary framework not only to recover but to work across an array of unexamined textual, visual, and material cultures. Following Betye Saar, we strive to find a new language in which to do justice to “The Strength of Tears, The Fragility of Smiles, The Fierceness of Love” as a bulwark against the terrible fate encapsulated in her warning “Lest We Forget.”

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The first section of this special issue focuses on key topics related to public history and opens with a powerful reassembling of the life of Frederick Douglass as both a private and public individual. Sir Geoff Palmer OBE,

a professor in grain science who [established the International Centre for Brewing and Distilling and](#) earned a personal chair at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh after [emigrating from Jamaica as a member of the Windrush generation](#), inaugurates the discussion and sets the radical political agenda that undergirds this collection. A pioneer, scholar, and community activist, Palmer measures his own experiences, and the experiences of Windrush descendants in Edinburgh and beyond, against the trials and triumphs of Frederick Douglass [as both fugitive and activist](#). Douglass's indomitable spirit, Palmer shows, resonates forcefully with multitudes of oppressed, marginalized, and insurgent women, children, and men, and offers a blueprint for past, present, and future activism.

This mindset is echoed by the specialists [who](#) work tirelessly to recover and reassemble the histories and cultures of individuals and communities across the Black Atlantic. Archivist, curator, historian, and genealogist Maya Davis's article represents an important scholarly intervention in studies of public history via her recognition of the incompleteness and systematic bias of white-authored historical records, which typically occlude the voices [and lives](#) of Black people, enslaved and free. This was especially true, Davis shows, for Frederick Douglass, who was never able to access the ledger that contained the record of his date of birth, now held by the Maryland State Archives.

[She](#) compellingly demonstrates the political tensions at work in seeking to recover such vital documents and establishes a model of collaborative and community-rooted activism that archives can emulate in aspiring to recover Black histories. Compounding the importance of collaboration and specialist heritage understanding, Ka'mal McClarin and Mike Antonioni offer unique curatorial insights into the history and memory of Cedar Hill, the house that Frederick and Anna Murray

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Douglass made their home from 1878 until her death in 1882 and his final passing in 1895. As an inspirational and emotionally and politically charged space of knowledge accumulation and curiosity for the Douglass family, Cedar Hill is a testament to the educational barriers that Douglass in particular overcame in forging his freedom, but, as McClarin and Antonioni underscore, it is also a monument to the everyday: to the domestic lives, social pursuits, and habitual joys of Frederick Douglass, his family, and their wider social circle. In this way, this article acknowledges that the reassembly and recuperation of Frederick Douglass {the phrase “reassembly... of Frederick Douglass” reads a bit oddly to me (makes me think of *Frankenstein*, haha); consider rephrasing} can only be achieved faithfully through a holistic understanding of his public *and* private worlds.

In an inspirational example of a meticulous localized study of African diasporic lives, Lisa Williams of the Edinburgh Caribbean Association provides an in-depth historical account of the city’s Caribbean connections. As she demonstrates, Edinburgh’s growth was buttressed by the exploitation of colonial enslaved labor. However, while the advancement of the cityscape was made possible through the pernicious profits of absentee white planters, Williams demonstrates through a series of unique case studies the revolutionary ways in which African Caribbean lives enriched the city’s culture. She showcases how Black women, children, and men have left indelible traces that African Caribbean community groups such as the Edinburgh Caribbean Association are striving to recuperate and preserve in the present. Also working with methodologies rooted in local history, Nick Batho presents rich insights into Frederick Douglass’s movements across Scotland and illuminates the breadth of his transnational activist networks, which transcended racial, geographical,

Commented [NW6]: I like the phrase reassembly (or perhaps just ‘assembly’) as it chimes with Gina Athena Ulysse’s call for an epistemology based on the principle of *rasanblaj* (Haitian Kreyòl). Perhaps we could add a footnote about this? She says of this: ‘Rasanblaj issues a provocation to reframe discursive and expressive practices in the Caribbean (and its diasporas). Rasanblaj requires communal presence from the engaged to the radical (yes, I do and still mean *dechoukaj*, of sorts, despite the fact that this term, like too many concepts in Haiti, has been, and in some sense remains, politically incarcerated) and is interactive from the **grassroots level** rather than imposed from above. Considering the dailiness of life—living with hunger, illness, bliss and happiness—**embodied viscerally in the structural**, it invokes Audre Lorde’s feminist erotic knowledge in its fullest dimensions, from the personal as political to the sensual and spiritual. It calls upon us to think through Caribbean performance and politics, recognizing **the crossroads not as destination**—but as a point of encounter to then move beyond. Indeed, **Kafou a pou nou de**. So with unequivocal evidence that the past and the future exist in the present, rasanblaj not only presupposes intent (an awareness of self/position/agenda) and method but also offers possibilities for other modalities and narratives.’ See Gina Athena Ulysse, ‘Why Rasanblaj, Why Now? New Salutations to the Four Cardinal Points in Haitian Studies,’ *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 23:2 (2017), p. 70. Full article also available here: for your ref, Celeste: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/688084>.

