# Freak Show Aesthetics: Exceptional Bodies and Racial Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century America

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## A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Language and Literature

University of Virginia May 2015

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#### Abstract

*Freak Show Aesthetics: Exceptional Bodies and Racial Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century America* argues that the performance conventions from the mass cultural form known as the "freak show" significantly shaped the archive of nineteenth-century writings on slavery, abolition, and their aftermath. Proceeding from the suggestive fact that the "Golden Age" of the U.S. freak show coincided with the height of abolitionism through the citizenship debates of the post-Reconstruction period, my project suggests that the freak show provided U.S. print culture with imaginative resources for confronting the crisis in racial representation brought about by abolition. While many areas of the dominant, white press drew on the freak show to forward racially circumscribed visions of the body politic, other texts from U.S. print culture invoked the freak show in less predictably regressive ways: questioning the reliability of visible physical identity, probing the relationship between disability and race, and interrogating the embodied requirements of citizenship.

In making these claims, the project revises and expands an earlier body of scholarship on the freak show by authors such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Rachel Adams, and Benjamin Reiss. While the earlier work on freakery tended to see it as solidifying the racial status quo--making blackness, as it were, "freakish"--*Freak Show Aesthetics* suggests that the performance conventions of the freak show did not reflect so much as transform the language of race. At the same time, the project complicates the large body of American studies scholarship on the depiction of the wounded or pained enslaved body, suggesting that the terms of the freak show provided a number of authors with language that could represent, without reducing black subjectivity to, the materiality

of the body. From the Barnum-esque narrative strategies of both slavery apologists and slave narrators, to the numerous freak show echoes in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the texts of American slavery relied, I argue, upon a "freak show aesthetic" that continually revised the relationship between blackness, disability, and national belonging.

### Acknowledgements

I owe my greatest debt of gratitude for the completion of this project to my excellent dissertation committee: Christopher Krentz, Eric Lott, and Victoria Olwell. I had the good fortune to enroll in Chris's "Disability Studies" class my first semester of graduate school, and the critical tools I gained in this course have shaped the entirety of my academic work since. Having entered the course with a somewhat inchoate interest in "the body" in literature and culture, Chris taught me that there was a rigorous and exciting field that theorized embodiment and value in endlessly productive terms. I am grateful for his intellectual generosity as I first got my feet wet in this field, his faith in this project from its inception, and his wonderful mentoring throughout graduate school.

I first began thinking about the freak show and its relationship to print culture in Chris's course, and brought this interest with me when I enrolled in the formative "American Cultural Studies" course with Eric Lott. I distinctly remember sitting in the yellow chair in Eric's office, pitching him my idea for a final paper focused on the Tom Thumb wedding, now Chapter Two of this project. I thank Eric for encouraging me to follow through on this topic, and credit him, as well, for helping me to think rigorously about the relationship between politics and culture.

I enrolled in Vicki's "Modern Love" class during the fall in which I was reading for orals, and found myself immediately enrolling in another class of hers, "Realism and Naturalism," the following spring. I think Vicki for helping me to think cannily about citizenship and material culture, and for always asking the big-picture questions of my work that have proved so immensely generative.

I am also grateful for the many other UVA faculty members who have materially impacted this project, whether they know it or not, by helping to advance my thinking in coursework and in hallway conversations. I thank especially Stephen Railton, Anna Brickhouse, and Susan Fraiman. Thanks, as well, to Randy Swift and Colette Dabney for their indispensable assistance, and to Colette for many enjoyable conversations in the English department front office over the last several years.

Grants from the UVA English department have allowed me to visit the Mark Twain Papers and Project, the New York Historical Society, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. They have also supported my attendance at conferences and institutes such as the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, the Modern Language Association Annual Convention, and the Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute, all of which have greatly enriched my work. I am particularly indebted to the members of Professor Colleen Boggs' 2010 and 2012 seminar groups at the Futures of American Studies Institute, who provided me with insightful feedback on early versions of the Mark Twain and Tom Thumb chapters.

My graduate school experience was significantly enriched by the presence of friends and fellow Americanists Laura Goldblatt, Anna Ioanes, and Lindsay O'Connor. These pages bear the marks of many fruitful conversations with them over the years. I am indebted, as well, to the many other colleagues and friends who sent me references to "freakish" phenomena with regularity.

Finally, a giant thank-you to my parents, who fostered my initial interest in reading and writing, who continued as my stalwart supporters throughout graduate school, and who even indulged my interest in freakery by reading Melanie Benjamin's

*The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb* and taking me to see Grace Church in New York City. This project is for them, and for Will, who knows more about the freak show now than he ever wanted to know.

### Introduction

This project takes up what may seem, at first glance, to be mere historical coincidence: the overlap between, on the one hand, the consolidation of abolitionism and its print organs through the citizenship debates of the post-Reconstruction period, and, on the other, the rise of the freak show as an organized mass cultural form through its heyday as a popular live entertainment genre. As the project hopes to show, however, the historical concurrence of these two phenomena over the period that spanned from the 1830s through the 1880s indicates not so much coincidence as an important chapter in the related genealogies of the categories of "disability" and "race" in America. Following the model of work such as Bryan Wagner's Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery, which argues that vagrancy arose as a trope to delimit definitions of blackness after the social relations of slavery had been overturned by Emancipation, I argue that a "freak show aesthetic" appeared in the print cultures of slavery and abolition as a way of imaginatively confronting the crises of racial definition taking place in the political and social spheres. As notions of blackness became unhinged from their relationship to a non-citizen, enslaved population, slave narratives, literary reviews, novels, newspapers, and activist discourse drew upon the content and style of the freak show to make sense of national and individual racial identity. In doing so, nineteenth-century print culture inaugurated a longstanding and dynamic relationship between models of African American citizenship, formulations of whiteness, and representations of (freakish) disability.

In making this argument, *Freak Show Aesthetics* revises and expands, even as it draws upon, an earlier body of scholarship on the freak show. American cultural studies

work on freakery flourished in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when scholars such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Rachel Adams, and Benjamin Reiss posited that the freak show offered an arena on which Americans worked out ideas about identity, normality, and communal and national belonging, with implications for the way they thought about which bodies were "fit" for the full privileges of citizenship. Following the work of these scholars, it was no longer possible to see the freak show as a mere fringe entertainment genre; rather, the freak show came into focus as a central location in U.S. mass culture where visions of the American polity were shaped and reconstituted through the spectacle of the anomalous, singular body.<sup>1</sup>

As Ellen Samuels has more recently suggested of this earlier body of work, however, "[a]cademic freak studies has often been divided between those working within the relatively new framework of disability studies and those that study racialized enfreakment as part of postcolonial critical race scholarship" ("Examining Millie" 56). This aspect of freakery scholarship reflects, in fact, a longstanding disjunction between the fields of critical race studies and disability studies, which have both been concerned with how hierarchies of the body shape political and cultural representation, and yet have often worked at cross-purposes to each other. Chris Bell, for example, has described what he identified as a white perspective dominating disability studies, one which fails to account for the fact of disabled people's differential access to cultural capital depending on their racial identity. As Bell put it in 2006, "while the field [of disability studies] readily acknowledges its debt to and inspiration by such inquires as Black Studies, its efforts at addressing intersections between disability, race, and ethnicity are, at best, wanting" (377). The dynamics described by Bell play role in the everyday functioning of

the freak show itself, where the performers who were able to maintain some modicum of control over their presentation and their employment contracts tended to be those who were non-cognitively disabled and white. These dynamics also play a role of the realm of representation, where a text such as Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* shows the marks of a confrontation with racialized assumptions about the invalid body.

Conversely, scholars such as Douglas Baynton have pointed to the black studies methodologies that risk reinforcing the equation between able-bodiedness and citizenship as they challenge the literary, political, legal, and medical discourses pathologizing black American bodies. As Baynton suggests, writing of the attribution of disability to exslaves, women, and immigrants in the three main citizenship debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "[W]hile many have pointed out the injustice and perniciousness of attributing these qualities to a racial or ethnic group, little has been written about why these attributions are such powerful weapons for inequality, why they were so furiously denied and condemned by their targets, and what this tells us about our attitudes towards disability" (41). This sentiment has been echoed, as well, by Samuels, who points out in her study of disability fakery in the slave narrative that African American studies has frequently countered the pathologization of black bodies with a focus on wholeness, health, and ability, despite the fact that slave narrators themselves often needed to "subvert [these categories] in order to attain actual freedom" ("Complication" 18).

From these interventions, an exciting new body of work has begun to emerge that considers how the categories of disability and race have interanimated each other in American culture. The work of Ellen Samuels and Susan Schweik is particularly

exemplary in this regard. Samuels, in the article from which the above quote is drawn, analyzes the disability disguises adopted by slave narrators William and Ellen Craft in their seminal text Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom to argue for the "intimate and constitutive relationship of race, gender, class, and disability" ("Complication" 16). In another article--one which takes up the freak show itself--she argues for a revisionary reading of enslaved, conjoined twin performers Millie and Christine McKoy, unearthing signs of their agency in a set of medical photographs of the twins and in the promotional pamphlets that accompanied their display. Susan Schweik's The Ugly Laws: Disability in *Public* traces connections between so-called unsightly beggar ordinances--which barred "diseased," "maimed," and "deformed" individuals from public begging--and racial segregation laws. In other articles, Schweik tracks the relationship between disability and racial politics in Stephen Crane's The Monster, and uncovers a brief, and often-forgotten, alliance between members of the Black Panther Party and Berkeley disability rights activists in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Their work, taken as a whole, suggests the rich set of historical and theoretical concerns that can be addressed when disability and race are seen as intersectional, rather than parallel, terms.

The growth of such intersectional analyses can also be tracked through the changes to the *Disability Studies Reader*, a canonical and frequently taught anthology within the field of disability studies, over the past decade. While the second edition of the *DSR* featured Bell's call to better theorize the intersection of disability and race, the fourth edition of the *Reader* responded with articles such as Josh Lukin's "Disability and Blackness" and Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear's "Unspeakable Offenses: Untangling Race and Disability in Discourses of Intersectionality" (2013). At the same

time, a recent CFP for a special issue of *African American Review* on "Blackness and Disability" asserts, "We recognize the historical relationship between racializing and disabling discourses as complex and dynamic" and suggests that "[c]entralizing disability in discussions of blackness revamps our understanding of what blackness was, is, and could be" (Pickens).

Freak Show Aesthetics situates itself within this burgeoning body of scholarship on disability and blackness in U.S. cultural history, one which casts the freak show--a primary site of display for these two identities--in a new light. Garland-Thomson has described how the spatial structure of the freak show, which exhibited its "Armless Wonders" and "African Savages" side-by-side, posited an equivalence between disabled, white Westerners and nondisabled, or "normal," non-Westerners. This theoretical equivalence was further highlighted by the fact that freak shows were "[a]ctually called 'Nig shows' in circus lingo" (Extraordinary Bodies 63). As Garland-Thomson also recognized, however, many exhibits explicitly staged disability and race together. Furthermore, the concept of the "freak"--about which I will have more to say later in this introduction--was a capacious term in which ideas of disability and race came into dynamic collision. Challenging the analogical structure of the shows and invoking instead the freak show's dual and often overlapping obsession with the categories of disability and race, freakery studies are well-positioned to unpack the intersections of blackness and disability in the era that witnessed both the "Golden Age" of the American freak show and the height of abolitionism through the through the "nadir" of American race relations.

My strategy throughout *Freak Show Aesthetics* has been to think outside of the disciplinary silos that would claim certain archival materials as the province of disability studies or race studies in isolation. As a result, I have found that freakery, disability, and race were imbricated in a much wider range of materials than the existing literature has suggested: in freakish spectacles, for example, that might appear to have little to do with national racial formations (see Chapter Two, on the Tom Thumb wedding), and in novels on America's racial legacy that might initially appear to have little to do with the freak show (see Chapter Three, on Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*). My research suggests, furthermore, that the entanglement of these concepts did not always produce the expected results: making blackness "freakish," and casting disability as a marker of otherness and exclusion. Rather, as the identities of disability and race jostled uneasily within the confines of the "freak," the parameters of each term were transformed in the process.

My project thus makes use of the concept of freakery to point to the *uneven* intersections of disability and race in the nineteenth-century U.S., the era that paved the way for our contemporary notions of embodied subjectivity with the rise of industrialization and urbanization, the reform movements of abolition and feminism, and the consolidation of the professions of science and medicine. By uneven intersections, I refer to those moments in which one identity may be privileged, however tenuously, at the expense of the other, rather than the two identities serving as mutually marginalizing. These are the intersections that are most difficult to recognize from our current vantage point, given the subsequent consolidation of disability and race in the eugenics movement of the early twentieth century. Excavating the less-ideologically certain relationships

between blackness, disability, and freakery in the nineteenth-century reminds us, however, that this outcome was not inevitable--that, in fact, the appearance of white bodies vulnerable to actual and figurative injury at the hands of the state caused many dominant U.S. cultural productions to claim disability as a grounds of national belonging, while several texts by African American authors invoked the freak show, as well, to represent disabilities in ways that could not easily be collapsed with the essence of black subjectivity.

As my invocation of national belonging suggests, these uneven intersections have implications for understanding nineteenth-century constructions of citizenship. Disability, race, and gender have often been described as that which exceed, even as they prop up, the bounds of the abstract liberal subject imagined by the citizenship contract. As Russ Castronovo puts it, "Abstract personhood is rhetorically, if not actually, financed by the experiences, memories, and stories of others: the privileges of (white male) citizenship are tied up with the hyperembodiment of blacks, women, and workers" (17). The "freak," to be sure, would seem to represent the opposite of the orderly body politic and of the citizen himself. And yet the archive of materials this project takes up suggests that this was not always the case. In the immediately post-Emancipation context, as I have suggested, the dominant white press cast the little people performers at the center of the Tom Thumb wedding as *representatives* of, rather than counterpoints to, the model citizen. Furthermore, postbellum political cartoons that depicted the figure of the black Civil War veteran often cast his disability as precisely that which secured, rather than invalidated, his claims to deserving citizenship. And in the antebellum context, as the first chapter suggests, Harriet Wilson cast her disability as generative of intellectual and

remunerative labor: that which makes her, rather than precludes her from being, a productive member of society. While these centerings of disability are, to be sure, far from uniformly positive, they do suggest that moments of upheaval in the state's relationship to racial definition both spur the reclaiming of disability by dominant cultural sites such as the newspaper *and* provide new resources for black expressive cultures.

In making these claims, I am adapting the model of Robyn Wiegman's work on the collision between gender and race ideologies to a disability studies context, as well as drawing upon recent work in the field of queer disability studies. Wiegman analyzes lynching rituals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reading the obsessive turn to castration as an accompaniment to lynching as an arena in which white supremacy and patriarchy come into profound conflict. As she writes of the black, male lynching victim in the introduction to American Anatomies, "If his lack must be corporeally *achieved*, his threat to white masculine power arises from the frightening possibility of a masculine sameness and not simply from a fear of racial difference" (14). Castration, Wiegman suggests, was white supremacist culture's disavowal of masculine sameness in the service of racial hierarchy. Similarly, my project uncovers moments in which ableism and white supremacy find themselves at odds, in addition to the more expected scenarios in which the attribution of disability further marginalizes black subjects. The news reporting on the Tom Thumb wedding, for example, reflects a culture that recast phrenological discourse as amenable to certain forms of disability in order to continue its white supremacist mission, while Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn includes a number of passages which attribute freakishness to Jim in a way that deessentializes racist categories, rather than contributing to his minstrelization.

In a related vein, much recent work in the areas of queer studies, queer disability studies, and "debility" studies has begun to focus on those moments in which previously marginalized identities may serve as surprising markers of inclusion rather than exclusion--though frequently at the expense of other populations.<sup>3</sup> In *Terrorist* Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times, for example, Jasbir Puar examines how gay and lesbian identities have become normalized in the contemporary moment even as so-called "terrorist" bodies have been rendered queer. Robert McRuer, adapting this framework in his "Disability Nationalism in Crip Times," argues that "disability studies does not yet have a necessary recognition of uneven biopolitical incorporation--an awareness, translating from Puar's theorizing, of disabled subjects who in certain times and places are made representative and 'targeted for life' even as others are disabled in different ways, or cripped, or targeted for death" (171).<sup>4</sup> McRuer's representative examples are the quadriplegic rugby players featured in the 2005 documentary *Murderball*, whose integration into the dominant nation-state is represented most fully by a scene at the end of the movie showing the players at George W. Bush's White House. He contrasts the rugby players to two men interred at Guatanamo, Moazzam Begg and Ruhel Ahmed, whose impairments, McRuer argues, are not even legible to us as disability as such.<sup>5</sup> Following upon the heels of these theorists, my project is equally interested in those moments in which disability identities have been claimed, rather than rejected by, dominant U.S. cultural discourses. In doing so, the project suggests that Douglas Baynton's previously discussed influential model--which assumes that the attribution of disability will always and only further marginalize an already marginalized identity--may in fact be insufficiently nuanced to capture the uncertain outcomes of the

intersections of disability and race as they were staged by the nineteenth-century figure of the "freak."

In doing this work, *Freak Show Aesthetics* is also contributing to a recent trend within freakery studies itself to note those moments in which "freaks" may stand in unexpected relationships to constructions of the national body politic. Garland-Thomson has argued persuasively that the freak show, which thrived in the United States from roughly the 1840s through the 1940s, bonded "a sundering polity together in the collective act of looking," constructing a sense of national identity by "ritually displaying in public those perceived as the embodiment of what collective America took itself *not* to be" ("Introduction" 59). From this model, which accounts for the many instances in which freaks represented what falls outside the parameters of the national body, more recent work has begun to explore those instances in which freaks might serve as its ideal. Emily Russell, for example, has suggested that Mark Twain's fictional freak show performers in "Those Extraordinary Twins" served as a model for sectional reunion. Cynthia Wu, similarly, has explored how representations of Chang and Eng Bunker "invoke a reconciliatory politics" even as they "demonstrate an uneasy ambivalence" about the national unity they advocate" (30). Building on this work, I suggest that an event such as the Tom Thumb wedding, as well as its representation in the mid-century press, reveals the surprisingly heterogeneous "cultural work" of the freak with regard to constructions of the US polity, casting two white little people performers as figures of white national purity and union in order to counter visions of a miscegenated body politic post-Emancipation.

If Freak Show Aesthetics thus targets moments in which a dominant discourse-such as the mid-century newspaper and periodical culture represented by *Harper's Weekly-*-lays claim to the freak, it is also interested in counterpublic invocations of freakery. Chapter One of this project argues that in the hands of slave narrators, fictionwriters, and activists, freakery became a trope by which black authors could acknowledge the materiality of the body without construing that embodiment as fixed or easily legible. Freakery, in other words, appears here as containing surprising potential for formulating flexible models of minoritarian identity, thus challenging the assumption in twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship that freakery served mainly as a reflection and reification of the racial status quo. Stuart Hall's conception of popular culture as a site of struggle, especially as implemented in Eric Lott's Love and Theft, thus provides a crucial framework for a successful analysis of the freak show, a cultural form whose premise is so obviously problematic from a contemporary standpoint that we risk missing its unpredictable political and ideological resonances. As Hall says, "The danger arises because we tend to think of cultural forms as whole and coherent: either wholly corrupt or wholly authentic. Whereas, they are deeply contradictory; they play on contradictions, especially when they function in the domain of the 'popular'" (233). As the freak show found its way into the nineteenth-century literature of slavery, its contradictions only intensified.

## I. Key terms

Several terms I have been using throughout this introduction merit exposition. The first is the very term "freak." A "freak," as described by early sideshow chronicler

Robert Bogdan, was a person whose embodied or social difference was put on display for the "amusement and profit" of others, to quote the subtitle of his seminal sociological study. One of Bogdan's main interventions, writing in the 1980s, was to suggest the bynow commonplace idea that the "freak" is a product of culture. As he put it, "Freak' is not a quality that belongs to the person on display. It is something that we created: a perspective, a set of practices--a social construction" (xi). Thus, while I do not use scare quotes around the term "freak" every time it appears in this project, they are implied throughout.

A related term is "freak show." When I use this term in this dissertation, I mean the organized displays of anomalous bodies that thrived in the United States from the Jacksonian through the Progressive eras (Garland-Thomson, "Introduction" 4). While the display of anomalous bodies on streetcorners and in taverns has a much longer history throughout Europe and colonial America, the mid nineteenth-century witnessed the appearance of "institutionalized, permanent exhibitions of freaks in dime museums and later in circus sideshows, fairs, and amusement park midways. The apotheosis of museums, which both inaugurated and informed the myriad dime museums that followed, was P.T. Barnum's American Museum, which he purchased and revitalized in 1841" (Garland-Thomson, "Introduction" 5). While later circus sideshows garnered a reputation for seediness, the freak show maintained a remarkably "respectable" position throughout much of the nineteenth-century. Michael Chemers has referred to the period from 1835, with the exhibition of Joice Heth, through the 1880s, with its boom in dime museum exhibitions, as the "Golden Age" of the freak show (55, 67).<sup>6</sup>

Bogdan, in his study of this mass cultural form known as the freak show, identified three different main categories of difference that might comprise the "freak": "born freaks," those with somatic differences we might today capture under the term "disability"; "gaffed freaks," whose difference was entirely fabricated out of costume and other tricks; and "self-made freaks," or novelty performers such as sword swallowers or snake charmers whose "difference" lay in their eccentric behavior (97, 234). Bogdan identified, as well, two main modes of presentation that tended to characterize the display of "freaks": "the exotic, which cast the exhibit as a strange creature from a little-known part of the world; and the *aggrandized*, which endowed the freak with status-enhancing characteristics" (97). Both of these modes are represented in this dissertation: we will see a young Sam Clemens, enraptured by an exoticized freak exhibit on the streets of New York City, while the freak performers at the center of the Tom Thumb wedding were displayed in the aggrandized mode. More generally, Bogdan's work has served this project as an indispensable guide to the many elements of staging--costuming, disguise, printed and oral narratives, and the spatial composition of the shows--that went into creating the "freak," such that the particular character of freaks tells us much more about the culture that produced them than about the performers themselves.