and class divides. His [article](#) also provides a unique overview of the possibilities for recovering and archiving these movements through digital mapping initiatives and collaborative multimedia, archival, and curatorial endeavors. He thereby demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary and multimedia apparatuses in helping to fill the gaps that pervade the archives of slavery and of Black history more broadly.

The second section, “Art and the Radical Imaginary,” explores the transformative and insurgent possibilities of art and art-making across the Black Atlantic. Diane C. Fujino’s article offers an anatomical exploration of the fugitive Pan-Africanist art of Akinsanya Kambon and demonstrates in rich detail how his activism infused his artistic practice. Especially [valuable](#) [valent](#) [{word choice? Relevant, perhaps? Or valuable?}](#) is the idea that Kambon’s art represents a kind of *marronage*, which situates it resolutely within an African diasporic tradition of creativity and ingenuity as strategic and cultural resistance. [Looking](#) at the full trajectory of Kambon’s artistic activity, Fujino also [explores](#) how his process has evolved across various awakenings, envisioning how diasporic pasts could inform diasporic futures through acts of learning, reclamation, and reinvention. Hannah Jeffrey’s article builds on this proposition in illuminating ways. Through her innovative exploration of murals as an expressive medium, she demonstrates how African American communities that have been systematically deprived of conventional platforms for articulating their personal histories of struggle and survival have harnessed dynamic forms of creativity to shape, disseminate, and preserve a collective radical imaginary. While murals are in this way embedded with a transgenerational and diasporic poetics, they are also highly localized, [speaking](#) to the specific concerns of the community in a given time and place.

S. D. Barnes's article examines the designer Patrick Kelly's "Mississippi Lisa" T-shirts, part of his spring/summer 1988 ready-to-wear collection inspired by the Mona Lisa. Exploring the myriad ways in which Kelly's designs invoke and reappropriate caricatured and hyperbolized images of Black people from the age of slavery to the present, she presents Kelly's vision as bathetic and subversive, especially in his creative engagement with and rearticulation of the trope of the mammy. His work is thus situated within a radically countercultural Black Atlantic tradition that fuses Black diasporic artistic praxis with an effort to reclaim and reconstitute violently distorted histories and cultures. Building on this theme, Alan Rice's article powerfully elucidates how the artist and activist Jade Montserrat "makes the past present" by reenvisioning landscapes that have historically denied and occluded Black presences. The unmaking and reassembly of historical metanarratives through artistic invention is shown to be vital to ensuring the transferrable legacies of Black histories, and especially Black British histories, which are so often decentered and decontextualized from British history at large and the landscapes that Britain's island geography recalls. Through her "guerrilla energy," Rice shows, Montserrat radically reinserts herself within the historical frame, thereby "opening up that space to other images and voices" and implicating the colonialist infrastructures that would seek to deny, obstruct, and silence those voices.

The third section, "Theorizing Representation," examines how African Atlantic communities have devised strategies of survival, subterfuge, endurance, and resistance to physical and ideological assaults on their personhood through philosophy, scholarship, and intellectual enquiry. Civil Rights lawyer, scholar, and activist Ernest J. Quarles's article represents a vitally intersectional intervention in African American cultural philosophy that looks beyond the text and beyond the

lauded public figure of Frederick Douglass [OK as inserted?] in a determination to reclaim the numerous and nameless women who are so often occluded by the literary archive. In teasing out the historical connections among African American women activists such as Anna Murray Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, and Angela Davis, he powerfully demonstrates the vitality of the political, educational and emotional labor undertaken by women of color across the African diaspora in the ongoing struggle for equality and social justice.