Building upon this point, Garland-Thomson has posited that those who were displayed as freaks tended to confound cherished categories of Western society. She writes, "Bodies whose forms appeared to transgress rigid social categories such as race, gender, and personhood were particularly good grist for the freak mill...Such hybridity, along with excess and absence, are the threatening organizational principles that constituted freakdom" ("Introduction" 5).<sup>7</sup> Exhibits such as "Bearded Ladies," "Siamese

Twins" and "African Albinos" drew crowds--they *worked*--because of their titillating category confusion. Thus, while Barnum's American Museum exhibited, in 1863, a "one-armed Civil War veteran," disability alone--particularly a disability that might be shared by many members of the audience in the mid-1860s--was generally not enough to qualify as freakery. In a rather weak-sounding attempt to spin this war-produced injury into the wondrous singularity of the "freak," the exhibition of the veteran at Barnum's Museum involved him performing the trick of guessing patrons' weight (Harris 165).

While the term "freak" could encompass those whom we would recognize today as disabled (the freak show's "Armless Wonders," for example, who staged their ability to drink tea and write correspondence with their toes), or non-white (racial exhibits such as "African Savages"), it cannot be neatly reduced to either of these two categories. Furthermore, the terms "disability" and "race" themselves deserve comment in the context of this project. Nineteenth-century understandings of disability had many iterations, of which the "freak," of course, was only one. Diane Price Herndl's work on invalidism--generally seen as category attaching to middle-class white women--and Susan Schweik's work on the "unsightly beggar" represent two other important formulations of disability in the nineteenth-century. The "freak" was one whose disability was cast in terms of the anachronistic language of religious wonder--imported from the days in which non-normative bodies were seen, alongside anomalies such as "six-legged calves" and "cyclopic pigs," as divine portents of natural disasters and other large-scale events (Garland-Thomson "Introduction" 3). As my project hopes to show, however, freakery had the potential, under certain circumstances, to change the very meaning of disability--as in the vast archive of Tom Thumb wedding news reports, which transform

Charles Stratton and Lavinia Warren's short stature into a privileged manifestation of whiteness. To adapt Schweik's comment on the indeterminate language of the ugly laws, the capacious quality of freakery is useful for "foregrounding the inevitable ambiguity of the category of 'disability'" (11).

Depictions of race that were staged at the freak show contended, as well, with other definitions of blackness--and, for the purposes of this project, with other representations of bonded peoples--circulating in nineteenth-century culture. Stereotypes of the slave as childlike and joyous drawn from romantic racialism competed, for example, with the sense of exoticism and wonder that attached to nonwhite bodies in the freak show circuit. Similarly, while pseudo-scientific theories of polygenesis and degeneration posited that African peoples were, alternately, supremely hardy and thereby suited to the labor of slavery, or constitutionally infirm and likely to dwindle as a race without the "paternalistic" influence of slavery, the freak show drew attention instead to visible blackness as a source of curiosity or wonder. This depiction of blackness was hardly positive in any simplistic sense, and indeed many freak show exhibits reinforced stereotypes of non-white or non-Western people as savage or imperfectly inhuman. The air of fakery that hung about many freak show exhibits, however, did have the potential to open up the question of racial identity in some interesting ways. As Rachel Adams has suggested, race-based exhibits such as the freak show's "wild men" were the most easily and regularly fabricated of all attractions, to the point that "one of the primary pleasures of viewing a racial exhibit was to disclose its fraudulence" (163). While Adams is right to caution that "[s]pectators' desire to unmask the racial freak as a hoax did not mean that they questioned the exhibit's underlying assumption of white supremacy," her assessment

that "interruption, misidentification, and the possibility of fraudulence contributed considerably to the shows' appeal" suggests that the everyday operation of the freak show itself opens up opportunities for thinking about identity beyond the shows' own essentializing projects (163, 171).

On this point, this project has been influenced by an early model for understanding the appeal of the freak exhibits at Barnum's American Museum: Neil Harris's notion of the "operational aesthetic," as formulated in Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum. Nineteenth-century audiences, Harris reminds us, were not the simple dupes of freak display that we might imagine. As they gazed upon outright frauds or upon exhibits that made use of juxtaposition to exaggerate difference (little people paired with "giants" and "fat ladies" paired with "skeleton men"), many relished the very uncertainty about authentic identity that the freak show posed. Harris has traced this pleasure to the conditions of an industrializing and urbanizing nineteenth-century America, in which new technologies such as steam, railroads, and telegraphs "indicated the futility of declaring anything impossible," at the same time that these advances accustomed the public to a jargon that focused on methods of operation and physical construction (73, 75). Barnum's human wonders, he argues, allowed audience members' to delight in judging authenticity for themselves and in uncovering how exhibits they deemed fake were constructed (59).

*Freak Show Aesthetics* suggests that this operational aesthetic, indulged in within the space of the freak show, had even broader effects on nineteenth-century understandings of embodied social identity than we have yet accounted for. Chapter One, for example, posits a homology between the reception of anomalous bodies on the freak

show stage and the white reception of black speech on the abolitionist circuit. The giddy response of the early newspaper reviewers of slave narratives can be seen to partake of this interest and delight in determining authenticity--so that a writer such as Frederick Douglass, once deemed authentic, could hardly be seen as anything *but* a "literary wonder" by the likes of Irish abolitionist Isaac Nelson (quoted in Blassingame xxxi).

Chapter One also suggests that the freak show--with its shuttling back and forth between doubt and belief--provided a structure within which to productively represent disability, and thus can help us continue to interrogate the meanings of this term. Lewis Clarke's slave narrative describes the green-tinted goggles he wore as part of his escape from slavery--goggles which materially change his vision, providing him with "new eyes" that cause him disabling dizziness (35). In Clarke's narrative, all distinctions between feigned and "actual" bodily identity become meaningless. This understanding of disability contributes, in fact, to recent debates within disability studies about the extent to which understandings of disability as socially constructed--arguably the greatest achievement of the field over the past two decades--may fail to account for bodily responses such as pain. I suggest that nineteenth-century lecturers and writers such as Clarke and Harriet Wilson were less encumbered by the distinction between "actual" and "constructed" bodily differences, recognizing many disabilities as reflecting both realities simultaneously.

A final term that deserves unpacking here is one that I have landed upon specifically for the purposes of this project. In tracking the influence of the freak show on U.S. print culture, I am interested not simply in direct depictions of the shows, but rather a wide-ranging set of conventions that I term a "freak show aesthetic." Aspects of the

freak show aesthetic include approaching anomalous bodies with a sense of wonder and an expectation of pleasure; confronting characters and sometimes readers with the difficulty of disentangling "real" from hoaxed identities; and linking blackness and disability in both overt and implicit ways. While Rachel Adams has tracked the appearance of the freak show in twentieth-century literature, photography, and film--its "afterlife" in works such as the Tod Browning film Freaks--I have been inspired by Toni Morrison's work on the Africanist presence and Christopher Krentz's work on the deaf presence in literature to look for its more subtle influences, as well. The freak show aesthetic reveals itself not only in direct depictions of the sideshow, in other words, but in such details as a textual investment in the "wondrous" and the "singular," or in the presentation of an embodied difference that toes the line between the authentic and the fantastic. In the end, this is a project that bridges the study of performance and print, and one which finds that modes of spectatorship drawn from the freak show helped to structure aspects of the white reception of black speech, even as subversive uses of freakery by black speakers and writers also changed the import of freakery itself.

## II. Chapter Summaries

The project begins by exploring this freak show aesthetic in texts from the antebellum era. The first chapter, "Antebellum Attractions: The Rise of the Freak Show and the Emergence of African-American Autobiography," argues that the freak show not only organized the terms by which white Americans consumed black authorship, but also provided a resource with which black authors wrote back to dominant ideas about embodiment, subjectivity, and citizenship. While white newspaper reviewers marveled over the "remarkable" curiosity of the slave narrative and the "literary wonders" who

produced them, black speakers and writers such as Lewis Clarke, William and Ellen Craft, and Harriet Wilson repurposed elements of freakery to break down the distinction between "actual" and "feigned" bodily identity, drawing attention to the phenomenological realities experienced by enslaved and indentured subjects. As such, the chapter complicates the considerable body of work on slavery and spectacle by Saidiya Hartman, Karen Haltunnen, and others, which has focused on the depiction of the wounded slave body on the abolitionist circuit and the attendant problems of voyeurism and self-serving empathy. I show that many nineteenth-century writers were canny about the ways they linked blackness and disability, drawing on the performance conventions of the freak show to destabilize readers' confidence in their interpretation of the bodies before them.

Chapter Two, "'The Biggest Little Marriage on Record': Union and Disunion in Tom Thumb's America," examines the extensive national newspaper coverage of the "Tom Thumb wedding," the 1863 nuptials of Lavinia Warren and Charles Stratton, two white "midget" performers from Barnum's American Museum. The chapter explores the frequent twinning of the wedding and Emancipation in the 1860s press, arguing that the Northern mass media reconfigured the Strattons' small stature as an index of idealized whiteness, their bodies seen as locations where, in the words of one newspaper writer, the "the principal features of the race may be looked at with one glance" (quoted in Harris, 51). I show that the articles that graced the front pages of publications such as the *New York Times* and *Harper's Weekly* used the marriage as a figure for the unity and purity of white America, thus reinforcing the conceptual links between citizenship, Americanness, and whiteness at a moment when Lincoln's Proclamation promised to radically alter the

parameters of the body politic. The chapter thus serves as a prequel to the work on postbellum white reunion by scholars such as Nina Silber and David Blight, describing an instance in which disability allowed white Northerners to celebrate white supremacy in unique ways in the immediately post-Emancipation moment. The Tom Thumb newspaper archive also, however, provides a rare glimpse into a moment in which the discourses of ableism and white supremacy came into conflict, as phrenological journals contradicted themselves in order to cast these "little" people as the epitome of white racial perfection.

The final chapter, "Unaccountable Freaks' and 'Extraordinary Twins': Mark Twain's Freak Show Aesthetics," uncovers the role of the freak show in the work of Mark Twain as an entry point into the shifting intersections of blackness and disability in Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction America. The chapter supplements the considerable scholarly work on the minstrel show, which has dominated the discussion of Twain and performance since Ralph Ellison's 1958 "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," arguing that the famous racial contradictions of Twain's texts are in fact propped up by his treatment of freakery. Turning to the hypercanonical Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, I show that the novel's freakish motifs of blue skin, prosthetic limbs, and descriptions of Jim as a "wonder" at times work to undercut the minstrelization of the black characters, while at other moments they reinforce Jim's alterity. Such a split use of the freakery trope, I suggest, mimics the fraught relationship between African American manhood and representations of disability that surfaced in political cartoons of black veterans, pseudoscientific racist discourse, and political rhetoric from the 1860s through the turn of the century, revealing the extent to which attributions of disability served both as a guarantee and a refusal of national belonging for black male subjects.

A coda, "Invisible Man to 'Ballad of a Thin Man," tracks the afterlife of these cultural constellations through the mid-twentieth century, a moment when the freak show flourished as a rhetorical trope even while sharply declining as an actual entertainment form. While many early twentieth-century texts of black uplift such as James David Corrothers' 1916 In Spite of the Handicap: An Autobiography presented blackness itself as a sort of "handicap" or disability, mid-century texts tended to return to the performance dynamics of the freak show to represent black identity as limited by the grotesqueries of the white gaze. As Ralph Ellison himself put it, in the often forgotten freak show referent to his famous metaphor of invisibility, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass" (3). Ellison's trope makes him a strange rhetorical bedfellow to Huey Newton, who stated that the sideshow described in Bob Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man" was a perfect description of race relations in America, and whose repeated broadcasting of the song served as the background noise for the production of the first Black Panther Party newspaper. Bringing the counterpublic engagement with the freak show begun in the nineteenth-century to its apotheosis, the works of Ellison and Newton reveal that the freak show regained its potency as a resource for engaging with American racialization roughly one hundred years after Emancipation. Their work also, however, instantiates the modern understanding of the freak show as necessarily reinforcing existing power dynamics, a move which has obscured the more unpredictable cultural work of the freak show aesthetic in the nineteenth century. Returning to the textual invocations of the freak show at the moment of its greatest popularity, and in a time period in which the body

politic itself was often represented as freakishly conjoined ("half-slave and half-free"), miscegenated, sundered, and imperfectly sutured, *Freak Show Aesthetics* reveals that the cultural construction of the "freak" reached straight to the heart of debates about the nature of U.S. citizenship.

### Chapter One:

Antebellum Attractions: The Rise of the Freak Show and the Emergence of African-

## American Autobiography

In February of 1853, *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* published an editorial bemoaning the current state of American letters. Entitled "Black Letters; Or Uncle Tom-Foolery in Literature," the article was concerned, in particular, with the popularity of books about slavery--or what the editorial termed "woolly-headed literature" (209). In a move familiar to us now, and one that reflected the bifurcations just then taking shape in American culture, the editorial turned for rhetorical fodder to another cultural arena: the popular display of "curiosities" by P.T. Barnum, self-described Prince of Humbugs. "That sudden popularity and success are not always evidences of merit to be relied upon," the editorial preached in its first line, "Barnum has taught us with the Woolly Horse, Tom Thumb, and his Mermaid" (209).<sup>8</sup> Comparing the literature by and about slaves to Barnum's fraudulent exhibits, the editorial established an intriguing--and telling--equation between the mid-century literary marketplace and the mass cultural form known as the "freak show."<sup>9</sup>

That this equation would be intelligible to its readers at all--that the comparison would be mutually illuminating--signals the cultural heft of both institutions at this moment. While the article focuses mostly on texts about slavery by white writers such as Stowe, both abolitionist literature and narratives by former slaves were widely read by 1853.<sup>10</sup> A few years earlier, Unitarian minister and critic Theodore Parker had gone so far as to term the slave narrative the paradigmatic American text: "There is one portion of our permanent literature, if literature it may be called, which is wholly indigenous and

original...We have one series of literary productions that could be written by none but Americans, and only here; I mean the Lives of Fugitive Slaves. All the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white man's novel" (quoted in Cohen 105). Even while expressing ambivalent (and racially-inflected) opinions as to the quality of the slave narratives, Parker makes them representative of "American literature" writ large. So, too, was U.S. culture experiencing the "Barnumization" of America at this moment, as thousands of visitors swarmed each day into the American Museum at the corner of Broadway and Anne Streets in New York City and newspapers filled with puff pieces for Barnum's displays (Wicke 58). As Bluford Adams puts it, writing of Barnum's central role in nineteenth-century U.S. culture, "The *Washington Post* only slightly exaggerated in 1891 when it eulogized him as 'the most widely known American that ever lived'" (1).

In comparing literature about slavery to several of Barnum's hoaxes, the article also indexes the authenticity concerns that dogged the genre of the slave narrative from its inception.<sup>11</sup> As a number of scholars have shown, ex-slave narrators met with incredulity from a number of sources, from pro-slavery politicians and journalists with a vested interest in debunking the fugitives' exposés of the peculiar institution, to casual readers who had imbibed stereotypes about African Americans' penchant for exaggeration or incapacity for literacy.<sup>12</sup> The authenticating documents by white abolitionists and acquaintances that package many of the slave narratives testify to the significant obstacles to credibility that the ex-slave narrator faced.

I am interested, however, in what else we might learn from *Graham Magazine's* equation between the literature of slavery and Barnum's displays--or more precisely, what we might learn about the culture that made this rhetorical equation tenable. For the

article's jibe (inadvertently) brings into focus a significant commonality among the literature of abolitionism, the slave narrative, and the freak show: all were sites that orchestrated relationships among disability, race, and fraudulence. In the case of abolitionist propaganda and the slave narrative, the injured body testified not only to the horrors of slavery, but to the very truthfulness of the ex-slave's claim to his or her identity. As a result, the fugitive's very subjectivity could come to be collapsed with the institution from which he had escaped: in this context, "the slave is the 'real' body, the 'real' evidence, the 'real' fulfillment of what has been told before" about the evils of the slave system (Dwight McBride, quoted in Cohen 103.) The freak show, by contrast, was an entertainment genre that actively invited skepticism--one that traded on questions of authenticity and doubt as part of its appeal. While comparisons between ex-slaves and their narratives and freakish productions could, therefore, be damning, freakery also afforded some imaginative resources for elaborating more flexible models of minority identity. For while the freak show made black bodies supremely viewable, it did not necessarily make them easily legible, nor did it necessarily conflate blackness with wounding.

This chapter looks at how echoes of the freak show appeared in newspaper reviews of slave narratives and several other arenas that reflected the white reception of antebellum black speech, as well as the ways in which black narrators repurposed of elements of the freak show in their productions. I focus for the most part on texts by exslaves, from the supercanonical (Douglass's *Narrative*), to the lesser known (*The Narrative of Lewis Clarke*, published in the same year). In the second part of the chapter, however, I hazard a conceptual leap by taking up Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, an

autobiographical novel by a "free" black woman in the North who writes of her indentureship using many of the tropes and conventions of the slave narrative. Wilson, I suggest, makes particularly inventive use of freakery and disability in her text, turning the tables on the abolitionist display of bodies and illustrating the extent to which the freak show destabilized the binary concepts--authenticity and fraudulence--on which abolitionism depended. Overall, I aim to demonstrate that the freak show helped to organize the terms by which antebellum Americans consumed the literature of slavery *and* shaped the ways in which black authors wrote back to dominant ideas about embodiment, subjectivity, and citizenship.

#### I. Wonders and Runaways: Disability, Freakery, and the Literature of Slavery

The situation lamented by the 1853 *Graham's Magazine* editorialist, in which both the literature of slavery and Barnum's exhibits were cultural dominants, began to take shape about two decades earlier. Beginning in 1831, when William Lloyd Garrison founded *The Liberator*, the 1830s witnessed the growth of both abolitionism and its print organs (Cohen 105). As part of this phenomenon, the slave narrative, which was promoted and in many cases published by abolitionist societies, grew in popularity: only four slave narratives appeared in the U.S. and Britain between 1820 and 1829, while that number climbed to nine between 1830 and 1839, and twenty-five between 1840 and 1849 (Cohen 105). The 1830s also witnessed the emergence of P.T. Barnum as a purveyor of "curiosities," and thus the birth of the modern freak show. As Michael Chemers has put it, writing of the exhibition that would make Barnum's name, "The Golden Age of Freakery begins on December 11, 1835, when Joice Heth, ostensibly a 161-year-old

African American woman who had been the nurse of George Washington, appeared at Niblio's Garden in New York City" (67-8).<sup>13</sup> As Heth's enslaved status figured prominently in her display, Barnum's entrance into the entertainment industry was bound up with slavery materially and thematically, as well as by historical coincidence. The opening of Barnum's American Museum in 1841--the same year that Douglass began his career as an antislavery speaker at a convention in New Bedford, Massachusetts--further secured the popularity of the freak show as a nineteenth-century cultural form, and its constant historical correspondence with the political issue of slavery (Gara 201).

Amidst these historical juxtapositions and interanimations between slavery, its print culture, and the freak show, the white reception of black self-expression often drew on the language and ideology of freakery. Due in part to the very novelty of the ex-slave's voice appearing on the stage and the page, and in part to racist stereotypes that divorced blackness from literacy, reviewers both more and less sympathetic to the plight of the fugitive often cast him and his works as oddities that partook of the category confusions of the freak.<sup>14</sup> As John A. Collins, an agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society, reported to Garrison in 1842, "The public have itching ears to hear a colored man speak, and particularly a slave. Multitudes will flock to hear one of this class speak" (quoted in Gara 196). Collins' remark reminds us that the mere entrance of black speech in the public sphere was seen as curious, notable--remarkable enough to draw a crowd.

Indeed, the extent to which words such as "remarkable" and "uncommon" appear in early reviews of the slave narrative suggest that the very existence of the form inspired readers with wonder, awe, and curiosity. The Reverend Ephram Peabody wrote in 1849 of slave narratives they are "among the most remarkable productions of the age,--

remarkable as being pictures of slavery by the slave, remarkable as disclosing under a new light the mixed elements of American civilization, and not less remarkable as a vivid exhibition of the force and working of the native love of freedom of the individual mind" (quoted in Nichols 149). A Boston Daily Atlas review of Douglass's Narrative, similarly, described the publication as a "remarkable one, in many respects" ("Frederick"). Such statements arguably place the slave narrative in a similar structural position to writing produced on the freak show stage by so-called "Armless Wonders" such as Charles Tripp, who wrote for audiences with a pen gripped between his toes; in both cases, the accomplishment of the act of writing itself constitutes the spectacle.<sup>15</sup> As a columnist for Putnam's Monthly put it, "The mere fact that the member of an outcast and enslaved race should accomplish his freedom, and educate himself up to an equality of intellectual and moral vigor with the leaders of the race by which he was held in bondage, is, in itself, so remarkable that the story of the change cannot be otherwise than exciting" (quoted in Nichols 156.)<sup>16</sup> Evincing a view of the slave narrative in which content matters less than the mere existence of the form, such reviews mark the writing by former slaves as a freakish object of wonder.

As responses to Douglass and his *Narrative* demonstrate, the language of freakery was pervasive enough to be used by reviewers on both sides of a ideological divide: those aiming to question and those aiming to shore up Douglass's authority. A London *Spectator* review from January 1846, for example, while assuming that "Frederick Douglass is what he professes," found several elements of his narrative "improbable" (quoted in Blassingame xvii). The reviewer concludes, "If this narrative is really true in its basis, and untouched by any one save Douglass himself, it is a *singular book*, and he is

a more *singular man*. Even if it is of the nature of the true stories of De Foe, it is *curious* as a picture of slavery, and worth reading" (Blassingame xxvii). Douglass and his literary output are rendered "singular," "curious," terms that appeared with regularity in the advertisement of human freaks.<sup>17</sup> Other reviews that were less skeptical of Douglass used the language of freakery all the more pointedly to express their admiration for the accomplishment of the task: the London *League* called the book a "curiosity," while Irish abolitionist Isaac Nelson stated, "I regard the narrative of FREDERICK DOUGLASS as a literary wonder" (quoted in Blassingame xxxi), echoing the term "human wonder" so popular in freak display. The editor of *Putnam's Monthly* suggested that politics take a back seat altogether to the wonder experienced upon encountering Douglass's life story, stating, "[W]hatever may be our opinions of slavery…we cannot but admire the force and integrity of character which has enabled Douglass to obtain his present *unique* position" (Nichols 154, my emphasis).