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The inspiration for twentieth-century activist-artist Jacob Lawrence's multi part narrative series, *Frederick Douglass* (1938–39), a thirty-two-panel work he painted while he was living in Harlem, emerged from his exposure to the stories of “strong, daring and heroic black heroes and heroines” and is the focus of Celeste-Marie Bernier's article. As she argues, whereas it had been an act of philosophical and political liberation for Frederick Douglass to focus upon the “multitudinous” possibilities of textual experimentation and visual reimagining when it came to his own face and body, let alone his life story and his intellectual and moral power as an orator and author, for social justice artists such as Lawrence who were building new languages of liberation from his activism and authorship, it was imperative that he become a point of origin, a Founding Father in a Black revolutionary tradition, and

a steady compass point for acts of radicalism, reform, and resistance in the African Atlantic world. {this text also appears verbatim in the article itself; is the repetition intentional?}

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The fourth section foregrounds acts of witnessing and testimony in remembering, rehabilitating, and preserving the legacy of Black lives. Nicole Willson's article examines the forgotten history of the Chasseurs Volontaires de Saint-Domingue—a legion of soldiers who fought in the Siege of Savannah composed predominantly of free men of color from the French colony of Saint Domingue (which, after a violent anticolonial revolution, became the first independent Black republic, known today as Haiti). She shows that while most popular historical accounts of the American War of Independence marginalize the contributions of the Chasseurs, scholars, artists, and activists across the African diaspora have sought to reassemble the fragments of their forgotten legacy. Her work stresses the importance of building historical narratives that incorporate voices that the historical canon typically occludes and using creative and engaging strategies for their dissemination. Paul Young's article likewise expounds on the need to peel back the veneer of what is known and accepted as “authentic” truth in order to expose the diverse and myriad layers of Black lives. Focusing on the life of poet, novelist, and playwright Paul Laurence Dunbar, Young shows that “Dunbar's multiplicity encompasses no binary of true/false or public/private, but exists as a self-consciously cultivated, multiple, and evasive array of biographical self(s).” Drawing on photography and letters from the archive of Dunbar's correspondent Maud Clark, he assembles divergent forms of testimony to present new, imaginative, and boundary-pushing possibilities for rereading and reinterpreting the author.

Kiefer Holland's article explores in minute literary-analytical detail the authorial tensions embedded in fugitive from slavery Josiah Henson's two autobiographies, *Life* and *Truth*. While both narratives were purportedly transcribed by a white amanuensis, Holland envisions alternative authorial possibilities that the white-dominated literary record refuses to entertain. Through linguistic analysis and the careful chronologization of Henson's life, his article works to validate Henson's authorial testimony—especially in *Truth*—and decenter the privileged figure of the white editor/benefactor as the vector for antislavery literature and antislavery activism more broadly.

Finally, in an act of willful defiance against colonialist ideologies, Esther Lezra's article engages imaginatively with creative and transcendent acts of witnessing located within the archive of Black freedom. As registers of the unarticulated and unspeakable pain of a community that bears the transgenerational scars of historic injustices, she demonstrates, sounds, words, and imaginaries converge to form testimonies that bear witness to, and combat the violence of, the colonial archive, which "tirelessly works to demonize the people whose labor, suffering, sweat, and blood built the structures and infrastructures of the modern world." Collective memory is thus imagined as a route to cultural survival. Lezra's article acts as a rallying cry that encourages scholars to reassemble scattered fragments, and to attune their senses to the cadences and frequencies of the divergent forms of testimony that operate on the margins of the dominant, colonialist, and white supremacist metanarrative.

* * * *
* (Consider inserting a descriptive heading) [Art as

The Cornfield (When They Didn't Have Their Freedom) is an emotionally unequivocal painting contemporary artist Thornton Dial created in 1990, which narrates a lived history in slavery only to imagine a future life in freedom.²⁷ Working with an expressionist landscape in which the cornfield comes to life via swirling shades of blue, brown, and white, Dial pins his central Black figure between two monumental plants but offsets the sense of entrapment with the enlarged silhouette of a bird flying free in the sky. Here he provides a visual endorsement [word choice? Not sure the sense of "public approval" quite works here] of centuries of Black people working for their survival through untold acts and unmemorialized arts of self-emancipation. "Black folks know what they got to do to live, and they will do it, they will work hard as they know how, as hard as the next man, by the sweat of their own brow," he emphasizes; "They want to have their own strategy for working, to use their own energy and spirit the way it come to them to do it, not something because someone else make you do it. That's freedom."²⁹ A revolutionary and radical artist who passed away in 2016, Dial dedicated his practice to developing his "own strategy" as he worked to formulate an alternative visual language in which to do justice to his "energy and spirit." Ever a self-reflexive experimenter, he honored his lifelong conviction that "my art is the evidence of my freedom."³⁰