Indeed, it is not only in their use of terms such as "curiosity" and "wonder" that such reviews evince their engagement with the culture of the freak show. The very pleasure the reviewers seem to take in determining--and making pronouncements about-the authenticity of Douglass's narrative approximates a main structural principle of Barnum's exhibits: what Neil Harris has termed their "operational aesthetic" (59). According to Harris, in the context of an industrializing and urbanizing nineteenthcentury America, in which new technologies such as steam, railroads, and telegraphs "indicated the futility of declaring anything impossible," at the same time that these advances accustomed the public to a jargon that focused on methods of operation and physical construction, Barnum's "human wonders" made use of an aesthetic that allowed

audience members to delight in judging authenticity for themselves and in uncovering how exhibits they deemed fake were constructed (73, 75). In reviews such as the *Boston Daily Atlas* piece that judged Douglass's narrative to be "remarkable," writers luxuriated in their doubts before coming to a conclusion about the book's truth value. While there is "much in the work to which we cannot accord," the writer states, "it is a dreadful and, we fear, too faithful depiction of slavery" ("Frederick"). Depicting Douglass's account as "too" faithful, the writer expresses a certain pleasure in being the arbiter of what it deems as the narrative's almost excessive authenticity. Barnum's operational aesthetic, such an example suggests, structured not only the exhibits at the American Museum, but also the broad contours of the white reception of antebellum black speech.<sup>18</sup>

The autobiography of white abolitionist Levi Coffin, however, reveals a more complicated use of the language of freakery--one that begins to point to the more subversive use of the freak show by slave narrators, even while maintaining some stark differences. Coffin, referred to as the "President of the Underground Railroad" due to the number of escaped slaves who took shelter in his Indiana and Ohio homes, reminisces in his 1876 text about a fugitive slave named Rose whom he had assisted on her journey to freedom. Rose, Coffin writes, was "so nearly white that a stranger would never suspect that there was a drop of African blood in her veins," while her son, likewise, "showed no trace of colored blood" (407, 408). Coffin continues:

We [my wife and I] were deeply interested in her at once, and felt that we wanted to exhibit these white slaves to some of our acquaintances, whose sympathies had never been so strongly enlisted for the slave as ours had been. I invited several prominent citizens, who were not abolitionists, to call at my house, saying that I

had recently received a *curiosity of the South* which I wished to show them. They responded to the invitation, and came at the time appointed. [After explaining to Rose that the men were not of the type to be a danger to her,] I then conducted her into the parlor where they were seated, and introduced her and her little boy as fugitives, fleeing to a land of liberty. The gentlemen were greatly surprised, and said: 'Can it be possible that they are slaves, liable to be bought and sold? It is a shame.'" (411, my emphasis)

In a common abolitionist maneuver, the passage reinforces problematic hierarchies of skin color; in choosing slaves who appear indistinguishable from white citizens as the supreme objects of (white) sympathy, the passage risks suggesting that some enslaved people are more deserving of their lot. And yet, the reference to Rose as a "curiosity" takes on a different valence in this passage than in many of the other comparisons between African American slaves and the subjects of the freak show. In this case, the category confusion invoked with the term "curiosity" is *not* the supposedly strange combination of black skin with eloquence, but the contradiction of a human being rendered a chattel.<sup>19</sup> While reinforcing problematic equations between whiteness and humanity, and while submitting Rose to objectifying display, Coffin's use of the term "curiosity" is not as easy to condemn as we might expect from the example of Douglass. His word choice makes the system of slavery itself appear "freakish," opening up the possibility of more subversive uses for freakery in public discourse about race and slavery, even as he uses the term to arouse interest in the spectacle he is about to display.

Douglass, of course, quickly became aware of his positioning by the white abolitionist establishment as an oddity. In his 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom*,

Douglass describes his encounter with George Foster, an abolitionist who had arranged for Douglass to headline a subscription drive for the *Anti-Slavery Standard* and *The Liberator*, as follows:

Many came, no doubt, from curiosity to hear what a negro could say in his own cause. I was generally introduced as a '*chattel*'--a '*thing*'--a piece of southern '*property*'--the chairman assuring the audience that *it* could speak. Fugitive slaves, at that time, were not so plentiful as now; and as a fugitive slave, I had the advantage of being a '*brand new fact*'--the first one out...Some of my colored friends in New Bedford thought very badly of my wisdom for thus exposing and degrading myself. (quoted in Reiss 84-85)

Benjamin Reiss has pointed out that Douglass's description makes Foster sound akin to a sideshow barker, while using concepts characteristic of freak show display (curiosity, novelty, and exposure) to "describe his [own] objectification" (85).<sup>20</sup> Reiss is clear, as well, about the implications of this collision between Douglass and the freak show, arguing that the Douglass of this passage is "viewed as a freakish exception to the rule of racial inferiority rather than a representative of his race's potential--akin to a learned pig or a dancing bear" (85).

There is no doubt that the figurative language that aligned black authors with freaks could be incredibly damaging. Such comparisons reinforced stereotypes that collapsed literacy, and therefore humanity, with whiteness; cast doubt upon the content of the slave narrative at a moment when it was intended as an overtly political tool; and established a dichotomy between the "exceptional" minority subject who is a "credit to his race" and its "common members"--a dichotomy that lingers even today. However,

while many black narrators did, as Reiss suggests, "fight through a web of images that associated public displays of blackness with freakishness," this move of distancing oneself from the freak show and fighting *against* its terms was not the only way for black writers to assert their humanity (85).<sup>21</sup> Without going so far as to suggest that antebellum authors wholeheartedly embraced the position of the freak, a number of black narrators, I suggest, chose to make use of the freak show by repurposing its terms, images, and assumptions in their writing.

Douglass himself, as Lara Langer Cohen has put it, at "cannily play[s] with problems of plausibility" at several moments in his own narratives (104). Denouncing slavery itself in his *Narrative* as a "gross fraud...committed upon the down-trodden slave" and sponsored by the church and state, Douglass, Cohen suggests, renders slavery a "large-scale confidence game" (56, quoted in Langer 104). This formulation shifts the attention away from the honesty or lack thereof of the slave narrator, and foists it onto the institution itself. The trope suggests, furthermore, that while the slave is the direct victim of the institution, the entire nation of citizens, including Douglass's white readers, are the potential dupes of the confidence scheme of slavery. The language of fraudulence, so tied to Barnum in this mid-century moment, is recuperated here to condemn as illegitimate a system that had legal and widespread social sanction.

Douglass also flirts with the language of fraudulence and freakery in his 1854 speech "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," in which he challenges the scientific racism espoused by Samuel Morton, Josiah Nott, George Gliddon, and Jean Agassiz by drawing on the language of the miraculous. Speaking of his own current position, Douglass states, "I have reached here--if you will pardon the egotism--by little

short of a miracle: at any rate, by dint of application and perseverance" (quoted in Levine 11). While not directly portraying himself, as his reviewers and as George Foster did, as a "literary wonder" or a "brand new fact," Douglass does draw similarly on the language of religious wonder that structured the nineteenth-century freak show. However, he does so for quite different ends. Once he makes the comparison, he follows it up with a significant caveat, one that changes the meaning of what came before: his almost "miraculous" rise is revealed to have a rational explanation in his the form of his own "application and perseverance." Whereas reviewers of the *Narrative* simply call him a wonder--as if the supposed contradictions of the eloquent and successful ex-slave were embodied in him, almost through no agency of his own--Douglass takes credit for his wondrous rise. Puncturing the freak show's discourse of "wonder," he critiques its implications and makes the language his own.

A more thoroughgoing engagement with terms important to the freak show appears in the narrative of Lewis Clarke. The *Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clarke, During a Captivity of More than Twenty-Five Years, Among the Algerines of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of North America*, dictated by Clarke to the Reverend J.C. Lovejoy, appeared in 1845, the same year that Douglass's *Narrative* burst onto the literary scene. Clarke, like Douglass, was described as "remarkable": one abolitionist termed him "a remarkable young man for ability, good sense, social qualities, and public speaking," while Boston's *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle* asserted of his autobiography, "This is a remarkable book--relating with great clearness the experience of a white slave" (Gara 201; "Lewis").<sup>22</sup> Like Douglass, as well, Clarke uses his narrative

to re-signify such assertions of singularity. First, in one of the most memorable passages in his narrative, Clarke relates the physical tortures meted out by his former slave mistress and the lasting effect these practices had on his body. "Mrs. B. had her peculiar contrivances for keeping us awake," Clarke explains. In order to keep her slaves working late into the night, "She would sometimes sit by the hour with a dipper of vinegar and salt, and throw it in my eyes to keep them open. My hair was pulled till there was no longer any pain from that source. And I can now suffer myself to be lifted by the hair of the head, without experiencing the least pain" (22). While the exhibition of scars from whippings or injuries from overwork were common fare on the abolitionist circuit, Clarke describes an injury that registers as a freakish super-ability. One can imagine the amazing feat of being lifted by the hair on one's head taking its place in the freak show alongside its regular exhibition of embodied oddities.

More than this, however, Clarke's decision to index the singular capacities of his body allows a later moment in the narrative to take on additional poignancy. Clarke describes reaching freedom in Ohio as follows: "What my feelings were when I reached the free shore, can be better imagined than described. I trembled all over with deep emotion, and I could feel my hair rise up on my head" (35). Given the previous anecdote about Clarke's lack of sensation, this sensory image--however contradictory--suggests the extent to which Clarke feels ownership over his body in this moment. What in another context might read as a fairly routine figure of speech indexes, in this case, the full implications of Clarke's freedom.<sup>23</sup>

Clarke's narrative also describes his use of disability disguise in his escape-disguise that, as Ellen Samuels has pointed out, strangely prefigures that of William and

Ellen Craft (42 n3). The existence of disability fakery in Clarke's narrative poses a complication to the important work of Saidiya Hartman, who describes how the routine display of the wounded slave body in abolitionist writing did violence to notions of black subjectivity. In depicting the injuries of slavery again and again, abolitionist writing and display threatened to collapse blackness with victimhood status or, paradoxically, to divorce blackness from sentience altogether in the minds of readers and viewers who may have become inured to such images. By describing the disabilities he faked in order to escape from slavery, however, Lewis Clarke also threatens to produce a different problem, attaching an air of dubiousness to the supposedly injured slave body. If, as Hartman has suggested, the routine display of the enslaved person's scars threatens to collapse his or her identity with injury, what happens when readers and audience members doubt the very veracity of this injury? What are the implications of formerly enslaved authors transporting suspicions about physical bodily evidence--suspicions that were the stock and trade of the freak show--into the realm of their narratives?

In one such example of disability disguise, Clarke relates how he tied up his face in a handkerchief and, with the help of his light skin, passes as a sick slave owner. He meets one young slave driving cows, who, Clarke says, "was quite disposed to condole with me, and said in a very sympathetic manner, 'Massa sick'" (48). While presenting himself as a sort of confidence man, and another slave as successfully tricked by his disguise, the incident also allows Clarke to depict the enormity of black sympathy--even across the hierarchies of color and power that the boy (wrongly) perceives.

More notable, however, is another example of disability disguise that troubles the very concept of a disguise itself. At one point in his journey, Clarke dons green-tinted

spectacles as part of his invalid persona. Unlike with Ellen Craft, who also dons green spectacles, Clarke's eyeglasses materially change his vision, so that he becomes temporarily disabled. Clarke narrates:

A thought of a pair of spectacles, to hide my face, struck me. I went across the way, and began to barter for a pair of double eyed green spectacles. When I got them on, they blind-folded me, if they did not others. Every thing seemed right up in my eyes. I hobbled back to the tavern, and called for supper. This I did to avoid notice, for I felt like any thing but eating. At tea I had not learned to measure distances with my new eyes, and the first pass I made with my knife and fork at my plate, went right into my cup. This confused me still more, and, after drinking one cup of tea, I left the table, and got off to bed as soon as possible. But not a wink of sleep that night. All was confusion, dreams, anxiety and trembling. (35)

In Clarke's re-telling, all distinctions between feigned and "actual" bodily identity become meaningless. The disguise becomes, temporarily, part of himself--part of Clarke's phenomenological reality--providing him with a set of "new eyes" to which he is not accustomed. The distinctions "disabled" and "non-disabled" are shown here to be far from self-evident; disability is not a static quality that only some bodies can be said to "have," but, in Clarke's anecdote, a shifting, mutable condition that is a product of the interaction between bodies and their environment. His account shows the ways in which the embodied realities produced by slavery--including the need to escape from it--broke down the binary between "real" and fraudulent disability, much as the freak show, with its ever-present possibility of the bodily hoax, encouraged viewers to shuttle back and forth between these two terms.<sup>24</sup>

In their 1860 narrative, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, William and Ellen Craft also engage obliquely with several of the concepts, terms, and issues important to the freak show. The narrative describes in detail the disability passing that enabled the Crafts' escape: Ellen, who has light skin, poses as white invalid gentleman, while William poses as her slave. As the main elements of her disguise, Ellen dons tinted glasses, ties a white handkerchief with a poultice over her face, and places her arm in a sling, which allows her to hide her female facial features and to avoid being asked to write. While not representing the freakish body directly, the Crafts' narrative thus touches on some of the problematics from the freak show by presenting a seemingly disabled body that the reader understands to be fraudulent.

As Ellen Samuels has discussed, the centrality of disability to the Crafts' escape flies in the face of a longstanding trend within both African American literature and later African American studies to divorce the free black body from signs of disability. In order to counter the nineteenth-century arguments that African Americans were "unfit" for citizenship, literature and scholarship on slavery often emphasized "wholeness, uprightness, good health, and independence--all representational categories which the Crafts paradoxically needed to subvert in order to attain actual freedom" (18). As Samuels also argues, however, the Crafts' narrative--even while making disability central--also posits it as the one "fixed and apparently immobile" category in the midst of racial and gender flux (20). While the narrative shows the constructed nature of white gender norms, which Ellen can adopt with ease, and suggests the arbitrariness of legal racial distinctions, given Ellen's white skin, disability appears as something that certain

bodies either "do" or "do not" really have. The point is made most clear by the engraving of Ellen that was sold even before the publication of the Crafts' narrative, in which the handkerchief covering Ellen's face is removed. The image obscures the disability aspects of the disguise, presenting Ellen instead as merely a respectable looking white gentleman (Samuels 20-22). This presentation of disability is quite different from that of Lewis Clarke, or, as we will see, from that of Harriet Wilson, who claims her some-time disabled body in what I argue is a singular and pathbreaking fashion. In describing their disability disguise in such detail, however, the Crafts' narrative poses the question of white spectatorship in some important and useful ways.

As with Lewis Clarke, the Crafts' decision to describe their adoption of disability disguise threatened to cast their honesty--and, therefore, trustworthiness as narrators--into doubt. From the beginning of their narrative, however, the Crafts deflect attention from the author-reader relationship and onto other "bad" readers of bodies. In the first pages of *Running*, the Crafts go beyond the common antebellum trope of describing the progressive whitening of the enslaved population to relate several stories of people who were "actually" white and were sold into slavery. One such person was a German immigrant girl named Salome Muller, who had disappeared after going to work on a plantation in Louisiana. The Crafts write:

There was no trace of African descent in any feature of Salome Muller. She had long, straight, black hair, hazel eyes, thin lips, and a Roman nose. The complexion on her face and neck was as dark as that of the darkest brunette. It appears, however, that during the twenty-five years of her servitude, she had been exposed to the sun's hot rays in the hot climate of Louisiana, with head and neck

unsheltered, as is customary with the female slaves, while laboring in the cotton or the sugar field. Those parts of her person which had been shielded from the sun were comparatively white. (3)

The citizens of Louisiana, the Crafts imply, had been duped by the visible physical appearance of Muller's tanned body. If the narrative stabilizes disability identity, making clear that Ellen was not "really" disabled by erasing the marks of her disability disguise in her engraving, the text's strategy with regard to race is to leave lingering doubts in the readers' minds about their ability to determine racial designations. The description of Muller partakes of the freak show's racial category confusion--the African Albino, or, even more closely, the "Leopard Child," with its dark and light patches of skin--but offers no comfort in revealing the "answer" to the riddle of Muller's racial identity.<sup>25</sup> This is Barnum's "operational aesthetic," but with a difference, the uncertainty about identity meant to goad readers to action rather than leading readers towards comfortable symbolic mastery.

Once they come to relating the particulars of their own escape, the Crafts continue to populate their narrative with stories of gullible white spectators. One man, fully duped by the Crafts' performance as an invalid white master and his valet, tells Ellen confidentially that he can tell by the cut of William's eye that he is "certain to run away" (26). William writes ironically, "My master said, 'I think not, sir; I have great confidence in his fidelity" (26), making a joke out of the significantly misplaced confidence of the white spectator. This anecdote is less threatening to a reader sympathetic to the Crafts plight than the example of Salome Muller, which portrays the slave system as even more complicated and nefarious than the reader might have thought. However, the anecdote

satirizes misplaced white faith in the ability to correctly read identity from physical signs, letting the reader in on the joke in order to deflect attention from the possibly unnerving aspects of the Crafts' dissimulations.

Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom continues to dramatize interactions between the disguised Crafts and the white citizens they encounter, many of whom appear to be amazingly bad readers of the bodies before them. Among the many other white interlocutors on the Crafts' journey who mistake their identities in various ways, one woman in particular stands out. On a train car in Virginia, the Crafts encounter a "stout elderly lady" who first mistakes William for a fugitive slave who ran away from her own home, exclaiming, "Bless my soul! there goes my nigger, Ned!" (33). Once this first confusion of identity is cleared up, the woman goes on to relate the story of Ned's wife, who had become "so ill, that she was unable to do much work; so I thought it would be best to sell her," the woman continues, "to go to New Orleans, where the climate is nice and warm" (34). If the first incident marks the woman as a bad reader of others, this detail marks her as duped by her aggrandized sense of her sympathetic nature, as well. The false nature of her sympathy is reinforced in the detail of a "richly embroidered handkerchief" that she cries into while reminiscing about the loyal slave she had sent South; the handkerchief, William can discern from his perspective, is "soiled" (35). Once the woman exits the train, a young Southern gentleman who had heard the entire exchange exclaims, "What a d--d shame it is for that old whining hypocritical humbug to cheat the poor negroes out of their liberty!," using a term--humbug--strongly associated at this moment with Barnum and his displays (37). In having a white man, and a Southern one at that, denounce the woman as a "humbug," the text manages to turn the tables on

the usual invocation of Barnumesque language in relation to the slave narrative. In this instance, the burden of authenticity is removed, however temporarily, from the Crafts' narrative, as their story shines light instead on the question of authentic versus false white sympathy. It is the unsavory elderly woman, not the Crafts, who is the real confidence woman in the scene.

Douglass, Clarke, and William and Ellen Craft, I've been arguing here, drew on the terms of the freak show--albeit in very different ways--in order to structure their accounts of the escape from slavery and the unfinished work of emancipation. They claimed for themselves the terms and logic of a mass cultural form that scholarship on the freak show has tended to assume was rhetorically available solely to the culturally powerful, and in doing so materially changed the way that terms such as disability, blackness, and fraudulence were linked in antebellum American discourse. It was a nonenslaved writer, however, whose engagement with the thematics of the freak show provided one of the most thorough-going critiques of white abolitionism's practices of embodied display. As we will see, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* proves an apt complement to the work of her formerly enslaved contemporaries, narrating a story of disablement that simultaneously launched a strident attack on abolitionist ways of seeing and interpreting African American bodies.

## II. Harriet Wilson's Prosthetic Authorship and the Abolitionist Stage

In 1982, Henry Louis Gates Jr. rediscovered a work that had been lost to American historians and literary scholars for over a century. The text was Harriet Wilson's 1859 autobiographical novel *Our Nig: or, Sketches from the Life of a Free* 

*Black*, which tells the story of a free black child named Frado who becomes informally indentured to a Northern white family and suffers numerous abuses, physical and otherwise, at their hands. When Gates republished *Our Nig* in 1983, a year after his discovery, it enjoyed what P. Gabrielle Foreman and Reginald H. Pitts have termed a "powerful and formative twentieth-century debut" (xxv). Wilson's text reconfigured the existing canon of African American letters, replacing Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's 1892 novel *Iola Leroy* as the first known novel written by an African American woman, and became the first known novel by an African American of either gender to be published *in* the U.S, given that William Wells Brown's *Clotel* first appeared in London.<sup>26</sup> While the text began to appear on college syllabi and in a number of literature anthologies, it found a considerable readership outside of the academy, as well. In the midst of a renaissance of writing by black women authors such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, who had both penned recent bestsellers, *Our Nig* sparked both scholarly and popular interest (Foreman and Pitts xxv).

*Our Nig*'s warm twentieth-century reception carried with it a great irony. In its own time, the book seems to have been read by only a very narrow audience near Wilson's hometown of Milford, New Hampshire. Despite the book's printing in Boston, a hub of abolitionist activity where black writers were routinely promoted, *Our Nig* does not appear to have been reviewed in a single nineteenth-century newspaper. As Gates puts it, "That such a significant novel, the very first written by a black woman, would remain unnoticed in Boston in 1859, a veritable center of abolitionist reform and passion, and by a growing black press eager to celebrate all black achievement in the arts and sciences, remains one of the troubling enigmas of Afro-American literary history"

(xxx).<sup>27</sup> In failing to achieve wide renown in its own moment, the book also failed to achieve its stated purpose: allowing the destitute Wilson to support herself and her son through sales of the novel.

Since the novel's rediscovery, scholars have offered a number of theories to make sense of its earlier invisibility. As Gates, Eric Gardner, and others have pointed out, antebellum black fiction was always less well-received than the slave narrative, though Wilson received comparatively less notice than even her other fiction-writing counterparts (Webb, Delaney, Wells Brown, and Douglass) (Gates xxx; Gardner 241 fn46). Other scholars have pointed to the novel's positive depiction of an interracial relationship between Frado's parents, and to its critical treatment of northern abolitionists, as further reasons why white abolitionists and black intellectuals alike may have steered clear of promoting the text (Gates; Foreman and Pitts; White). Little attention has been paid, however, to the novel's treatment of disability, or to its engagement with several of the terms and concepts central to the freak show, two elements which further contribute to Our Nig's departure from the dominant terms of much antebellum black and abolitionist writing.<sup>28</sup> I argue in this section that it was not only the existence of Wilson's attack on white abolitionists that may have registered as threatening to the antebellum literary status quo, but rather the specific manner in which she launched her assault: producing knowledge about the disabled black subject that ran counter to the abolitionist depiction of the wounded body (as silent and open to others' interpretation), and using the terms of the mass cultural form of the freak show against a dominant culture that was supposed to feel confirmed by its display of anomalous bodies.<sup>29</sup> Wilson's attack, in other words, was even more thoroughgoing and disruptive

than we may have yet imagined, posing a significant challenge to abolitionist modes of staging black embodiment.

Wilson's Our Nig, it is fitting to remind us here, was not a slave narrative. In reading her novel alongside non-fiction narratives by Douglass, Clarke, and William and Ellen Craft, I risk, perhaps, collapsing the diversity of writing by antebellum African Americans, or imposing a sociological understanding of literature onto writing by black authors. As a number of critics have established, however, Wilson's novel imported a number of elements from the slave narrative (and from white abolitionist literature) into its plot, signifying on the conventions of these genres in the process. In particular, in telling the story of a black child in the North who becomes informally indentured to a white family, *Our Nig* depicts "[t]he physical torture that Frado endures while no one is held accountable either in private or public spheres, the recurring runaway plot, and the possessive qualities in black chattel labor implied by the family's moniker 'our Nig." As Foreman and Pitts conclude, "all of these themes tie the text to another popular form, the life stories published by and about former slaves" (xxxii-iii).<sup>30</sup> Margaretta Thorn, who appends a letter to the end of Wilson's narrative vouching for the truth of its contents, encourages this interpretation, as well, telling readers that Wilson "was indeed a slave, in every sense of the word" (78).

Given this overlap between Wilson's text and the genre of the slave narrative, *Our Nig* was positioned to contend with some of the same discourses surrounding black embodiment that were faced by the slave narrators themselves. Indeed, in charting her story as one of gradual disablement, Wilson subjects her own subjectivity to considerable

risk, producing a text that is forced to navigate among a number of damaging beliefs about the health and ability of black (female) bodies. First, Wilson's text is marked by its engagement with the scientific and popular belief that African American women were actually less susceptible to pain and illness than their white counterparts--beliefs that were enshrined, for example, in the practices of J. Marion Sims, who perfected his methods of gynecological surgery upon enslaved women without the use of anesthesia. *Our Nig* indexes these beliefs in an exchange between Mrs. Bellmont and her son John, who has expressed a concern that Frado is growing thin from overwork. Mrs. Bellmont responds, "[y]ou know these niggers are just like black snakes; you can't kill them! If she wasn't tough she would have been killed long ago. There was never one of my girls that could do half the work" (49). As Diane Price Herndl has demonstrated in her work on invalidism in the nineteenth-century, such stereotypes ensured that the category of invalid came to be associated with whiteness and middle-classness, so that black women's supposed heartiness came to signal, paradoxically, their inferiority. The text's comparison between the invalid daughter Jane and the often similarly weak Frado, who is still expected to perform the labor of "man, boy, housekeeper, [and] domestic," further indexes the antebellum cultural construction of black women's allegedly impervious, and therefore labor-ready, bodies (Wilson 64).

In response, of course, abolitionist literature often aimed to secure its black protagonists' humanity *by* depicting them in pain. Wilson's text intersected with what James and Wu have termed the "nearly reflexive ascription of disability to enslaved bodies in antebellum abolitionist literature" (7). Theodore Dwight Weld's *Slavery As It Is* (1839) typified this practice, compiling hundreds of testimonies from runaway slave

advertisements that identified fugitives by their scars and other marks of injury (Gomaa 374). As Saidiya Hartman, Karen Haltunnen, and others have suggested, such texts relied upon intense visual description in order to elicit sympathy for the slave, and thereby risked turning the suffering black body into spectacle. As Haltunnen puts it, the "spectatorial nature of sympathy" "claimed to demolish social distance, [but] actually rested on social distance--a distance reinforced, in sentimental art, by the interposition of written text, stage, or canvas between virtuous spectator and the (imaginary) suffering victim" (307, 309).<sup>31</sup> Black narrators who wanted to describe their disabling injuries thus found themselves caught between two contradictory representations: one that would deny them the authenticity of their disabled bodies, and the other which would collapse the entirety of their subjectivity with suffering, with the possibility of producing in white viewers a sort of pornographic pleasure or a sense of self-serving empathy.

Finally, as I've been sketching out in this chapter, black narrators who entered the antebellum public sphere risked being seen through the lens of another kind of spectacle: enfreakment. If references to Frederick Douglass as a literary "wonder" traded on the routine display of both blackness and disability on the freak show stage, the situation was further compounded for black women. Hostile audiences routinely challenged the gender identity of black women lecturers, as in the well-known incident when Sojourner Truth was apparently asked to bare her breast for an audience dubious about her claims to be a woman. As Benjamin Reiss has argued, restrictive white gender norms essentially turned "outspoken African American women into bearded ladies" in the dominant cultural imaginary (85). Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, whose short story "The Two Offers" was published the very same month as *Our Nig*, recognized this situation, as well. Harper

wrote to a friend in 1870, "[Y]ou would laugh if you were to hear some of the remarks which my lectures call forth; 'She is a man,' again 'She is not colored, she is painted'" (quoted in Black 621). Such remarks testify to the "the intense bodily scrutiny blacks faced on entering the public eye," their bodies rendered anomalous according to the dominant categories of Western culture (Reiss 85).

How, then, does Harriet Wilson navigate through such contradictory and dangerous discursive territory? For Wilson's Our Nig, I argue, manages to testify to Wilson's--and Frado's--pained embodiment while inventively drawing on and reversing the terms of (white abolitionist) spectacle. This work begins in the short autobiographical preface, in which Wilson asserts her reason for writing Our Nig: "Deserted by kindred, disabled by failing health," she writes, "I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life" (4). The text thus highlights the disability of its author in the very first paragraph. In a reversal of David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's influential theory of "narrative prosthesis," wherein the literature of the dominant culture relies on disability, as on a crutch or prosthesis, for its figurative and symbolic power, Wilson offers her disability as authorizing the entire text that follows--which includes, of course, her scathing critique of Northern white racism and structural inequality.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, without ignoring the real sense of compulsion here, it is worth noting that Wilson presents her disability as potentially generative of intellectual and remunerative labor.

The preface further highlights the material condition of Wilson's disability in invoking the conventional authorial apologia. "In offering to the public the following pages," Wilson states in the first sentence, "the writer confesses her inability to minister

to the refined and the cultivated, the pleasure supplied by *abler* pens." Later in the preface, she reinforces the point: "My humble position and frank confession of errors will, I hope, shield me from severe criticism. Indeed, *defects* are so apparent it requires no skilful hand to expose them" (4, my emphasis). On one level, these elements signal Wilson's familiarity with a common textual convention, while also providing the additional cover necessary for a woman entering the public sphere of letters.<sup>33</sup> When juxtaposed so immediately with reference to her actual, material disability, however, the standard elements of the apologia are denaturalized and made strange. Wilson references "abler pens," her "inabilities" of narration, and the text's "defects," but then brings the disavowed bodily referent of such figurative speech back into view. The preface thus refuses to purchase Wilson's authorial agency at the cost of *effacing* embodiment, suggesting that her text is one that will choose to re-signify the black and disabled body, instead.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, if Wilson's text casts new light on the disability studies concept of "narrative prosthesis," *Our Nig* can also be usefully read through the lens of another set of terms drawn from contemporary disability theory: "disability as masquerade." Disability masquerade is Tobin Siebers's formulation for the strategic disclosure of disability for personal and political ends. In contrast to disability masquerade plays up his or her disability, the subject of disability masquerade plays up his or her embodied difference. Examples range from someone with limited vision using a white cane to signal to others that they will need extra time entering a bus, to the ADAPT protest agitating for the passage of the ADA in 1990, in which wheelchair users dragged

their bodies up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to draw attention to barriers to accessibility in the built environment (109, 106).

Wilson's novel enacts a textual version of such masquerade--conceived by Siebers as a mode of real-world, real-time performance--exposing her disability to the reader at the outset and thereby deflating the logic of narrative suspense that might turn her wounded body into exciting spectacle (or a supreme object of pity.) To offer a contrast, Wilson's preface avoids the sorts of titillating references to the contents of the narrative that we see in Lydia Maria Child's introduction to Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. In the latter case, Child tells readers that the "public ought to be made acquainted with [slavery's] monstrous features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn." This promise of a "veil withdrawn" threatens to take on a provocative cast, especially as Child hints at the taboo nature of her subject by worrying that "our ears are too delicate to listen" to what will follow (6). As Sally Gomaa has suggested, Child's visual metaphor "exemplifies the abolitionist treatment of pain as visual and of the slave's body as spectacle" (375). The reader of Jacobs's narrative is essentially teased with the hint of a black female body that will be ravaged--physically and sexually--within the course of the narrative.

Child's reference to "withdrawing the veil" echoes the spectacularization of the ex-slave's body on the abolitionist lecture circuit. One such example from 1855 provides a particularly close material counterpart to Child's textual strategy--the type of strategy that Wilson's text writes against. At one gathering, an Ohio clergyman, after preaching his anti-slavery sermon, " dramatically drew a curtain to reveal a family of six fugitives. 'There is a specimen of the infernal fruits of slavery,' he cried. The audience, said a local

reporter, was 'surprised and horror-stricken. Many eyes were filled with tears. Promptly the congregation collected money for their journey and 'sent them on their way rejoicing'" (198). As this example makes clear, the moment of dramatic revelation that posits the ex-slave as the object of the audience's gaze leaves little room for her to assert her own subjectivity; the structure of unveiling invites, instead, shock, pity, or a wide-eyed "interest" in the object of the spectacle. Wilson's text, in contrast to Child's introduction or to the Ohio clergyman's display, makes reference to her disabled body in the very preface to the novel, mitigating the possibility of a great unveiling within. This move helps ensure that she remains the "interpreter of the wound" rather than merely the site for others' interpretation of her embodied state and intervention on her behalf (Gomaa 380).

In the text proper, Wilson continues this work of performing her own pained embodiment in a way that avoids the many discursive pitfalls surrounding her. For if she tags her disability in the preface to her narrative, the text itself actively resists the spectacularization of her body with its relatively understated depictions of physical suffering. R.J. Ellis has made this observation, comparing *Our Nig* to other antebellum depictions of the black American's plight and suggesting that *Our Nig* "never becomes as shamelessly hypberbolic" a text as William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, his main point of comparison (108). In episodes such as the one in which Frado is beaten and forced to accommodate a wedge of wood between her teeth, "[w]hat is remarkable here is the narrative's restraint: the absence of any embellishing comment on this punishment" (Ellis 109.)<sup>35</sup> Indeed, for readers used the extravagant rhetoric of many of the other works about

slavery from the 1850s--from *Clotel* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*--the text of *Our Nig* reads strangely at first due to its consistent use of understatement.

If Wilson's text avoids hyperbolic comment on the violence so routinely inflicted upon her body during her indenture with the Bellmonts, it makes a number of other rhetorical moves in its stead. Ellis suggests, for one, that Wilson saves "sentimentalism's characteristic rhetorical hyperbole" for her descriptions of her white characters, such as Frado's mother Mag, whose life conforms to the narrative of the fallen woman. Frado's experiences, by contrast, are told through litotes and ellipses, tropes which "swerve[] from the usual discursive practice of abolitionist narratives" (109, 113). Building upon Ellis, I'd add that in concert with this strategy, Wilson's narrative tells its tale of disability through an accumulation of details in place of the expected spectacular scenes of wounding. These details apply reveal how Frado's condition of servitude produces, at once, her racialized and disabled identity. The moment in which we learn that Mrs. Bellmont refuses to allow Frado to protect her skin from the sun is exemplary in this regard. Wilson writes that for the short time Frado was allowed to attend school, "the interim of terms was filled up with a variety of duties new and peculiar. At home, no matter how powerful the heat when sent to rake hay or guard the grazing herd, she was never permitted to shield her skin from the sun" (22). Wilson quickly appends the reason behind this slowly accumulating and injurious marking of her body: "She was not many shades darker than Mary [Bellmont] now; what a calamity it would be ever to hear the contrast spoken of" (22). Mrs. Bellmont's decree, issued so that the mixed-race Frado's skin color can be more easily differentiated from that of her daughter, Mary, shows how race is produced--in the world of *Our Nig--through* physical punishment.<sup>36</sup> The slaps and

beatings that Frado receives work similarly. She is left weak and only intermittently mobile later in life not through one spectacular incident of torture, but from the accumulated toll of overwork, physical deprivation, and punishment--all elements meant to produce Frado's position as the legible "black" subject in the household. Making and marking her body through pain, injury, and overwork, Mrs. Bellmont hopes to clearly establish Frado's racialized and commodified status as "our Nig."

In addition to narrating her disabling past in a manner that resists the spectacular visual logic of much abolitionist literature, the early sections of *Our Nig* also reveal other ways in which Frado is made the subject of spectacle. As such, these sections begin to thematize the terms of spectacle itself. On the day that Frado first enters school, for example, a crowd gathers to gawk: "As soon as she appeared," Wilson writes, "with scanty clothing and bared feet, the children assembled, noisily published her approach: 'See that nigger,' shouted one. 'Look! Look!' cried another" (18-19). The extreme rarity of African Americans in Milford, New Hampshire makes Frado's black skin a spectacle in its own right, one that draws the shouts and stares of the town's children.<sup>37</sup> While the scenes of Mrs. Bellmont's abuse show that race is produced in concert with disability, the geographical and social contexts in which Frado's body moves also attributes to blackness the singularity of the freak. This rendering of Frado's skin obscures the fictional nature of racial distinctions by fixing Frado, instead, as the oddity--the one visible exception to the general rule of "pure" or unsullied whiteness.

Wilson describes how Frado first flirts with the subject position assigned to her by the schoolchildren, attempting to convert the (negative) attention she receives into a sense of recognition and inclusion. "Day by day there was a manifest change of deportment

towards 'Nig,'" as her antics in the classroom--making speeches, placing a smoking cigar in the teacher's desk--"drew merriment from the children" (19). As Wilson suggests in a later episode, however, the implications of such attention were not so easy to reroute or control. One day, after James has allowed Frado use the Bellmonts' dinner table following their meal, an enraged Mrs. Bellmont catches sight of the scene. Ordering Frado to set down the clean plate she had intended to use, Mrs. Bellmont explains, "[Y]ou shall not have a clean one; eat from mine" (39). Rather than follow Mrs. Bellmont's orders, Frado undertakes one of her first acts of resistance: "Quickly looking about, she took the plate, called Fido to wash it, which he did to the best of his ability; then, wiping her knife and fork on the cloth, she proceeded to eat her dinner" (39).

Frado's action is a serious one, a rebellion enacted with calculations for her own safety. Indeed, Wilson tells us that "Nig never looked toward her mistress in the process. She had Jack near; she did not fear her now" (39). Unlike in the scenes at school, in other words, Frado's intention in this moment is to exercise an act of civil disobedience, *not* to entertain others or to provide comic relief. Even Jack, however--a relatively sympathetic character among the Bellmonts--processes the scene in just this way. "[B]oiling over with laughter," Jack relates what had happened to James, and, "pulling a bright, silver half-dollar from his pocket, he threw it at Nig, saying, 'There, take that; 'twas worth paying for" (40). Rendering her act of opposition mere performance, Jack's action becomes a paradigmatic illustration of Jose Muñoz's "burden of liveness," in which minoritarian subjects are expected to "'perform' for the amusement of a dominant power bloc" as "a substitute for historical and political representation" (187-188). Wilson's text suggests that in a world in which blackness is made the subject of spectacle, overt acts of

resistance by black subjects are likely to be misinterpreted or misappropriated: they are very likely, in other words, to fail. In the later moments of her narrative, Wilson shows us another strategy--seizing the terms of representation that organized the white display of black bodies, and putting them to new, and subversive, use.

If these early moments, as I'm claiming, testify to Wilson's pained embodiment while resisting the terms of spectacle, the last pages of the text explicitly thematize issues of spectacle and authenticity in inventive and productive ways. After spending the bulk of the novel describing Frado's childhood experiences, the final chapter, entitled "The Winding Up of the Matter," quickly runs through a series of events in Frado's/Wilson's adult life which bring the reader up "to the present time" (72).<sup>38</sup> One such event, which I will focus on here, is Frado's ill-fated marriage to a man who turns out to be an imposter fugitive slave. This plot point takes up only a few pages in the entire narrative, but has immense ramifications for the novel's positioning with regard to the abolitionist establishment and its treatment of embodied display. The chapter begins, "A few years ago, within the compass of my narrative, there appeared often in some of our New England villages, professed fugitives from slavery, who recounted their personal experience in homely phrase, and awakened the indignation of nonslaveholders against brother Pro. Such a one appeared in the new home of Frado" (70). As a number of critics have pointed out, Wilson is wading into dangerous political territory with this story of the false fugitive. While, as earlier sections of this chapter attested, antiabolitionists often attempted to discredit slave narrators by questioning the veracity of their identities, abolitionist circles warned readers and viewers to be vigilant about false fugitives, as

well. Particularly following the great embarrassment surrounding the 1838 "slave narrative" of James Williams, discredited as a fabrication after it had been championed by Garrison's *Liberator*--(and after the American Anti-Slavery Society had sent a free copy to every member of Congress)--abolitionist publications joined the general chorus of warnings urging Americans to be heedful of fraudulent lecturers (Cohen 115).<sup>39</sup>

In highlighting, rather than hiding, the existence of false fugitives, Wilson thus distances herself from the populations most likely to have championed her novel: abolitionist societies and the black press, both of which stood to lose credibility in association with the narrative of the imposter fugitive (Foreman and Pitts 97 n5; White viii). Wilson's preface makes clear that she anticipated this danger: after stating that she writes in order to secure aid for herself and her child, Wilson adds, "I would not from these motives even palliate slavery at the South, by disclosures of its appurtenances North. My mistress was wholly imbued with southern principles" (4). Wilson's gesture here indexes the might of the abolitionist establishment, which, on the one hand, she seems careful here not to disturb. On the other hand, however, her reference to slavery's "appurtenances North" already begins the work of disrupting the binary between the "free" North--home to the nation's most strident abolitionists--and the slave South. She continues in this vein in the next sentence, writing, "I do not pretend to divulge every transaction in my own life, which the unprejudiced would declare unfavorable in comparison with treatment of legal bondmen; I have purposefully omitted what would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home" (4). With this statement, Wilson, even while putatively claiming to be working in alignment with "our good antislavery friends," leaves her readers with a lingering sense of doubt regarding their

mission, as it clearly leaves unprotected a black child in their midst. As Barbara White has written, the fact that Wilson seems to have anticipated the risk of alienating abolitionists and continued with her project nevertheless suggests that "a critique of abolitionists' racism was more central to Wilson's story than we have previously supposed" (xxx).

Indeed, this short section of Wilson's novel, which may provide the explanation for the book's century-long obscurity, contains one of the most striking assessments of the abolitionist logic of display that I have yet seen in antebellum American literature. For it is not only Frado who is duped by the imposter, but abolitionists, as well.<sup>40</sup> In a sentence that is utterly devastating to the white abolitionist project, Wilson writes, "He left her to her fate--embarked at sea, with the disclosure that he had never seen the South, and that his illiterate harangues were humbugs for hungry abolitionists" (71).

First, Wilson's use of the term "humbug" in this passage brings the contents of the freak show--with its usual depiction of non-white and disabled bodies as curiosities, and its engagement with questions of authenticity--to bear on her critique. As we know, and as the explanatory notes to *Our Nig* make clear, this word could not have been uttered in the U.S. in 1859 without triggering associations with Barnum. Foreman and Pitts write, "the very popular P.T. Barnum was known as the 'prince of humbug' at this time; Wilson's language calls attention to the issues of commodification, spectatorship, and sensationalism that haunted the display of black Americans as speakers on the antislavery cause" (98 n5). With this one sentence, then, Wilson's text presents abolitionist display as itself a freak show, echoing Douglass's similar charge in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and inverting the rhetoric by white viewers that cast black

literary production as itself freakish. Furthermore, in portraying the abolitionist stage as akin to a Barnum-style freak show, ruled by the same principles of hoaxing, bodily display, and exploitation, Wilson also suggests that in this instance the tables have been turned, as the white abolitionists find themselves in the position of being duped by spectacle they have orchestrated. Wilson's text is thus immensely canny about the structural similarities between abolitionists and showmen, and draws on these similarities in order to interrupt the logic of abolitionist display.<sup>41</sup>

This rhetorical association between the abolitionist stage and the freak show carries with it many implications. Most obviously, Wilson exposes the commodification of black bodies on the abolitionist lecture circuit. While Wilson would have shared little in common with the openly racist editorialist in *Graham's Magazine* with whom I began this chapter, his comment about the economics of the literary marketplace is to the point here. Northerners, the editorial suggests in the course of its diatribe against the current popularity of books about slavery, are "anxious to make money" from the stories of exslaves (209).<sup>42</sup> Wilson's text, with its alignment between "hungry" abolitionists and showmen, complements this critique. Wilson's false fugitive storyline also proves threatening because it reverses the expected power dynamics between abolitionist organizer and fugitive exhibit. The imposter fugitive in Wilson's text converts his apparent slave status, with its expectation of a commodified body, into a commodity he uses himself. The powerless ex-slave turns out to be a powerful black con man who

Finally, the incident is threatening to abolitionist reading strategies because of the complication it poses to the expected relationship between performance and text. Live,

embodied display was supposed to be the supplement to the printed slave narrative, proving the authority and authenticity of the ex-slave speaker through the display of his scars, his injuries, and his humble speech. The authenticating documents by acquaintances of the slave narrator, as we've seen, stood in for such first-hand encounters on the part of the reader, assuring him that a credible witness has seen the narrator in the flesh and can testify to his or her identity and character. With her storyline of the false fugitive, Wilson mocks the idea that visually apprehending an ex-slave narrator necessarily provides one with reliable information or lets one in on the "truth" of his situation. More so than simply using a word ("humbug"), drawn from freak show display, Wilson's text takes on its main structuring principle: inviting readers to interpret a body that may turn out to have been fraudulent all along. In this case, further, Wilson's text withholds from readers the "pleasures" of the operational aesthetic--the fun and satisfaction in being the arbiter of authenticity--that we saw reviewers of Douglass indulging. The abolitionists in her text who take up this invitation to interpret are, after all, ultimately "humbugged" by their own preconceived notions about the authenticity of "illiterate" black speech (Gomaa 375). Upending the "visual requisites for sympathy in abolitionist discourse," Wilson suggests, in a manner consonant with the pleasures and terrors of the freak show, that visual evidence can be supremely deceiving.