"I was doing some drawing recently about the Negro and the history, about slavery, about the families, about how we come to be in the United States, and about the future for everybody. I was drawing about the coal mines and the ore mines, about mules and horses," Dial summarized.³¹ His epic-scale painting *How a Man Been Down*, also created in 1990, foregrounds his commitment to "the Negro and the history."³² This mixed-media work comes to life via textured hues of purple, red,

yellow, blue, brown, and white. He generates emotive visual drama by painting multiple contorted faces in various stages of psychological torment. Disembodied and disconnected, they free-fall within swirling shapes of cacophonous color interwoven with layered strands of industrial rope, shoring up his testament to Black struggles to break free. ““This is how life used to be, the man under the mule. The mule was treated better than black folks. White folks had this song, ‘Kill a nigger, hire another. Kill a mule, buy another,’” he insists. He bears witness to a traumatizing reality by asserting, “It was a terrible life to live at that time.”³³

In the same year Dial painted an equally powerful work titled *Running with the Mule, Running for Freedom* in which he again provided haunting close-ups of emotionally contorted faces as positioned in close proximity to his abstract-figurative reimagining of a mule. “I have seen the Negro next to the mule, used like a farm animal at that time. I seen cruel things like that,” Dial observes, poignantly urging, “A grown man should have not been handicapped that way. He should be able to fight for his freedom to say, ‘Yes, I will do because I want to do.’”³⁴ While living and working centuries apart, Thornton Dial no less than Betye Saar, Bessie Harvey, Lonnie Holley, and the Anna-Murray-Frederick Douglass family all testify to the conviction of the contributors mapping hidden histories of individual and collective fights for liberty: “All people want freedom and run for it.”³⁵

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge our profound debt of gratitude to the UK Arts and
Notes

¹ Betye Saar, *Betye Saar: Workers + Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1999), 22. A full-color reproduction of this work can be found here: <http://www.artnews.com/2017/06/12/betye-saar-at-craft-folk-art-museum-los-angeles/> [\[this link no longer leads to the Saar work.\]](#)

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² ~~Quoted~~ in Leslie King-Hammond, “Bitter Sweets: Considering the *Colored* Rainbow Universe of Betye Saar,” in ~~King-Hammond, *Betye Saar: Colored*~~ *Consider the Rainbow* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2002), 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For further information on Betye Saar’s construction of the “slave ship imprint,” see Celeste-Marie Bernier, ““The Slave Ship Imprint”: Representing the Body, Memory, and History in Contemporary African American and Black British Painting, Photography, and Installation Art,” *Callaloo* 37, no. 4 (2014): 990–1022.

⁵ ~~Quoted~~ in King-Hammond, “Bitter Sweets,” 7.

⁶ Betye Saar, “Artist Statement,” ~~I~~ in *Betye Saar in Service: A Version of Survival* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2000), 3.

⁷ For further information, see the catalog by Arlene Raven titled, *Betye Saar: Workers + Warriors, The Return of Aunt Jemima* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1998). Various installation views of Saar’s series can be viewed online ~~here~~ [at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, “Betye Saar: *Workers + Warriors, The Return of Aunt Jemima*,”](https://www.michaelrosenfeldart.com/exhibitions/betye-saar-workers-and-warriors-the-return-of-aunt-jemima) <https://www.michaelrosenfeldart.com/exhibitions/betye-saar-workers-and-warriors-the-return-of-aunt-jemima>, accessed May 12, 2020.

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⁸ A full color reproduction of this work can be viewed ~~here~~ at *The Berkeley*

Revolution, “The Liberation of Aunt Jemima.”

<http://revolution.berkeley.edu/liberation-aunt-jemima/>, accessed May 12, 2020.

⁹ Barbara Isenberg, “Betye Saar,” ~~in~~ *Barbara Isenberg, State of the Arts: California Artists Talk about their Work* (New York: W. Morrow, 2000), 278.

¹⁰ Quoted in Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, “Redtime Est: An Installation by Betye

Saar.” Betye Saar, “Redtime Est,” is accessible online at:

<http://www.michaelrosenfeldart.com/exhibitions/redtime-est-an-installation-by-betye-saar>, accessed May 12, 2020.

¹¹ Bessie Harvey as interviewed by Stephen C. Wicks, ~~and~~ quoted in “Revelations in Wood: The Art of Bessie Harvey,” in ~~in his volume~~, Stephen C. Wicks, *Awakening the Spirits: Art by Bessie Harvey* (Knoxville: Knoxville Museum of Art, 1997), 14.

¹² A full ~~color~~ reproduction of this work can be viewed here:

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/19281104627303503/>, [Pinterest links may be particularly unstable for future readers: might there be another site where the image can be viewed?]

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¹³ ~~Quoted~~ in Wicks, ~~in~~ “Revelations in Wood,” 22.

¹⁴ Lonnie Holley, “*Blackbirds* by Lonnie Holley as told to Theodore Rosengarten,” ~~in~~ Mark Sloan, ed., *Something to Take My Place: The Art of Lonnie Holley*, edited by Mark Sloan (Charleston, ~~South Carolina~~: Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, 2015), 203.

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¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Lonnie Holley, “The Best That Almost Happened.” ~~in~~ William and Paul Arnett et al eds., *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art*, Vol. ume Two2, edited by William Arnett and Paul Arnett et al. (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001), 538-5-83. Available ~~online~~ at

Souls Grown Deep, “Lonnie Holley,” ~~:-~~<http://soulsgrowndeep.org/artist/lonnie-holley>, accessed May 12, 2020.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For a history of African American and Black British artists see Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Stick to the Skin: African American and Black British Art (1965–2015)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

²² For further information about the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council project, “Our Bondage and Our Freedom,” see University of Edinburgh, *Our Bondage and Our Freedom*, 2018, the following website:

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<https://ourbondageourfreedom.llc.ed.ac.uk>. For ~~access information about~~ the 2018 *Strike for Freedom Frederick Douglass* exhibition at the National Library of Scotland, see ~~the following link~~ National Library of Scotland, “Strike for Freedom,” <https://www.nls.uk/exhibitions/treasures/frederick-douglass>, accessed May 12, 2020.

For ~~access to the~~ digital maps of the African American freedom trails of Edinburgh and Scotland, see University of Edinburgh, “Maps,” *Our Bondage and Our Freedom*, 2018, the following online resource:

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<https://ourbondageourfreedom.llc.ed.ac.uk/maps/>.

²³ Frederick Douglass’s newspaper, ~~F~~the *North Star*, ran ~~between from~~ 1847 until 1851, when he gave it the new name *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

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²⁴ For further information on the Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass family, see ~~the following publications:~~ Celeste-Marie Bernier and Andrew Taylor, *If I Survive: Frederick Douglass and Family in the Walter O. and Linda Evans Collection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Living*

Parchments: Artistry and Authorship in the Life and Works of Frederick Douglass

(~~forthcoming~~ New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, ~~forthcoming~~ {any update?});

~~Celeste-Marie Bernier, and The Anna Murray~~ ~~[hyphen intentional here?]~~ and

Frederick Douglass Family Writings, a three-volume work consisting of a standalone biography and annotated transcriptions of the family's published and unpublished works (Edinburgh: ~~forthcoming~~ Edinburgh University Press, ~~forthcoming~~ {any update?}).

²⁵ *“My Bondage and My Freedom”* is the title of Frederick Douglass's second autobiography. ~~For further information, see~~ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, edited by Celeste-Marie Bernier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁷ Dial's work is reproduced in Thornton Dial, *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World* (New York: Southern Queens Park Association, ~~Inc.~~, 1990), 5.

~~²⁸ Thornton Dial, “Mr. Dial is a Man Looking for Something,” in Arnett and Arnett et al eds., *Souls Grown Deep, Volume 2*, 201.~~

~~²⁹ Thornton Dial, “Mr. Dial **I**s a Man Looking for Something,” in Arnett and Arnett et al eds., *Souls Grown Deep, Volume 2*, 201. ~~*Ibid.*~~,~~

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2:196.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Paul Arnett, “The Strategy of Thornton Dial,” in Dial, *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World*, 19.

~~³⁴ Thornton Dial, “Mr. Dial **I**s a Man Looking for Something,” in Arnett and Arnett et al eds., *Souls Grown Deep, Volume 2*, 200–201.~~

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³⁵ Arnett, "[The Strategy of Thornton Dial](#)," 19.