But what of Wilson's disability, which, I argued earlier, she has so carefully introduced to the reader? In debunking the credibility of visual evidence, does Wilson cast doubt upon her own story, as well? Just before the story of the false fugitive, Wilson provides her readers with another example of a white Northerner duped by what seem to

be her own racist assumptions. During a period of illness and inability to work, the adult Frado is removed to the home of a Mrs. Hoggs, who earns money from the town by taking in and caring for sick boarders. Propping herself up in bed, Frado is soon able to use her hands, and "would often ask for sewing to beguile the tedium. She had become very expert with her needle the first year of her release from Mrs. B., and she had forgotten none of her skill. Mrs. H. praised her, and as she improved in health, she was anxious to employ her" (68). The arrangement works for some time, until Frado, who has been working through returned bouts of bodily pain, "was startled by the announcement that Mrs. Hoggs had reported her to the physician and town offices as an imposter. That she was, in truth, able to get up and go to work" (68). As we can see, Northern whites in this book are persistently bad readers of the black bodies before them, misguided by their own presumptions about black cognitive inferiority (the false fugitive's "illiterate harangues"), and lack of womanly physical vulnerability and laziness (Frado's supposed disability imposture). Wilson's text reveals not only a society in which Frado's raciallyinflected servitude actually caused her disability, but also one in which the distorting lens of white racism conveniently obscures this fact.

Wilson shows that such racialized assumptions, and their attendant misreadings, have not only ideological but material effects. Hearing about Mrs. Hoggs' charge "brought on a severe sickness of two weeks," when a Mrs. Moore, whom Frado had been living with previously, "again sought her, and took her to her home" (68). Mrs. Hoggs' doubts, in other words, literally disable Frado further.<sup>43</sup> The anecdote thus blurs the line between the categories of "disability" and "ability," showing that these terms do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are affected by the contingencies of race, class, and labor. Rather

than suggesting increased surveillance, however--rather than guiding readers towards *better* detection of imposture in order to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor--Wilson's text instead troubles the very distinction between authenticity and fraudulence.<sup>44</sup> Just as no clear parameters for "worthy" or "real" disability are possible in a world in which the stress of navigating a racially-inflected system can exacerbate current symptoms, Wilson's *Our Nig* (itself a hybrid autobiography-novel) begins to break down the categories of authenticity and fabrication as we usually think of them.

Indeed, as Eric Gardner astutely noted back in 1993, "Gates' skillful detective work of 'finding' the author may have shaped the direction of critical work to date"; the issues raised by the possibility that *Our Nig* is an autobiography or at least an autobiographical novel "have dominated study of the book" (227). Due to the circumstances of Wilson's rediscovery, Gardner suggests, the scholarly work on her text has taken the form of a hunt for authenticity, when in fact Wilson's narrative plays with questions of truth and authenticity in several ways. Foreman and Pitts, for example, note an instance in which Wilson delays providing her reader with the whole truth. Keeping the racial status of her character Mag (Frado's mother) open to interpretation until the last paragraph of the chapter in which she appears, Wilson engages in "challenging play with her readers' racialized expectations," a move that may inspire less than full confidence from her readers (xxix). Gates himself offers another example, noting that "Frado never truly undergoes a religious transformation, merely the *appearance* of one; as the text emphasizes, a 'devout and Christian exterior invited confidence from the villagers'" (xlix). In one, sense, then, the villagers "confidence" in Frado's Christian exterior is

misplaced. In another sense, however, they are right to see in Frado someone who exhibits the qualities expected of a good Christian, in theory if not in practice. As Gates says, "Frado's innate innocence, outside of the respectability of the church, is one of the most subtle contrasts and social critiques of Our Nig" (xlix). In other words, the line between authenticity and dissimulation, between warranted and unwarranted confidence, is not as stark in Wilson's novel as we might imagine.<sup>45</sup>

While Wilson's text plays with questions of truth and falsity in these various ways, a detail from the archives of material culture provides an interesting complement to her false fugitive plot. On the last page of her narrative, Wilson writes of Frado, "In one of her tours, Providence favored her with a friend who, pitying her cheerless lot, kindly provided her with a valuable recipe, from which she might manufacture a useful article for her maintenance" (72). In the Appendix of *Our Nig*, the pseudonymous "Allida," who writes a letter in support of Wilson, makes clear that this "valuable recipe" was a formula for hair dye. Allida makes clear, as well, that Wilson peddled the hair dye with some success, until her health issues made continuing difficult: "The heart of a stranger was moved with compassion, and bestowed a recipe upon her for restoring gray hair to its former color. She availed herself of this great help, and has been quite successful; but her health is again failing, and she has felt herself obliged to resort to another method of procuring her bread--that of writing her Autobiography "(76). With this move, Allida furthers Wilson's equation between the hair dye and her book as commodities in the market-place; she marks them both as objects that Wilson hoped to sell for money in order to make up for her lost labor potential due to disability.<sup>46</sup>

In her role as a businesswoman peddling "Mrs. H.E. Wilson's Hair Dressing" between 1857-60, Wilson drew on the Barnumesque language that also appeared in Our Nig's false fugitive storyline (Foreman and Pitts ix). Asking "Who Wants a Good Head of Hair?," the advertisements for the hair dressing promised that "Mrs. Wilson's Hair Regenerator" was "no humbug" (Foreman and Flynn).<sup>47</sup> Positing a potentially skeptical consumer, the advertisements use the language of "humbug" to make an evaluative claim about the product: it works well, which is to say, it is worth the money one will spend on it. However, since the very act of dying one's hair involves imposture--a certain level of "humbug"--the ads can also be read as containing a wink to their female consumers.<sup>48</sup> Staking claims for the authenticity of the product at the same time that the product itself allows women to disguise themselves, Wilson's use of the term "humbug" embraces the vacillation between belief and doubt that was the stock and trade of the freak show. The hair bottle advertisements thus help us to see Wilson as a sort of literary Barnum--though, in a quite different manner than Twain, who (as we will see in the next chapter) often relishes freakery for its entertainment value. Assuring readers that "Enough [of her story] has been unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid," Wilson leaves open the possibility that she has not been fully forthcoming (72). Printing the language of skepticism on her material product, while embodying, rather than erasing, disability in her printed text, Wilson makes the bold move of enshrining her narrative of disability in a text that challenges readers' faith in their abilities to discern the truth.

## Chapter Two:

"The Biggest Little Marriage on Record": Union and Disunion in Tom Thumb's America

On February 10, 1863, in the midst of the U.S. Civil War and just one month after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect, thousands of New Yorkers gathered to witness a legal proclamation of a different sort. The event was the wedding of Charles Sherwood Stratton (better known as "General Tom Thumb") and Lavinia Warren, two little people performers who gained fame under notorious showman P.T. Barnum.<sup>49</sup> The "Tom Thumb wedding," as it has come to be called, temporarily disrupted both the city space and the textual spaces of nineteenth-century America's thriving mass media--the newspaper. As police routed omnibuses away from Broadway in order to accommodate the massive spectacle, the "marriage of Tom Thumb shoved news of the Civil War off the front page of the *New York Times* for three days" (Chemers 73). As another New York paper put it, apparently without irony, the Tom Thumb wedding was "the event of the century, if not unparalleled in history," and new outlets of various persuasions took notice ("General Thumb's Wedding").<sup>50</sup>

Given the Tom Thumb wedding's status as a major news item, 1860s readers seeking information on wartime events such as Emancipation could not have helped coming across news reports on the performers, and vice versa.<sup>51</sup> The February 21, 1863 edition of *Harper's Weekly* demonstrates this point in graphic fashion: a full-page image of Stratton and Warren graces the very cover of this issue, in which the next illustration to appear depicts "The Effects of the Proclamation--Freed Negroes Coming Into Our Lines at Newbern, North Carolina" (113, 116) [See Figures 1 and 2]. Barnum himself, always one to work topical references into his exhibits, riffed on the temporal and

journalistic proximity of the two events. Ads for his American Museum that appear in the *New York Herald* and the *New-York Daily Tribune* in March of 1863 bear the title "Proclamation by P.T. BARNUM." After beginning with a mock-official "WHEREAS," the advertisement continues to echo the language of Lincoln's executive order. Replacing the phrase "Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States..." with "Now, therefore, I the manager of Barnum's Museum," the ad goes on to explain that Barnum is extending his American Museum engagement of the Tom Thumb wedding party before they embark on their European tour ("Proclamation").<sup>52</sup>

These rhetorical connections between the Tom Thumb wedding and the Lincoln presidency were only strengthened when the Lincolns held a reception for Stratton and Warren at the White House in the weeks following the ceremony. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that some news outlets in this moment made explicit connections between the Tom Thumb wedding and the actions of the wartime state. The Southernsympathizing *New York Herald*, for example, reprinted a piece from the *London Index* that connected the mass interest in the Tom Thumb wedding to the federal plan to construct a new riverbed leading to the Gulf of Mexico. "The Great Union river [proposal] is nearly as exiting as the nuptials of Tom Thumb," the article states wryly, "and it may answer the purpose of keeping people from thinking of the difficulties that threaten every moment to engulf them in national ruin" ("Federal Bombast"). If the article thus presents the Tom Thumb wedding as a distraction from the wartime moment, it does so in a way that strongly links the spectacle to the proceedings of the Lincoln government. The first wave of twentieth-century scholars to consider the Tom Thumb wedding were, I'd suggest, too quick to portray it as a distraction from wartime events for which any large-scale spectacle would have sufficed. Sociologist and early freak show chronicler Robert Bogdan, for example, sketches elements of the tumultuous Civil War context in which the wedding takes place only to assert, "But despite all that, and as a testimonial to the manipulative powers of the great showman P.T. Barnum, on February 10 the nation's attention focused on, *of all things*, a wedding between two dwarfs" (148, my italics). In portraying Barnum's ingenuity as the sole explanation for the widespread interest in the Tom Thumb wedding, Bogdan's account leaves little room for exploring the formal qualities of the spectacle that made it so amenable to absorbing Americans' attention at this moment, not to mention the broader question of the relationship between the "political" and "cultural" spheres directing this outcome.<sup>53</sup>

Neil Harris, similarly, presents the war as the disassociated historical backdrop to the Tom Thumb wedding, taking for granted that the spectacle would have little substantive relationship to the political and social upheavals of the day. Harris describes a pamphlet by a pseudonymous poet named Cymon that circulated in the wake of the Strattons' reception at the Lincoln White House. "Cymon," Harris tells us, alleged that "the Tom Thumb wedding was a plot between Barnum (Bamboozleum) and Lincoln (Foo-Foo) to ease the melancholia caused by the disasters of the Civil War," a charge that Harris calls "undoubtedly the most bizarre ever made against the showman" despite acknowledging that he had previously been compared to the devil by several critics (164). I have no wish, of course, to suggest that Barnum and Lincoln were actually involved in a conspiratorial plot. However, the dismissive tone of Harris's account elides the way in

which the Tom Thumb wedding may have had precisely the effect that "Cymon" suggests--not simply distracting from the war as any large-scale cultural event might, but, I'd suggest, negotiating white Americans' anxieties relating to sectional and political division, widespread injury and loss, and the radical indeterminacy of the body politic in the wake of Emancipation.

On the one hand, then, I aim to draw on the recent insights of the field of freak show studies--a field that Bogdan and Harris's seminal work helped to establish--in order to reconsider the role of the Tom Thumb wedding in 1860s America. As "one of the inaugural areas of cultural studies," freak studies, in its contemporary manifestations, productively assumes a relationship between this popular entertainment form and the social formations of the nineteenth and twentieth-century U.S. (Samuels 55). On the other hand, I hope to use the news reports on this famous spectacle in order to expand the methodologies of even the current body of freak show scholarship. More recent work on the Tom Thumb wedding has productively read this event for what it can tell us about disability, gender, and class constructs in 1860s America. However, with some limited and scattered exceptions, the scholarly work on the Tom Thumb wedding has not tended to consider its relationship to the questions of race brought so powerfully into focus by the U.S. Civil War.<sup>54</sup> This critical lacuna seems to arise, to put it bluntly, from the fact that Stratton and Warren were white, and that studies of freakery have historically focused on the shows' "African savages" and "wild men" when considering racial representation. As Ellen Samuels has put it, "[a]cademic freak studies has often been divided between those working within the relatively new framework of disability studies and those that study racialized enfreakment as part of postcolonial critical race

scholarship" (56). And while a growing number of scholars are working at the "intersection of race, disability, and other embodied social identities to produce important new understandings of enfreakment," the (undoubtedly useful) emphasis in these cases on non-white, disabled performers means that not enough attention has been paid to how *white*, disabled "freaks" might impact questions of national and individual racial identity in moments of national racial upheaval (Samuels 56).<sup>55</sup> Until we look for the conjunction of freakery and racial meanings in those places we don't initially suspect, we miss recognizing the centrality of the freak show to the history of race in America, as well as the extent to which disability has been constructed in and through articulation with racial meanings.

Thus, this chapter takes a cue from Barnum and the news media's palimpsestic alignment of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Tom Thumb wedding to ask what this freakish spectacle can tell us about national racial formations in a moment of ambiguous status for both formerly enslaved and white men. How, in other words, did the mass media use the Tom Thumb wedding to construct certain notions of whiteness and a white America? What might be the relationship between the freak show's exceptional bodies and the political state of exception characterized by Emancipation? Analyzing the hundreds of news reports on the Strattons and their spectacular wedding that appeared across the fractured nation, this chapter contends that the connotations of racial purity and representativeness that attached to little people combined with the citizenship associations of marriage to make the Tom Thumb wedding an ideal vehicle for mediating white (male) readers' anxieties in the immediately post-Emancipation moment.<sup>56</sup> In the later portions of this chapter, however, I put my own reading under pressure by

considering those news reports, largely overlooked in scholarship on the Tom Thumb wedding, which address the spectacle in self-reflexive or critical terms. In other words, what appears in many papers to be an event that produces white nationalist sentiment capable of symbolically suturing the wounds of the U.S. body politic betrays, in other accounts, the fiction of such consensus. A mass cultural event taking place when the meaning of "America" was not at all self-evident, the textual invocations of the Tom Thumb wedding help us to recognize the discursive labor necessary to create those entities referred to as the "American public" and "American culture," as well as the freak show's paradoxical role in both shoring up and revealing the fallacy of national community. As such, a media event like the Tom Thumb wedding helps us to assess the extent to which the united post-war America I take up in my next chapter is, at bottom, a media effect. As a first step, however, we will turn to 1863 in order to flesh out the social and political situation in which reports of the Tom Thumb wedding imaginatively intervened.

## I. Exceptional Bodies, Excepted State

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation officially freed the slaves in the ten Confederate states in active rebellion against Union. Many scholars have pointed out that since the order affected only those areas not yet under Union control, the number of enslaved Americans who were immediately freed was relatively modest.<sup>57</sup> However, if the immediate practical effect of Emancipation was much more partial, uneven, and contingent than American cultural memory tends to recall, the political effects were stark. Pronouncing, in effect, that the Civil War was now officially linked to

the project of ending the institution of slavery altogether rather than simply halting its expansion, Lincoln's order intensified the extant sectional, political, and social divisions in the war-torn nation. At once providing encouragement to abolitionists, retrenching Confederate sentiment, and angering so-called War Democrats and Copperhead Democrats in the north, the Proclamation highlighted the divisions that overshadowed shared racial and regional status. As Kirk Savage puts it, the war as whole "disrupted traditional patterns of cultural difference by allying white with black and pitting white against white," and responses to Emancipation made this point particularly clear (132).

New York City--site of the Tom Thumb wedding and of the most extensive news reporting on the event--was home to notably stark internal political divisions. As Bluford Adams and others have reminded us, many New Yorkers continued to support the Democrats as the party of the Union well into the war, and cultural and economic ties between the city and the plantations of the South left many feeling openly sympathetic to the Confederate cause (129).<sup>58</sup> A March 7, 1863 San Francisco Evening Bulletin article reporting on the frenzy in New York City over the Tom Thumb wedding succinctly conveys these dynamics. Stating that he wants to have "a bit of fun" with the fact that "[a]l the town's alive about [the wedding]," the Bulletin's New York correspondent claims to have put a miniature dress in the window of Lord and Taylor's and announced that it belonged to Lavinia Warren. The correspondent's burlesque of New Yorker's fascination with the Thumb wedding quickly segues into a knowing nod toward the lessthan-strictly-Unionist character of the city: "By 10 A.M. the street was blocked up," he writes, "and as virtuous and patriotic interest excited as if the store had been burning up or Jeff Davis was addressing the crowd" ("Street Scene").

While intensifying the sectional and political differences already dividing white Americans, the Proclamation also exacerbated class-based rifts among the white male populace. Again, these dynamics were particularly visible in the case of New York, where many white workers "resented the war effort, which brought economic hardship and increasing unemployment to working-class neighborhoods" even as the overall economy of New York City prospered. With competition for jobs between Irish and black workers mounting, "[a]mong New Yorkers, African Americans and middle-class and wealthy Republicans tended to support abolition; most of the white working-class did not, fearing competition for jobs from thousands of newly emancipated slaves" ("A City Divided"). These tensions were, of course, further intensified by the 1863 Enrollment Act--the first national conscription act in U.S. history--which led to the New York City draft riots in July of the same year.<sup>59</sup> With provisions that allowed draftees to evade service if they could pay the \$300 commutation fee or provide a substitute for military service, the act made class status the salient difference between those white, able-bodied men who were able to avoid possible injury or death at the hands of the state and those who were subject to its compulsions.<sup>60</sup>

If the Proclamation and the national conscription act thus intensified differences based on section, political affiliation, and class, they also signaled the beginning of "the marked and permanent expansion of federal authority," an expansion that subjected many white Americans both North and South to similar coercions (Nudelman 86).<sup>61</sup> These policies, along with the suspension of the writ of habeus corpus, constituted "three important instances of the controversial exercise of state power [that] occurred during the second year of the war (1862-1863)" (Nudelman 86). The Emancipation Proclamation, in

other words, was exemplary of the state of exception reigning in America during the Civil War era. A "state of exception," as political theorist Giorgio Agamben defines it, is the suspension of the normal juridical order that is "state power's immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts," including, and importantly for our purposes here, Civil War (*State* 2).<sup>62</sup> Under this state of exception, those who may have previously felt protected by state power now found themselves subject to compulsions on military service, the threat of execution for desertion, and lack of safeguards against unlawful detention for perceived rebellion against the federal government. In other words, white, male, able-bodied citizens not only found themselves divided by sectional and social differences, but were suddenly quite visibly vulnerable to both physical and political injury.<sup>63</sup>

The dynamics of this exceptional moment make themselves felt in numerous news articles and advertisements that surround the reports of the Tom Thumb wedding. First, the many references to wounding in battle quite directly suggest the extent to which citizens now faced injury at the hands of the state. The issue of *Harper's Weekly* that features the Strattons on the cover, for example, includes advertisements for not one but two brands of prosthetic legs. The more elaborate ad, from the Universal Joint and Artificial Limb Co., boasts, "Weighs only 4 Pounds. Soldiers, price \$50; civilians, \$75; silver-plated, \$100. They will lengthen and shorten, and are self-adjusting," emphasizing the technologically advanced nature of the prosthetic but also pointing to the widespread disablements of war (128). Similarly, the January 29, 1863 *New York Observer* features news of the Tom Thumb wedding immediately below a report on injury and sickness in the army; the July 16 issue places an advertisement for Barnum's American Museum

near one asking for donations for the wounded; and a reader opening the April 14, 1863 *New York Herald* would have found, at once, news of the sale of Tom Thumb's house, and information on back pay for veterans discharged from the army due to disability.<sup>64</sup>

The shifting use of the term "runaway" in 1860s newspapers provides another striking index of this "state of exception" moment. In some of the Southern papers, notices of the Tom Thumb wedding are, unsurprisingly, adjacent to notices of fugitive slaves. In the January 12, 1863 Memphis Daily Appeal, for example, news that Tom Thumb is to marry appears just to the left of a notice advertising reward money for eight fugitive slaves who "RANAWAY about three months ago from the Alabama and Mississippi railroad" ("\$90 Reward!"). In other instances, however, newspaper references to "runaways" refer, in fact, to white Americans who have fled their homes following the conscription measures passed by both the Confederate and U.S. congresses. In the March 20, 1863 edition of Jackson, Mississippi's *Daily Southern Crisis*, for instance, a description of the crowds who throng the Strattons' Bridgeport, Connecticut home appears directly below the news that "[t]he statistics of Canada show that the number of runaways from the United States who have became frightened at the prospect of a draft, numbered 1,942" ("Various Items"). This semantic ambiguity--the fact that a term predominately used to refer to enslaved fugitives can now attach itself to white, male, able-bodied citizens--suggests the truly ambiguous status of the latter under the state of exception. They are, one could say, edging closer to the position of the homo sacer, the obscure figure of Roman law who, according to Agamben, represents "the originary exception in which human life is included in the political order in being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed" (Homo 85).65

At the same time that white men may have felt themselves in a newly ambiguous relationship with state power, Emancipation meant that "some four million ex-slaves" would have also found themselves in an uncertain position with regard to the state (Savage 5). As those previously excepted from the fiction of universal rights on American soil, former slaves traded one version of liminality--their position as "socially dead but biologically alive and economically exploited being[s]"--for a position that now lay in a no man's land somewhere between this already contradictory status and citizenship (Ziarek 95, invoking Orlando Patterson).<sup>66</sup> As Kirk Savage puts it in his discussion of a famous nineteenth-century sculpture, the *Freedman*, "the sculptural cues of pose, props, and clothing all reinforce the idea that *the social identity and prospects of this new man remain uncertain, undetermined.* Yet that indeterminacy does not only mean lack--of material goods, political rights, social position. The *Freedman* in his very indeterminacy also carries heroic potential, a possibility for transformation into a fully formed, fully acting social being" (59, my italics).<sup>67</sup>

In response to these dynamics, the news archive on the Tom Thumb wedding is replete with stories on black soldiers that evince a real anxiety about the ability to keep black Americans "in their place." <sup>68</sup> One such example that appears in the February 28, 1863 edition of *Harper's Weekly* does so, furthermore, in a way that engages both the content and the style of the contemporaneous freak show. In an article and several associated illustrations depicting "Our Colored Troops in Louisiana," *Harper's* reprints the account of a *New York Times* correspondent who encounters these troops and is initially convinced that at least one of them is white:<sup>69</sup>

I was literally amazed. Often as my senses had been deceived in this matter, they never had been so completely before. This officer, Captain E. Davis, of Company A [his portrait is given in our group-*Ed*.], was a fine-looking young man, not unlike General M'Clellan in mould of features, with light blue eyes, ruddy complexion, soft, silky hair, and a splendid mustache, of a sandy color, nearly approaching red. I would have defied the most consummate expert in Niggerology, by the aid of the most powerful microscope, to discover the one drop of African blood in that man's veins. (143)

*Harper's* continues, "We present our readers, on the same page, with a group of portraits of five of the line officers of Companies A and D of these Louisiana Native Guards. The central figure, Lieutenant L. D. *Larrieu*, is very nearly white; Captain *E. Davis*, as before stated, is to all appearances perfectly so," (143), making use of skin tone shading--or lack thereof--in the illustration to suggest this visual racial indeterminacy [See Figure 3]. The situation depicted in "Our Colored Troops," in which an observer has difficulty pinning down the racial status of a light-skinned black soldier, provides an apt metaphor for the anxiety that the status of the white citizen and the former slave would be increasingly difficult to distinguish now that the latter had been afforded the legitimacy of a military role.<sup>70</sup>

Such racial confusion was also, importantly, the stuff of the freak show. As Garland Thomson has pointed out, "[b]odies whose forms appeared to transgress rigid social categories such as race, gender, and personhood were particularly good grist for the freak mill...Such hybridity, along with excess and absence, are the threatening organizational principles that constituted freakdom" ("Introduction" 5).<sup>71</sup> In early 1863,

for example, Barnum's American Museum was exhibiting an Albino African family, and freak shows often exhibited as "Leopard Children" people with skin disorders such as vitiligo that caused a patchy pigmentation.<sup>72</sup> Further, in referring to the spectator's deceived senses, the *Harper's* story sets up the racial status of Captain Davis as a puzzle or riddle akin to those that faced visitors to the American Museum. In giving readers the answer to the riddle--Captain Davis, like the African Albino, is "actually" a black man who merely appears white--the article attempts to provide readers with a sense of mastery over the conundrum. However, this forced sense of mastery only points back to the anxiety underlying these articles on black servicemen: an anxiety that soldiering subjects white men to government-issued punishment at the same time that it, paradoxically, validates the humanity and masculinity of former slaves with a government-issued uniform.

These concerns about the uncertain status of both white and black men in 1863 also indexed concerns about the make-up of the postbellum body politic writ large. While citizenship for recently freed slaves was still several years away, it would be hard to overstate the paradigm-shattering effect of Emancipation for those used to thinking about the American polity in terms of whiteness. This was, after all, the first moment in American history in which "[t]he people" might now "include[e] slaveowner and slave alike"--when slaves might become "participants in the American contract" (Savage 5, 75). Once again, I'd suggest, *Harper's Weekly* made use of its illustrations to graphically depict these anxieties--and, once again, it did so in a way that resonated with the cultural construction of freakery. The February 28, 1863 issue features a map of the Southern states entitled "Our Slavery Chart," which, as the description goes, "represents to the eye

the relative slave population in the different parts of the Southern States at the beginning of the rebellion. The depth of shade represents density of the colored in proportion to the white population; and it will be perceived that the shade varies from white to solid black" (142) [See Figure 4]. While the chart purports to provide mere factual information on the proportion of black to white residents, the decision to represent the black population with various degrees of dark shading makes the nation itself look monstrously miscegenated, grotesquely hybrid, freakishly mixed. If Lincoln used the phrase "half slave and half free" to describe what he saw as the dangerous mixture of legal codes within one nation in his famous "House Divided" speech, "Our Slavery Chart" makes the existence of nonwhite people themselves appear to taint and deform the body politic.<sup>73</sup>

The links between the exceptional bodies of the freak show and the racial dynamics of this exceptional moment go beyond even these historical resonances. Given that those bodies that worked best with the concept of the "freak" were those that confounded cherished categories of Western society--the racial exhibits such as the "Black Albinos" and the "leopard boys," but also the such as "bearded ladies" who challenged gender binaries, or the "Siamese twins" who complicated the parameters of the individual person--the concept of "freakishness" has an inherent thematic connection to the political state of exception. As Agamben describes it, the state of exception is characterized, in large part, by its blending or confusion of categories. This category confusion is reflected in the very difficulty of defining the term, "given its position at the limit between politics and law" (Agamben, *State* 1). As, paradoxically, "the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension," the

state of exception is neither inside nor outside the juridical order, but rather "a threshold" where inside and outside "blur" (Agamben, *State* 3, 23).

This category confusion manifests itself in the position of the sovereign, who is "logically defined in his being by the exception" (Agamben, State 35). As Agamben takes pains to point out, the sovereign who initiates the state of exception is not the same as a dictator, who positions himself outside of the system he controls, but rather is "at one and the same time inside and outside the juridical order" (Homo 15). Political cartoons appearing in the illustrated press often conveyed this dynamic by representing Lincoln, whose gaunt, 6'4" frame was already an exception to bodily norms, in ways that essentially enfreaked him in order to convey the charge that his was both an antidemocratic and an ineffectual regime. The most explicit example is an 1860 satirical lithographic print discussed by Bluford Adams. In this image, a newly-elected Lincoln and New York Tribune editor and noted abolitionist Horace Greeley present the "What is It?"--Barnum's famous racial exhibit which presented a black American as Darwin's "missing link"--as their party's next "Heir to the Throne" (162). While in some ways the cartoon positions Lincoln as showman who appears to be offering up the black freak to the implied audience, in other ways he is made to resemble a freak himself; he is portraved leaning on a stick in a similar manner to the "What is It?," and wearing an open-collar shirt in visual correspondence with the exhibit's undress. Using the term "Black Republicanism"--meant to suggest the freakish alignment of blackness with political representation--the ad features Lincoln announcing, "[H]e will be a worthy successor to carry out the policy which I shall inaugurate" (quoted in B. Adams 162).<sup>74</sup>

If the state of exception reveals the position of the sovereign to be freakishly mixed, the ambiguous legal status of the citizen that I've outlined might also be seen as freakishly ambiguous. White Americans in this period arguably felt themselves closer to what Agamben refers to, speaking here of President George W. Bush's order allowing indefinite detention of suspected terrorists, as "legally unnameable and unclassifiable being[s]" (3).<sup>75</sup> Though moving in opposite directions on the spectrum of political viability, both formerly enslaved people and white male citizens were thus, simultaneously, in ambiguous territory in terms of the political recognition of their personhood. To use a term sometimes applied to racial freak show exhibits such as the "What is It?," they were, in terms of their civic personhood, like nondescripts, or entities who could not safely be assigned to pre-existing taxonomies.<sup>76</sup>

More specifically, however, I also want to suggest that these elements of the Civil War political scene--uncertainty about the future racial (and regional) make-up of the body politic, at the same time that the rights of white American white appeared less certain--were manifested and reworked in the reporting on the Tom Thumb wedding itself. The Tom Thumb wedding, this chapter contends, intervened in these dynamics by allowing news writers, audience members, and readers to invest in whiteness, maleness, and able-bodiedness in the *cultural* realm in a moment when these qualities no longer accorded the same sort of privileges in the political.<sup>77</sup> By reasserting these qualities as the foundation for national belonging, many news articles presented these categories as the "impassable boundaries"--to take a term from Benjamin Reiss--which had the potential to suture rifts based on section, political affiliation and class (171). Thus, in considering the wedding not as a disassociated distraction from the wartime scene depicted in the

surrounding articles, but rather one that engaged white Americans' concerns about their own citizenship status and about the racial make-up of the national body, this chapter explores the relationship between the political state of exception, the longstanding exceptions from governmental protections and rights based on characteristics such as race, and the exceptional bodies of freak show performers such as the Strattons.

In doing so, I aim to draw on and extend a seminal model for understanding the role of the freak show in nineteenth and twentieth-century American culture. Rosemarie Garland Thomson has suggested that the freak show's immense popularity in the U.S. from the Jacksonian through the Progressive Eras reflected the audience members' desire to "reaffirm the difference between 'them' and 'us' at a time when immigration, emancipation of the slaves, and female suffrage confounded previously reliable physical indices of status and privilege such as maleness and Western European features" ("Cultural Work" 65).<sup>78</sup> Detailing the state of exception moment that brought Emancipation into being and that, I will argue, is reflected in the Tom Thumb wedding, extends this model by adding a more explicit analysis of the continuing depredations of state power even in such moments of "progressive" political change. The freak show, in other words, spectacularly reveals that the ideologies supporting the general exclusion of certain categories of people from supposedly universal rights are the same ones that underpin the sovereign decision on the state of exception, with its potential to subject a much larger swath of the populace to "bare life." Once a populace has decided that certain people may be "reasonably" subjected to state injury, the door is open to broadscale suspension of protections.

Looking at the news articles' particular responses to the Strattons' bodies suggests another way in which the Tom Thumb wedding has the potential extend Garland Thomson's model. If the typical function of the freak show performer's disability is, in this model, to secure the viewer's normalcy and status in contradistinction to the performer's aberrance, the Strattons' bodily difference is notable for securing a similar result by different means. As we will see, rather than serving as visual representatives of "what collective America took itself not to be," those little people who were short in stature but otherwise considered well-proportioned by normative standards became idealized representatives of the national body (Garland Thomson, "Cultural Work" 59). As Lori Merish puts it, the "Although they, like all 'freaks,' were known as 'curiosities,' the curiosity engendered by midgets was tempered by sympathy," and audiences tended to identity *with* rather than wholly *against* them (192).<sup>79</sup> The Tom Thumb wedding thus suggests that even when freak show performers are not working in their most recognizable manner, the display of anomalous bodies works to determine the inside and outside of the fantasized body politic; this fact reminds us that a "positive" identification with freak show performers does not ensure a progressive relation to disability itself or to other non-dominant identity categories.<sup>80</sup>

## III. Mass Media-tion and the "Marriage in Miniature"<sup>81</sup>

While thousands of people either attended the Tom Thumb wedding or thronged the streets outside Grace Church on that day, many more Americans in the 1860s would have read about the event in the newspapers than would have witnessed it in the flesh. Indeed, Barnum assiduously controlled the guest list for the ceremony itself, issuing

tickets to a select crowd that consisted of generals, statesmen, and New York City's elite.<sup>82</sup> More importantly, however, even those who managed to catch a glimpse of the Strattons on their wedding day, as well as the many more who visited their levees at the American Museum and elsewhere both before and after the nuptials, would have had their experience thoroughly shaped by the extensive press coverage of the event.<sup>83</sup> What, then, was the nature of the American dominant press in this moment--the press that described the Tom Thumb wedding as "the grand national event of the season" (Saxon 209)?

By 1830, the U.S. was boasting three times as many newspapers as either France or England, and the numbers continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century (Jamison).<sup>84</sup> New York, furthermore, was a newspaper capital of sorts. The city was home to the "newspaper revolution of the 1830s" which saw the birth of commercial journalism in the United States; during these years, what had formerly been newspapers funded by political parties, government contracts, or elite city members were displaced by the first penny dailies, which "survived on sales, advertising, and moxie" (Reiss 35). The first of these were the New York Sun, founded in 1833, and the New York Herald, founded in 1835, newspapers which maintained a specifically populist rhetoric (Reiss 35-36).<sup>85</sup> By the time of the Civil War, the newspaper scene had flourished, but had also become more solidly middle class. As Benjamin Reiss explains, "by the late 1840s and 1850s they, like Barnum, found themselves veering closer to the status of mainstream rather than oppositional culture, in part by virtue of their own success. The penny papers--most of which were now selling for at least two cents--moved away from their radical roots and rowdy populism in favor of a more 'respectable' style" (186). With this move

toward the ideological middle, newspapers were positioned to pass themselves off as representative of the nation at large. They were aided in this project by technological advances such as the telegraph, which ensured that "[n]ews spanned ever greater distances in ever shorter periods of time, cultivating a sense of participation in national events" and "increased homogeneity in news coverage" (Nudelman 118).<sup>86</sup> In the coverage of the Tom Thumb wedding, this sense of homogeneity comes through in the linguistic repetitions that occur as news writers lift phrases or whole paragraphs from other articles. Sometimes acknowledging their sources and sometimes not, these repetitions create a web of linked locations--a pattern of words crisscrossing the country.<sup>87</sup>

However, the increased homogeneity in mainstream news coverage did not, of course, indicate an increasingly homogenous nation. Benedict Anderson, in his analysis of the intimate relationship between newspapers and nationalism, has famously theorized the imaginative labor required to uphold this kind of secular community. The newspaper, along with the novel, is one of the cultural forms that Benedict Anderson sees as responsible for constructing the "imagined political community" that is the nation (5-6).<sup>88</sup> Due to what he calls the "profound fictiveness of the newspaper" (33)--or the novelistic structure whereby the juxtaposition of unrelated news stories creates a sense of a coherent social totality that appears to move, like the characters in a story-world, steadily through time--readers feel themselves tied to their fellow countrymen who, they imagine without actually having to see them, are simultaneously reading of the same events.<sup>89</sup>

Postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard have also helped us to recognize the role of media in shaping what passes as social reality. The Tom Thumb wedding can

be constructively analyzed through the lens of Baudrillard's "media event," a term which describes the way in which informational media claim to be merely representing a reality that they are, in fact, helping to create ("Introduction" 10). As Paul Patton reminds us in his introduction, the situation is not that the news media provide "a distorted or misleading representation" of real events (10), but that "the principle of simulation governs all information," so that we have the "encrustation of the event in and by information" (46, 48). In the case of the Tom Thumb wedding, we can see quite clearly that media outlets were not merely reporting on a real world event that had a measurable existence apart from them. It was the news media's promotion of the event that maintained its relevance and importance, and the source to which many both then and now turn to access this moment in history. In other words, it would be impossible to separate the hype that "surrounded" the event from some pre-existing, ontological essence of the event itself.<sup>90</sup>

In fact, the history of the "news" is intimately bound up with the strange, the sensational, and the freakish--a point which usefully reveals the newspaper's role in spectacularizing, rather than merely reporting on, the world. Benjamin Reiss describes the "long-standing connection between 'news' and 'curiosity,'" pointing out that "accounts of 'monstrous births' and other human anomalies were among the first items circulated in French newsbooks and English broadsides," while accounts of so-called curiosities "gav[e] impetus to some of the earliest forms of Western journalism" and "continued to be a staple of newspaper reporting up until Barnum's day" (36).<sup>91</sup> Indeed, as nineteenth-century newspapers came to rely on revenue for their continuation, they

were particularly eager for the "ready-made news" which Barnum's spectacles provided them (Saxon 74; see also Reiss 160).<sup>92</sup> If the newspaper thus evinces some similarities with the freak show in terms of content, it also displayed similarities of form. Often using hyperbolic language, stylistic devices such as bold print or--in the case of the illustrated news magazines--the juxtaposition of image and text, the newspaper can be viewed as a textual freak show in its own right (Reiss 36; B. Adams 87).<sup>93</sup>

What fantasies, then--of the Strattons, of themselves and their readers, and of the nation--did these journalistic showmen help imagine into being? At first glance, the Strattons' non-normative size seems unrelated to the dynamics of the Civil War moment in which their wedding took place--including, as we will see, questions of racial identity. However, a closer look at the rhetoric surrounding the Strattons' exceptional bodies reveals that this is anything but the case. As an earlier section of this chapter suggested, nineteenth-century American culture followed a long tradition of distinguishing between "dwarfs," who were considered misshapen and grotesque, and "midgets," such as Stratton and Warren, who were small in stature but otherwise normally proportioned; the latter were seen as examples of nature's "attention to the perfection of detail" (Stewart 111).<sup>94</sup> In other words, while the Strattons were still considered freakish exceptions to the norm, their bodies--in contradistinction to those of most freak show performers--actually inspired fascination due to their perceived perfection, proportion, and wholeness. As such, the Strattons' bodies were pressed into a quite different relationship to notions of the normative body and the body politic than might initially be expected.

The nineteenth-century press made a ritual of cataloguing this bodily perfection in their reporting on Strattons and the other members of the wedding party, which included

Lavinia Warren's sister Minnie, and American Museum performer George Washington Morrison Nutt ("Commodore Nutt")--both little people, as well. The New York Observer wrote on January 29, 1863 that "Unlike all the dwarfs we have ever seen previously, Miss Warren has no feature or characteristic in person or voice to repel, but on the other hand, from the perfect symmetry and beautiful developments of body and mind, attracts the admiration of all" ("Great Talk"). On February 12, the Observer added that like Lavinia, Minnie is "a little paragon of beauty and perfection of form" ("General Thumb's Wedding"). The American Phrenological Journal gushed in January of that year that "[t]o be disformed is to be disfigured, distorted, ugly, wanting in natural beauty or symmetry, but the Commodore is perfection in every joint and limb" ("Bantam Men"). And in February, the same journal, in an extended reverie on Lavinia Warren, writes that "[p]hysiologically, the only peculiarity is her size," and that Warren is "made up of the best materials." "In this case," the Journal goes on to claim, "we have a confirmation of the old adage, that 'Nature puts up her choice materials in small parcels'" ("Bantam Woman").

The American Phrenological Journal's concluding remarks begin to point to a relationship between this bodily perfection of form and the Civil War moment in which the article appeared. The Journal states, "Miss Warren is perfectly developed, she enjoys excellent health, and is entirely free from deformity and every drawback that would give pain to the spectator...We look at her, and know that her diminished stature does not arise from compression or mutilation, but from natural causes alone" ("Bantam Woman," my italics). At a moment when the war was producing a steady stream of maimed and disabled bodies, this article suggests that viewing the "naturally" exceptional bodies of

the Strattons provides a soothing effect on viewers.<sup>95</sup> Such accounts suggest that the Strattons' wedding spectacle did not simply distract from the Civil War scene in a way that any mass cultural event might, as Bogdan and Harris's assessments imply. Rather, I'd suggest, it was the specific contours of the Strattons' fetishized disability that made them figures capable of absorbing some of the tensions of this moment.<sup>96</sup>

Joseph Roach's concept of surrogation provides a productive model for thinking about this relationship between the Strattons, their audience, and the body politic. Surrogation, for Roach, describes the processes by which "culture reproduces and recreates itself" when "actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric" (2). Roach suggests that performers, including freaks, often carry out the work of surrogation, performing the "public enactments of forgetting" necessary for communities to perpetuate themselves (3). The extensive news coverage of the Strattons can be read as doing, in fact, just that: at a moment when the fiction of universal able-bodiedness was powerfully shattered, the idealized bodily forms of the Strattons evoke the "preservative love and protective cherishing" that Lori Merish has suggested is the "culturally sanctioned response to the 'cute," thus absorbing and refiguring some of the affective energy of the sentimental response to mass disability and death (185-86). In doing so, the intense media focus on the Strattons' bodies encouraged, perhaps, not only a temporary mass cultural "forgetting" of war-produced disability, but also of the tenuousness and contingency of able-bodiedness in the first place.97

Other elements of the Strattons' public display as American Museum freaks added to their ability to serve as surrogates for the large number of wounded and dead soldiers. Stratton, like many freak show "midgets," was presented in what Bogdan has

termed the "aggrandized" style of freak show presentation (97). Under this presentation, little people performers were given lofty titles--General, Commodore, Prince--that existed in ironic tension with their small stature and made them seem like "diminutive prodigies" (Merish 190). As part of his persona as "General Tom Thumb," Stratton frequently performed routines as a Revolutionary War soldier and, even more famously, as Napoleon Bonaparte. These routines involved Stratton "march[ing] around the stage... waving a ten-inch sword and performing military drills" (Merish 191) often making quips about being in command of "cupid's army" (Saxon 126).

During the Civil War, newspapers routinely drew on this aspect of Stratton's public persona in ways that didn't so much distract from the ongoing military campaigns as repurpose their meaning. In other words, these references brought the war into the realm of entertainment, arguably allowing readers a momentary sense of control during this chaotic moment. A New York Times piece from January 2, 1863, for example, states of Stratton's temporary absence from show business, "Gen. Tom Thumb, like Gen. McCLELLAN, is at present off duty. His name is on the retired list, and he has his time at his command" ("Local Intelligence").98 A Chicago Tribune piece, writing on the supposed competition between Stratton and Nutt for Warren's hand in marriage, writes, with mock gravity that a "terrible and momentous inquiry arises: 'Will a duel take place between Commodore Nutt and Tom Thumb?", thus displacing to the realm of entertainment, rather than merely distracting from, the fraternal strife of the Civil War ("Prospective Marriage"). The Daily Cleveland Herald, finally, in an interesting juxtaposition of truth and farce, writes, "Mrs. Gen. Tom Thumb is a little patriot. She has a brother in the Union service, and at the White House levee said she was entirely willing

for her husband to volunteer!" ("Multiple"). In this case, the "humorous" impossibility of Stratton's actual enlistment supplants the real threat to Warren's brother, who did indeed serve in the Union army.<sup>99</sup>

Given his particular bodily conformation, Stratton was perhaps particularly suited to serve as a surrogate for the many boy soldiers that faced battle during the Civil War.<sup>100</sup> The aggrandized style used to display Stratton and Warren relied upon what was meant to be an amusing contrast between the performers' adult demeanor and their childlike appearance. Indeed, if those displayed as freaks tended, as I've described, to confound cherished categories of Western society, the Strattons' freakish appeal relied on their confusion of the categories of adult and child (Merish 191). As can be seen in the advertisements for Barnum's Museum, the exhibitions of Stratton and Warren made this point explicit by routinely inviting "children from two to nine years old" on stage so that the audience could compare their height with that of the little people.<sup>101</sup> Other advertisements made the contrast between adult characteristics and childlike appearance explicit by juxtaposing phrases such as, "NO LARGER THAN SO MANY BABIES!" with the following description: "Educated, Intelligent, Social, Affable, and Polite" ("Miscellaneous").

In fact, in early 1863, while the Tom Thumb wedding mania was at its most extreme, the American Museum lecture hall stage featured appearances by Robert Henry Hendershot, a drummer boy who enlisted in the Union army around the age of twelve and whose drum was supposedly shattered by an enemy shell at Fredericksburg (Saxon 217).<sup>102</sup> A March 9, 1863 ad in the *New York Daily Tribune* encourages readers to visit the exhibition of Tom Thumb wedding party members Minnie Warren and Commodore

Nutt, as well as that of "MASTER ROBERT HENRY HENDERSHOOT [sic], the little hero who crossed the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg with the brave band that first crossed that river to drive the enemy back and lay the pontoons" ("Barnum's"). Both Stratton and famous boy soldiers such as Hendershot were represented as "little heroes," though the appellation was meant in earnest when describing the drummer boys and in (loving) jest when describing Stratton. Similarly, while photographs of drummer boys such as Hendershot emphasize their smallness next to props such as American flags and rifles, the news media tended to overlay such indices of vulnerability--and potential for disability--with descriptions that emphasized their physical perfection. For example, while Hendershot had been temporarily discharged from the army for epilepsy ("America's Civil War"), an April 18,1863 New York Daily Tribune article described him in the following glowing terms: "He is in his 13th year, has a fine physique, dark hair and eyes, and a healthy countenance" ("Drummer Boy"). Such images are thus meant to evoke a soothing response of sentimental cherishing from readers, while Stratton's small size, when paired with his miniature Napoleon sword, is meant to evince a response of friendly bemusement.<sup>103</sup> The Strattons' display, in other words, performed similar cultural work to these more explicitly war-related exhibitions, though they did so slightly different affective registers. In his public persona as "General Tom Thumb," Stratton, like these famous drummer boys, could serve as a surrogate for those boys who were killed or injured in the war, allowing spectators to transfer some of their energies of mourning for America's lost or maimed sons onto these fetishized figures.<sup>104</sup>

If on one level Stratton had the potential to serve as a surrogate for the literal disablements and dismemberments of the Civil War, on another level, I want to suggest,

the Strattons performed the work of *racial* surrogation. The Tom Thumb wedding, in other words, allowed news outlets to construct images of white racial purity and unity in the face of what was routinely figured as a dismembered (white) body politic, and when any reconstructed body politic might now include ex-slaves. Once again, it was the Strattons' particular bodily difference, combined with the way in which it was displayed on the freak show circuit, which allowed their public personas to have such resonances. As we will see, the Strattons' anomalous size, which upon first glance might appear either unrelated to questions of race--or, if anything, to simply detract from their racial privilege--was saturated in this moment with more complicated racial meanings. The freak show's display of disability, the Tom Thumb wedding reminds us, never exists in a vacuum, but rather is continually constructed through its articulation with racial ideologies.

Stratton's "Grecian statue" routine provides a useful entry point into the links between bodily form and race--or, the "aesthetic dimension of racial theory"--as they were played out and reinforced in Tom Thumb's exhibition (Savage 11). In this routine, which often served as the finale to "General Tom Thumb's" performance, Stratton appeared before the crowd in a flesh-colored body stocking and struck the poses of wellknown ancient sculptures, "provid[ing] spectators the opportunity to further admire the General's perfect proportions, unencumbered by the sometimes elaborate costumes he wore earlier in the act" (Saxon 126). Kirk Savage has reminded us that "racial theorists looked to classical sculpture specifically as an empirical model of white racial superiority" a point which helpfully reveals the ways in which Stratton's routine, in displaying his "perfect proportions," simultaneously secured his "perfect" or unsullied

whiteness (9). Thus, by the time of the Tom Thumb wedding, the Grecian statue routine would have already accustomed the large number of American Museum patrons to thinking of Stratton's idealized physical form in the terms of white racial purity and supremacy.<sup>105</sup>

The "Grecian statue" routine orchestrated by Barnum set the stage, so to speak, for the mid-century media's treatment of the Strattons. The archive abounds with physical descriptions that juxtapose references to the Strattons' size, their proportionality, and their light skin, as in the following paragraph from the February 11, 1863 Chicago Tribune: "His height is thirty-one inches, and his weight twenty-nine pounds. He is wellproportioned, his head handsomely and naturally developed, and the size of his hands and feet is in proper proportion to that of his body. He has a fair complexion, light hair, rosy cheeks, dark eyes and expressive face, and did wear a pretty little moustache" ("All About It"). These juxtapositions make the linkages between the Strattons' physical anomaly and their whiteness seem natural, common-sense, non-contradictory. More than this, however, the papers' very emphasis on the Strattons' symmetry, proportionality, and perfection connoted whiteness in a moment when phrenology and anatomy--drawing heavily on ancient Greek statuary for their ideal--claimed to "prove" the inferiority of non-white peoples through reference to their supposedly inferior physical features. Indeed, one could imagine the discourse of phrenology working quite differently for the Strattons than it did; the common assumption at this moment that little people had diminished mental functioning in direct proportion to their brain size is of a piece with phrenological thinking--with its alignment of physical, moral, and intellectual attributes-and could have led to the Strattons being more closely aligned with phrenology's

"Negro" types. <sup>106</sup> Instead, far from detracting from their full possession of whiteness, the Strattons' bodily difference was repeatedly recuperated to secure it. Praised in phrenological accounts for their perfection of form, the Strattons were made the epitome of whiteness according to the logic of this white supremacist pseudo-science. <sup>107</sup>

Describing the Strattons as models of symmetry and perfection suggested, further, that the values of white, middle-class ideology--moderation, propriety, control and balance--were inherent in their very bodies.<sup>108</sup> Building upon this link, both Barnum's advertisements and mid-century newspaper articles emphasized these qualities in the Strattons' manner and behavior, as well. As a July 1, 1863 ad in the New York Tribune puts it, speaking of the entire wedding party, they are "perfect men and perfect women, in all the peculiarities and qualities that constitute such" ("Barnum's").<sup>109</sup> Such an assertion gives the news media the opportunity to define what constitutes such perfection, and, repeatedly, the papers enumerate qualities that epitomize middle-class gender codes. A number of news writers, for example, make the paradoxical assertion that these public performers are actually models of modesty. The San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin suggests that while Barnum has raised a "hubbub," the "happy couple, with a modesty that does them great credit, have issued but one bulletin under their own signatures" ("Letter from New York").<sup>110</sup> As the ideology of separate spheres would maintain that modesty was a particularly crucial quality for Warren to uphold, other articles recast her entrance into public life as a reluctant one: she is, in one New York Times account, "the handsome little lady, whom the Great Showman, with so much difficulty tempted for awhile out of the shades of private life" ("Amusements"). Similarly, both Stratton and Warren are presented as industrious. The Scientific American, for example, uses a

distinctly strange metaphor for marriage in stating of the Strattons that "[1]ike full-grown lovers each of them 'sighed like a furnace,' and worked industriously as two beavers to bring their affections into the legal crucible to be molded into unity for life, just as speedily as money and labor could bring this happy event to pass" ("Great Lilliputian").<sup>111</sup> However, Stratton, as the man in the couple, is presented as particularly in control of his own labor--someone who, as the *San Francisco Bulletin* puts it, "transacts all his own business, like other men" ("Details").<sup>112</sup> In all of these instances, enumerating the Strattons' middle-class, gendered credentials furthers their solid purchase on racial privilege, given that to be a "proper" man or lady in this moment was practically synonymous with whiteness.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, the Tom Thumb news archive is replete with references to the fact that by the time of his wedding, Stratton was no longer bound to the contract that had initiated his employment under Barnum. This move, according to the *Hartford Daily Courant*, made him and the rest of his family "independent"--a term which makes quite clear the potentially racializing aspects of Stratton's exhibition that these news articles have overcome to make him the epitome of white subjectivity ("Gen. Thumb Talks"). Stratton was originally "sold" by his indigent parents into an indentureship to the showman, a relationship that arguably has overtones of chattel slavery.<sup>114</sup> Barnum, for example, repeatedly referred to Stratton in the possessive as "my dwarf" (Merish 202n20), described him as "made to my order six [months] ago" and "valuable" (Harris 309n13), and used the terms of the callous trade in human beings when he stated, in negotiations with rival museum owner Moses Kimball, that "if [Stratton] lives, you shall have him" (Harris 51). *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Paper* followed this lead, noting in its biographical

summary of Stratton that "Barnum saw that he had found a gold mine in little Stratton, the products of which would prove almost inexhaustible if properly and energetically managed" ("Gen. Tom Thumb: Some Account"). As "perhaps the most profitable exhibit item that the showman ever stumbled upon"--as more recent commentators have put it--Stratton's body held value for another human being in a way that might draw comparisons with the position of a slave (Harris 43). By the time of the wedding, however, Stratton's independence from his original contract allowed this chattel-like relationship to be replaced with images of self-possession: "Barnum can not part with his Thumb, and the public sustain him in his endeavor to retain that useful part of the body corporate," another issue of *Frank Leslie's* states. "Luckily the General is *his own master*, and can well afford to oblige his old friend Barnum and the public at the same time" ("Idler," my italics).<sup>115</sup>

There are a number of other aspects of the Strattons' presentation on the freak show circuit that would seem to threaten their status as the epitome of white, middle class identity, and yet were overcome in the news reporting. The title of "General" (as well as the title "Queen" often assigned to Warren in the news coverage), provides one example. This aspect of the "aggrandized" style of freak display echoes "the 'overblown titles'...assigned black comic figures in minstrelsy and vaudeville, as well as print culture," which "made comic capital out of the blurring of 'high' and 'low'" (Bogdan 97, Merish 190).<sup>116</sup> The Strattons' supposed freakish mixture of adult and child--adult behavior, childlike appearance--provides another. As Lori Merish points out in her discussion of the racialized dimensions of cuteness, the cute person or object "contains an invitation to ownership," due to the association of cuteness with childhood and the

"fundamental ambivalence of the child in a liberal-capitalist order: as at once consenting 'subject' and property 'object'" (188, 187). In other words, in both their performance titles and their association with the realm of childhood, the Strattons were implicitly configured in terms that linked them, at this moment of slavery's abolition, with the concept of human property.

Racial dynamics also came to the fore in some other aspects of the "Tom Thumb" performances. Earlier in his career, Stratton was often exhibited with a "doctor or straight man," who asked Stratton the questions that set him up for his comic quips (Saxon 126). This performance structure placed Stratton in a similar role to that of the minstrel show "darky" in relation to the interlocutor who would appear on stage without blackface. Stratton, in fact, also performed at the American Museum in blackface during the run of at least one show, playing "Tom Tit" in the lecture hall's performance of H.J Conway's dramatization of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp (140). Merish has explained that "cuteness as a comic theatrical style available to children was intimately bound up with the history of race. The comic child in nineteenthcentury America was a racialized construction" (198). If Stratton's littleness thus allows him to play a child in blackface--perhaps doubling the racializing effect, given the associations between children and property--in other instances we see quite clearly the way in which black imitation only further secured Stratton's whiteness.<sup>117</sup> Barnum's description of a Tom Thumb exhibition in London early in Stratton's career is quite telling in this regard. Barnum describes a black man who comes to the Thumb exhibit with a white woman, portraying the black man in terms of the Zip Coon minstrel show stereotype:

The darkey was dressed off in great style, with gold chains, rings, pins &c (niggers always like jewels), and his lady love was apparently quite fond of him. I made General Tom Thumb sing all the 'nigger songs' that I could think of and dance Lucy Long and several 'Wirginny breakdowns.' I then asked the General what the negroes called him when he traveled south. 'They call me little massa,' replied the General, 'and they always took their hats off, too.' The amalgamating darkey did not like this allusion to his 'brack bredren ob the South,' nor did he relish the General's songs about Dandy Jim, who was 'de finest nigger in de country, O' and who strapped his pantaloons down so fine when 'to see Miss Dinah he did go.' The General enjoyed the joke and frequently pointed his finger at the negro, much to the discomfiture of 'de colored gentleman.' (Saxon 82, quoting the *New York Atlas*, 21 July 1844)

While on the one hand Stratton is presented here as Barnum's puppet, prosthesis, or slave---"I made General Tom Thumb sing all the 'nigger songs that I could think of"--on the other hand this rehearsal of black stereotypes secures Stratton's whiteness in contradistinction to the black spectator: Stratton is the "little massa" to the "negroes" of the South, and, according to the logic of the insult, to all black people, no matter how refined or self-possessed they appear. The performance, if we believe Barnum's account, even provided Stratton with an opportunity to publicly "enjoy" his racial privilege, and is most certainly crafted to give a white readership a sense of racial superiority at the black patron's expense. <sup>118</sup>

With these examples, we can begin to see the ways in which the Strattons' fame relied on and encouraged a celebration of the racial status quo. More than this, however,

if the Strattons were presented as the epitome or the idealization of whiteness, they were also, paradoxically, presented as broadly representative of it. Neil Harris's analysis of the news reporting on the wedding helps to capture this contradictory situation: "Tom Thumb is 'magnitude in miniature,' wrote James Watson Webb of the Courier and Enquirer, 'multum in parvo; not exactly an abridgement of human nature, [but] one of Nature's Indices, in which the principal features of the race may be looked at with one glance.' The little fellow was a 'sort of mental and physical concentration, a chemical synthesis, in which manhood has been boiled down" (93). Harris concludes, "Tom Thumb was a museum in himself, a display piece for the race" (93).<sup>119</sup> In other words, the same quality--their littleness--that caused the Strattons to be described as embodying "Nature['s]...choice materials" ("A Bantam Woman") also allowed them to be viewed as representative of "the race" writ large. Both idealized and yet said to index a totality, the Strattons were poised to stand in for white Americans' fantasy notions of themselves and their nation. More likely to serve as a figure *for* the imagined body politic than to define the outside of it, these freak show performers' spectacular wedding ceremony had the potential to powerfully raise questions of national belonging.

## III. 'Til Death Do Them Part

The fact that the Tom Thumb spectacle consisted of a wedding--with all of marriage's symbolic resonances, as well as the ceremony's physical organization of bodies in space--allowed it to further engage elements of the wartime moment. If the Strattons' "naturally" diminutive bodies can be read as surrogates for those maimed or killed in battle, their public wedding allowed viewers to invest emotional energy in a

spectacle of romantic and familial union at a moment when newspapers teemed with evidence of families broken up by war-related distance or death.<sup>120</sup> More than this, however, the marriage at the center of the Tom Thumb spectacle added to the Strattons' ability to serve as racial surrogates. Scholars such as Nancy Cott have shown us that marriage as an institution has long been connected to questions of citizenship, race, and national belonging. From the beginnings of American republicanism, the marriage contract has served as a figure for the contractual nature of citizenship (16), as well as constituting an actual privilege attendant upon one's citizenship status. Marriage, as such, has been "instrumental in articulating and structuring distinctions grouped under the name of 'race.' In slaveholding states before the Civil War, slaves had no access to legal marriage, just as they had no other civil right; this deprivation was one of the things that made them 'racially' different" (Cott 4).<sup>121</sup> Marriage laws, in their role of dividing full citizens from non, and white from black, thus "play a large part in forming 'the people.' They sculpt the body politic" (Cott 5.)<sup>122</sup> Given this history, it is not surprising that concerns about the racial make-up of the national body have often been figured through references to sex, marriage, and reproduction, as in some pro-slavery factions' use of the term "amalgamationist" to malign abolitionists. As a highly public marriage ceremony, then, the Tom Thumb wedding both drew upon and promoted these sorts of imaginative links between marital and sexual relationships and national belonging.<sup>123</sup>

In describing the nuptials of these two "indices" of the white race, reports on the Tom Thumb wedding continually reinforced the symbolic associations between citizenship and whiteness. One way in which they did so was by emphasizing the contractual nature of marriage and highlighting the Strattons as model "contractual

subjects" (Hartman 9), clearly in possession of "intentionality and rational agency" (Reiss 121). The *New York Times*, for example, describes the Strattons as the "high contracting parties" ("Loving Lilliputians"). The *New York Daily Tribune*, similarly, proclaimed that "[t]here is something in the union of two willing hearts that at once arouses the sympathies of all men, and women, too," thus emphasizing the consensual nature of the affair ("Wee Wedding"). <sup>124</sup> Descriptions of the ceremony itself went even further, stating of the loud and clear tones in which the Strattons were said to give their vows that "[t]he words were enunciated by the parties…with perfect self-possession"("Remarkable").<sup>125</sup>

Many new sources also emphasized the Strattons' "right" to marry. At times responding to speculations about Barnum's role in bringing about the nuptials, though more often to news that the bishop originally chosen to officiate the ceremony had refused, papers such as *Frank Leslie's* stated emphatically,"[W]ith the ulterior views of the parties concerned we have nothing to do. We recognize the right of all individuals, great or small, to marry with as much publicity as they please" ("Great Marriage!"). The Herald, even while critical of Barnum's role in the affair, suggested similarly, "Miss Warren is a woman and Tom Thumb is a man, no matter how small they may be, and they have as good a right to be wedded as any other man and woman," while the Scientific American suggested that "[i]t is generally admitted, we believe, that these little people have as good a right to marry as the larger folks" ("Barnum and the Miniature Marriage"; "Great Lilliputian"). All of these papers make size the salient characteristic in their defense of the Strattons, and yet it goes without saying, given the race-based privileges of marriage, that "larger folks" almost by necessity means "white folks." Implicitly solidifying the links between racial privilege and the civil right of marriage, the

reporting on this spectacularized wedding both focused attention on the figure of the contract and asserted it as a prerogative of whiteness.<sup>126</sup>

In the context of another ritualistic feature of the Tom Thumb wedding reporting, the references to the Strattons' "right" to marry take on an even more insidious cast. This feature is the newspapers' ubiquitous emphasis on the Strattons' symmetrical size. In article after article, reporters present the Strattons' union as natural and expected due to their common physical attributes. The *Herald* prints an ad on January 20, 1863 that reads, "Nature matched you herself, so the match must be right" ("Barnum's"). Frank Leslie's adopted a pseudo-scientific tone in writing, "Nature, it seems, in her wonderful laws of compensation had provided a suitable mate for one, who, as the smallest man in the world, had been the wonder of the world, and this predestined bride was Lavinia Warren" ("Gen. Tom Thumb: Some Account"). In another instance, the paper gushed, "What a fortunate thing that there should be a Miss Lavinia Warren for a Mr. Tom Thumb! We are almost tempted to exclaim, in the words of the dramatist: Sure such a pair was never seen,/ So justly formed to meet by Nature--/The youth, the smallest man, I ween,/ The maid a little less in stature!" ("Idler"; Feb. 7). The San Francisco Bulletin, similarly, suggested that lines composed centuries ago might well "have been addressed to Gen. Tom Thumb and Miss Lavinia Warren on their recent marriage: Design or chance make others wive/ But Nature did this match contrive;/ Eve might as well have Adam fled/ As she denied her little bed/ To him, for whom Heaven seemed to frame/ And measure out this only dame" ("Epithalamium"). Other papers replace the sentimental tropes with a more lighthearted tone, and yet retain the emphasis on the fitness of the Stratton's union based on their homogenous physical attributes. The Pittsfield Sun, for example, writes

that "Tom Thumb has married a girl of his own size. Prentice [the pseudonymous writer] thinks it was very well for two such people to get spliced" ("Tom Thumb; Prentice").<sup>127</sup>

Thus, it is the Strattons' "right" to marry, these articles seem to suggest, because their similar stature deems it natural that they should do so.<sup>128</sup> Once again, the papers' overt references are to the characteristic of size; however, such descriptions of the union of like-with-like are, in 1863, clearly indebted to and supportive of the logic of anti-racial miscegenation rhetoric. The New York Times' reference to Stratton and Warren as "smiling twins" perhaps makes this point most clear ("Loving Lilliputians"). As Lori Merish has pointed out, this phrase portrays them momentarily as siblings rather than--or, in addition to--mates (195). The visual illustrations of the Strattons often followed suit, making them appear even more similar, or twin-like, than they did in real life, as in the image gracing the cover of *Harper's Weekly* that provides them with remarkably similar facial features. Portraying the Strattons in a way that makes them seem practically related, the papers invoke images of racial purity and homogeneity, similar to the domestic novel's trope of the marriage of adoptive siblings that Amy Kaplan has suggested "answers the question of how to break with parental bloodlines of the Old World, to create a new family and nation, while keeping that new family untainted by racial intermixing in the New World." This "near incest," Kaplan explains, "enact[s] the desire for a domestic space in which the family members are as alike as possible" without actually violating the incest taboo (45).<sup>129</sup> Thus, the wedding of these two representatives of white purity provided a spectacular tableau of homogeneity at a moment when individual miscegenation--no longer tied to the potential to reproduce the slave population--would come to be more stringently prohibited by state laws, and when the

polity of the national body threatened to become "miscegenated" with the incorporation of ex-slaves as citizens.<sup>130</sup> In other words, both as individuals and in their roles as standins for the fantasized body politic, the Strattons' marriage emphasized a symmetry that existed in contradistinction to the "freakish" mixtures of amalgamation--a striking antidote to the unevenly colored America depicted in *Harper's* "Slavery Chart."<sup>131</sup>

As stand-ins for the fantasized body politic, the Strattons' wedding ceremony, further, provided a spectacular figure of white union at a time when the issue of slavery (or, as some saw it, the presence of enslaved Americans themselves) had divided white Americans from each other. In 1863, newspapers both North and South were representing sectional differences as severe enough to be described in racial terms. The Harper's Weekly issue that features the Strattons on the cover, for example, suggests that Southerners are a "race of people as diametrically opposed, in every essential characteristic, to us of the North, as can be readily imagined, and between whom there is no possible community of feeling or harmony of action." Harper's also asserts that Northerners are in the Southerners' eyes "a lower race" in the Southern schema that divides mankind into the following classes: "1st, the aristocracy, comprising the crowned monarchs and noblemen of Europe and the gentlemen of the South; 2d, the working people, which included the merchants and operatives of Europe, the whole people of the North, and the white trash at the South; and, 3d, the negroes" ("Irrepressible"). South Carolina's Edgefield Advertiser, the same year, expresses anxiety about Yankees being able to take on Confederate citizenship, using the same language of intermixture that dominated mid-century racial thinking ("Naturalization"). Stratton and Warren were both Northerners, and thus their wedding does not perfectly fit the mold for what Nina Silber

has termed the "romance of reunion," or the popular postbellum novelistic trope that secured symbolic national reunion through a cross-sectional marriage plot. However, in making visible physical similarity the basis of fraternity and union, the Tom Thumb wedding was nevertheless a powerful antecedent of this model, suggesting that other differences are bound to pale in comparison to the "truths" of the body.

The Strattons' fictitious baby, advertised in the press and in promotional materials as their own, pushed this emphasis on bodily symmetry to its strange conclusion. The couple never actually had children, but Barnum understood that he could get more mileage out of the Strattons' post-nuptial public appearances if he advertised that they had. In September of 1863, a number of news sources began reporting on Warren's supposed pregnancy, and in December of 1863 it was announced that the Strattons had given birth to a "midget" daughter. The Strattons "borrowed" a baby from an orphanage to appear in their publicity photos, later borrowing other babies to appear with them on tour in Europe (Bogdan 157).<sup>132</sup> Importantly, in the speculations on and descriptions of the Tom Thumb baby, it was always assumed that the child would also be of small stature, even as the contemporary press recognized that Stratton's parents were of "normal" height.<sup>133</sup> Newspapers tended to emphasize this point with puns and quips on the issue of size. The Wisconsin Daily Patriot, for example, wrote, "There is to be, 'it is said,' more Thumbs in the Tom Thumb family. Rather a 'small affair' to speak of" ("Thumbs; Tom"). The Chattanooga Daily Rebel, similarly, tells its readers, "A New York letter-writer intimates that Maj. General Tom Thumb is about to assume some new little responsibilities" ("A New York letter-writer...").<sup>134</sup> Once the baby had been "born," the Chicago Tribune shares with its readers that "[t]he reported weight is 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounces

avoirdupois," and adds that "the baby...is the picture of the General. So saith Dame Rumor, and she is supposed to know" ("New Baby"). The *Zion's Herald* claims more exactness in its measurements, quoting a London paper which says that "[t]he baby is a pretty little girl with light silken hair and a vivacious disposition. She will be a year old next month; and it may interest our readers to know that she weights precisely seven pounds and three quarters" ("Personal").<sup>135</sup>

This insistence on homogeneity not only between sexual partners, but also between parent and offspring, added to the racial overtones of the spectacle by relying on the ideas of inheritance that ruled nineteenth-century racial thinking. At a time when theories of polygenesis held sway, and when Darwin's theory of inheritance was being (mis)applied to the race concept, "certain differences, notably of skin color, facial structure, and hair type, came to be correlated with moral and intellectual capacities thought to be inherited and therefore shared by the 'race'" (Savage 8).<sup>136</sup> Thus, with each news reference to the Strattons' "midget" baby, the mass media drew on and furthered concepts that were being used to support the idea of distinct racial groups, thus helping to reify race as an inviolable category at a moment of white division and disruption of the racial status quo (Reiss 9). Given the Strattons' position as figures for the national body, the baby hoax also provided a reassuring image of futurity and stability in a moment of radical uncertainty. As Lauren Berlant has suggested, "the generational form of the family has provided the logic of the national future" (18, check quote). If war "disrupts the expectation that the future will unfold in the image of a familiar past," the Tom Thumb baby hoax symbolically reinstalled this expectation (Nudelman 105).<sup>137</sup>

The news media's portrayal of the Strattons' marriage and (supposed) reproduction thus made whiteness the most important "common national denominator"-to take a term from Amy Kaplan--at a moment when white Americans were pitted against each other, when ex-slaves might join the polity, and when white privilege was less certain under Lincoln's state of exception (220n16). However, it was specifically a sense of white *patriarchal* unity and power that the Tom Thumb wedding reporting conjured into being. One way in which the news articles did so was by reflecting the gender hierarchy enshrined in marriage law. According to the system of coverture, "the husband became the political as well as the legal representative of his wife, disenfranchising her. He became the one *full* citizen in the household, his authority over and responsibility for his dependents contributing to his citizenship capacity" (Cott 12). For all that the media emphasize Warren as a good contractual subject, other articles take pains to point out that the balance of power with this exceptional couple is, in fact, no exception to the norm at all. "Some very curious people are wondering how so diminutive a couple will manage to get along together after the irrevocable knot is tied," writes the New York correspondent for San Francisco's Daily Evening Bulletin. "Well enough, doubtless. Tom is no chicken at heart, and, knowing his rights, knows also how to maintain them," the correspondent states, relating as evidence an anecdote in which Warren supposedly "instantly and demurely" left a conversation she was involved in upon being summoned by Stratton ("Letter from New York").<sup>138</sup>

In fact, the freak show context of the Strattons' wedding brought some of marriage's gendered power relations to the fore. A number of news sources--following the lead of the American Museum advertisements--liken Warren's performance contract

with Barnum to her marriage contract with Stratton, a comparison that has the effect of representing Warren as the (valuable) property that gets passed "between men." An ad printed in the January 23 *New York Daily Tribune*, for example, writes that Warren "was engaged to Mr. Barnum before she was to the General, but as the General is determined that she shall not be exhibited after her marriage, this is POSITIVELY THE LAST OPPORTUNITY to see the charming little creature" ("Barnum's"). Similarly, a *Chicago Tribune* article from January 1863 describes an instance in which Warren was asked if she was engaged: "[S]he replied, with witty evasiveness, that she was engaged to Mr. Barnum." The article also reports the news of the upcoming nuptials by representing Stratton as snatching "the jewel" from Barnum's grasp, and "rob[bing] Mr. Barnum of this bright and brilliant capture" ("Prospective"). With these descriptions of the Tom Thumb wedding, the news reporters confer on white male readers a sense of their own masculine power, reminding them of a legal arena in which they are constructed as both the self-possessed and possessing party.<sup>139</sup>

In addition to drawing on the gendered dimensions of the marriage contract, a number of news outlets used their descriptions of the Tom Thumb wedding's audience to assert a transcendent masculine subjectivity. Indeed, while the Tom Thumb wedding is notable, as Lori Merish usefully discusses, for "present[ing] the possibility of an explicitly feminine style of commercial entertainment," the backlash in the news reporting against this public feminine presence is equally prominent (193).<sup>140</sup> In describing the large numbers of women in the crowd, the papers tend to use a mocking tone that relies on a sense of shared bemusement from their implied male readers. The

full-page *New York Times* article appearing just after the wedding, for example, sets the scene thusly:

Such a tremendous hullabaloo, such a furor of excitement, such an intensity of interest in the feminine world of New York and its neighborhood...We say 'feminine world' because there were more than twenty-thousand women in this City yesterday morning up and dressed an hour and a half before their usual time, solely and simply because of the approaching nuptials. They didn't all have cards of admission, oh no, but it wasn't their fault. Fathers were flattered, husbands were hectored, brothers were bullied, and cousins were cozened into buying, begging, borrowing, or in some other way *getting* tickets of admission to the grand affair. ("Loving Lilliputians")

With this assessment, the *Times* casts what another paper terms "womanly curiosity" in a humorous light, thus deflating any threat to male dominance that this scene of mass female spectatorship might pose ("Inklings"). Employing free indirect discourse--"oh no, but it wasn't their fault"--calculated to secure a knowing nod from male readers, the paper encourages masculine bonding over the subtle ridiculing of the women in question. At the same time, in turning their Tom Thumb wedding report into a story of stereotypical nagging women, the *Times* displaces the strife in the national domestic arena with this scene of familial domestic drama--a familiar and entertaining "battle of the sexes."<sup>141</sup>

A *San Francisco Bulletin* article provides another notable example of the masculinist tone typical of the Tom Thumb wedding reporting. The article details an event that supposedly took place in the weeks leading up to the ceremony, in which a

local store announced having the Strattons' bridal bed inside. Within fifteen minutes, the reporter claims, "several thousand women were standing on each others' heads" to get a glimpse, and "and the news appeared to be telegraphically communicated from the Battery to Harlem in an hour afterwards" ("Street Scene"). Whereas the *Times* merely conjures up images of a "battle" between the sexes, the Bulletin reporter, for the rest of his article, makes the military metaphor explicit: "The proprietors [of the store] are popularly supposed to have left for Washington to have put themselves under the protection of the General Government, recognizing the utter incapacity of the city or State to struggle with a female invasion," the *Bulletin* continues, "and up to this time the Metropolitan Police, reinforced by the Provost Guard and the 1st Division of Militia, have been wholly unable to produce the least impression upon the enemy" ("Street Scene"). Pushing the trope to its limit, the article goes on to quip that the "carnage (of crinoline) has already been horrible," and that it is "generally hoped that hostilities will cease on or before [the wedding day], and the normal conditions of the city be restored" ("Street Scene"). In the case of this article, it is the state itself--rather than fathers, husbands, brothers, and cousins--that is proposed to be at the mercy of these hordes of women, thus rendering the bloated wartime institution as comically benign and ineffectual.<sup>142</sup> Even more noticeably, however, the article's use of military metaphors shifts attention from the fraternal strife of the Civil War, while positing a transcendent male identity that emerges in contrast to the "silly" women on display.<sup>143</sup>

Indeed, if the Tom Thumb wedding reporting tends to symbolically suture rifts of section and political affiliation by asserting whiteness and maleness as inviolable categories, the articles also mediate class-based rifts by displacing class tensions onto the

"ladies" they depict.<sup>144</sup> On the one hand, the news writers implicitly assert themselves as superior to the lower-class types they describe, such as the "woman retailer of apples" in the crowd outside the church ("Loving Lilliputians"). They also, however, consistently present the wealthy women who came out for the event--and especially those who actually had tickets of admission--as badly behaved and ridiculous in appearance. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, for example, describes the "dense mass of humanity," comprised of both "humble and wealthy" women, who came out to catch a glimpse of the Strattons entering the church: "An indescribable rush commenced as the carriages, at a brisk pace, proceeded past Ninth street, amid the applause and exclamations of thousands of feminine voices, apparently losing all sense of the proprieties and decorum which should govern womanhood" ("Latest Sensation"). The elite women inside the church are perhaps even worse; the writer complains that upon the Strattons' entrance, "notwithstanding the holy character of the place, the ladies stood on the seats, and, with outstretched necks, gazed on the middle aisle" ("Latest Sensation"). Frank Leslie's, similarly, writes that "fair necks were stretched to an unconscionable length," and describes how "the whole body of crinoline swayed right and left" in order to catch a view ("Great Marriage!"). With these descriptions, the news writers put the upper-class women on display as freakish spectacles in their own right: their gender transgressions and contorted bodies become the subject of a disapproving--and disembodied--male reportorial gaze meant to be shared by reporter and reader alike.<sup>145</sup>

IV. The United States of Thumbiana<sup>146</sup>

If the papers thus tend to mock women's relationship to the Tom Thumb wedding, they nevertheless draw on the ubiquity of Strattons' celebrity to suggest that Americans were unified in their exposure to the event.<sup>147</sup> D.C.'s Daily National Republican, for example, writes that "every one and their neighbors has now seen Gen. Thumb, who is now quite a veteran" ("Inklings," Feb. 14). The New York Times suggests that "Those who did and those who did not attend the wedding of Gen. Thomas Thumb and Queen Lavinia Warren composed the population of this great Metropolis yesterday, and thenceforth religious and civil parties sink into comparative insignificance before this one arbitrating query of fate--Did you or did you not see Tom Thumb married?" ("Loving Lilliputians"). While this article clearly uses hyperbole for comic effect, it ultimately portrays a city that, while riven by other differences, is unified in its domination by the Tom Thumb affair. As the *Times* also puts it, with a nod to readers who would recognize the indirect reference Stratton's Napoleon imitations, "next to Louis Napoleon, there is no one person better known by reputation to high and low, rich and poor, than he," thus representing Stratton's celebrity status as bridging otherwise unbridgeable distinctions of class and social position ("Loving Lilliputians"). Frank Leslie's goes so far as to state that the Stratton is "known to almost everyone in the country, old or young" a phrase that seems to willfully ignore the fact that Americans were now, in truth, residents of two countries ("Gen. Tom Thumb: Some Account").

In fact, despite the papers' condescending treatment of female curiosity about the Strattons, many of the articles invoke a city or a nation of spectators who are united not only in their exposure to the Tom Thumb wedding, but in their actual interest in it.<sup>148</sup> In other words, one final way in which these papers enact a symbolic mediation of the rifts

diving white Americans is by attributing to them a common affective response to the spectacle.<sup>149</sup> The Scientific American, in a typical move, suggests that "[f]or some weeks past the public mind of the great metropolis has been considerably stirred" by the affair ("Great Lilliputian"), while Frank Leslie's describes the city as "full of the singular pageant; it was discussed in every household and in all public places, and the unanimous opinion was the event was conducted in the most unexceptionable manner and was, in short, a perfect success" ("Great Marriage!"). As Frank Leslie's goes on to say of the mixed-class group who apparently found a way into the post-wedding hotel reception, "[I]t was a jam superlative; everybody's toes were common property...Social distinctions were set at naught; the millionaire rubbed against the tradesman, and Miladi of Fifth Avenue jostled Mistress \_\_\_\_\_, of Canal Street...It was a great confounding of grades, but one touch of curiosity makes the whole world kin...No one grumbled; all had come for an uncommon purpose in a common way"("Great Marriage!"). The Hartford Daily *Courant* writes of the Tom Thumb wedding tour that "here they were welcomed by crowded houses each day, and have given the best of satisfaction, as they cannot fail to do wherever they go," extrapolating from events in this one Northern city to project an image of one predictably homogenous culture ("Gen. Tom Thumb; Colt Amory," my italics). Representing the Strattons' performance as common national property, and the nation as united in a common response to it, these papers engage quite visibly in the production of an Andersonian "imagined community." <sup>150</sup>

What might be less immediately apparent, however, is the way in which scholarship on the Tom Thumb wedding runs the risk of colluding, unwittingly, in such a production. Academic work on this event, including my own, tends to begin with a

rehearsal of the sheer magnitude of the spectacle: the number of bodies on the street, the number of articles in the press, the number of dollars flowing in to Barnum's (and the performers') pockets. These appeals to the scale and prominence of the event--perhaps necessary to justify our readings of its cultural import--tend to imply if not to state outright that some entity that might go by the name of "the American public" was infatuated with the Tom Thumb wedding.<sup>151</sup> As Michael Warner has cautioned, however, "Publics do not exist apart from the discourse that addresses them" (72). While he concedes that it is "difficult to imagine the modern world without the ability to attribute agency to publics," doing so, he warns, "is an extraordinary fiction" (123). Furthermore, Warner points out, the unity we attribute to "the public" is ideological: it "depends on an arbitrary social closure (through language, idiolect, genre, medium, and address) to contain its potentially infinite extension" (117), so that "the projection of a public is a new, creative, and distinctly modern mode of power" (108). In writing about the Tom Thumb wedding, we risk reinscribing this mode of power, representing the fears and desires voiced by one particular segment of the population--the mostly white, male, middle-class news writers of the dominant press--as the fears and desires that constitute an American character writ large. We risk, in other words, falling into the trap laid by Barnum and the culture industry itself, which assured its readers that "everyone" was indeed equally riled up about the event.<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, the Northern news articles cited most often in the scholarship on the Tom Thumb wedding tell only one side of the story. Looking at the sectional differences that remain extant in the reporting on the event, we can begin to see the cracks in the sorts of symbolic mediations that this chapter has outlined. One the one hand, as I've discussed, a

periodical such as Harper's Weekly had a national readership and tended to walk the line in its political affiliations. Furthermore, a number of papers in Southern or border states did report with what appears to be a straight face on the Strattons' celebrity.<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, however, many Southern papers show themselves to be outright scornful of the Tom Thumb wedding and the interest it garnered. The Charleston Mercury provides one notable contrast to the Northern papers' representation of Tom Thumb mania as a national affair. "Lincoln and all his Cabinet and all his Generals are to be there, and all New York is run mad to see the jewels of the trousseau, which are displayed in a shop window in Broadway," the Mercury scoffs, depicting the spectacular wedding as a strictly Unionist matter ("Letter from Richmond"). The Houston Telegraph is similarly critical. Describing the wedding as "invented, ordered, prescribed, and engineered by the all-pervading Barnum," the paper evinces a sense of cultural saturation or exhaustion with the showman ("Tom Thumb's marriage to little Lavinia"). In its refusal to suspend disbelief about Barnum's role in the affair, the *Telegraph* is also much less forgiving than a Northern paper such as the Hartford Daily Courant, which states with a wink, "Wonder if Barnum has anything to do with making the arrangements?," but whose full belief in the spontaneous nature of the Strattons' engagement seems unnecessary for the writer to enjoy the ensuing spectacle ("Tom Thumb's Marriage"). South Carolina's Edgefield Advertiser simply states sardonically that "Barnum is still afloat at his Museum, and offers great attractions, as will be seen by the following extract from Phineas's announcement," which advertises appearances by Minnie Warren and "Commodore Nutt" ("Barnum"). In all of these instances, the papers protest against what they see as Northern cultural hegemony, attempting to dethrone Barnum from his position as the

king of entertainment and using this popular freak show affair as evidence for the frivolity of the Northern character.<sup>154</sup>

Other Southern news articles, recognizing the Tom Thumb wedding's status as a media event, leveled their criticism against the press for fanning the flames of excitement. Jackson, Mississippi's Daily Southern Crisis describes "especial Jenkinses being employed to extol the beauty of the bride's complexion, dress and ornaments, the magnificence of the bridegroom, and the superlative aristocracy of the equipages attendant" ("Tom Thumb's Nuptials").<sup>155</sup> Savannah's Daily Morning News, more subtly, says, "The New York journals have an excitement now over the approaching marriage of Major General Thomas Thumb" ("Tom Thumb's Marriage"). As often happens in the Tom Thumb reporting, the fact that the wedding *is* news becomes the basis of another report, creating a self-perpetuating chain of media engagements with the event. In this instance, the news cycle being reported upon is clearly designated as happening elsewhere. In ignoring the critical Northern reports such as those by the *New York Herald*, the Savannah paper also represents the North--or at least New York--as monolithic in its sentiments, a move which has the potential to implicitly calcify sectional differences. 156

One Southern article in particular gives the lie to the Northern papers' vision of a (white) nation unified in its love for Tom Thumb. Entitled "Chance for Barnum," the article appeared in Virginia's *Petersburg Express* and was reprinted in September 1865 in the *Dallas Weekly Herald*.<sup>157</sup> The article quips, "Had Barnum been in Petersburg, yesterday, he might undoubtedly [have] made a bargain and secured a curiosity, which would credit a large amount of greenbacks to his bank account...We refer to the

appearance on our streets of a negro man 43 years of age, yet only about the size of a boy of five." In a statement that subtly mocks Barnum's cultural productions by questioning the inherent attraction of the sorts of "curiosities" on which he made his name, the *Express* writes, "Crowds gathered around him yesterday to question him concerning his life and antecedents, both of which were ascertained to be not unsimilar to other mortals. But he is a 'black dwarf'--very black and very diminutive--and hence he is a curiosity." Much less subtly, the paper also asserts, "He is a second Tom Thumb in all but accomplishments and color, but his color would make him a hero among the negro-worshippers at the North--and may be, would secure him more kisses than were ever showered upon the immortal Thumb" ("Chance"). With this statement, the article collapses disdain for Northern cultural production with disdain for its supposed racial sentiments. Far from conjuring up an image of white unity, it instead uses a reference to Tom Thumb to reinscribe the divisive equation of abolitionism with amalgamation, and to attribute this political stance to Northerners in their entirety.<sup>158</sup>

While the Northern reporting on the Tom Thumb wedding tended overwhelmingly to be positive, some Union papers did buck consensus to express criticism of the spectacle. The anti-abolitionist *New York Herald*--despite its extensive coverage of the Tom Thumb wedding elsewhere--writes in an article appearing just one day before the public nuptials that the press and the public have been too "lenient" with Barnum. The *Herald* asserts that Barnum's "successful swindles, more curious than those of poor Greeley, have earned Barnum his proud title of the Prince of Humbugs" ("Barnum and the Miniature Marriage"). In comparing Barnum's exhibitions to abolitionist trickery, the *Herald* highlights political differences rather than assuaging

them with appeals to a transcendent white patriarchy. Referencing the upcoming Tom Thumb wedding directly, the *Herald* goes on to complain, "There will be a crowd to see the little people married, and certainly there would be a greater crowd to see them encouched, as the princes and princesses of France were exhibited during old monarchical times" ("Barnum and the Miniature Marriage"). In a paper obviously somewhat at odds with its sectional affiliation, the Tom Thumb wedding becomes an occasion to imagine the projected crowd *not* in terms of a democratic mass, but rather as subjects to a hierarchical, monarchical power.<sup>159</sup>

Outside of New York, *The Daily Cleveland Herald* showed itself to be consistently critical of what it referred to as the "New York sensation," a move calculated to highlight its own emotional as well as geographic distance from the Tom Thumb mania. Writing a month before the event, the paper breaks ranks with most news reporting on the Strattons by both suggesting that Stratton is of sub-par intelligence and by expressing disdain for Stratton's wealth. Entitled, with clear phrenological and ableist overtones, "Little Head Little Wit," the article suggests that Stratton "is as big a snob as his limited mental capacity and his abbreviated physical stature will allow. He has appointed a Secretary to superintend the issuing of invitations to his wedding, conferring these invitations only to people who will appear in 'full dress.'" *The Daily Cleveland Herald* then explains that "as all these details of Tom's bridal are daily chronicled in the New York papers, and all bear the stereotyped style of the 'Great Showman,' it is but a natural inference to draw, that Thumb and Barnum are making a joint speculation out of the matter" ("Little Head"). Recognizing the number of "puff" pieces likely written by or

in consultation with Barnum, the *Herald* both expresses skepticism about the motivations behind the Tom Thumb wedding and laments Barnum's infiltration of the press.<sup>160</sup>

Perhaps more interestingly, several news reports that seem content to fan the flames of the Strattons' celebrity nevertheless evince a self-awareness about the media's role the affair. In other words, some articles both forward a vision of consensus around the Tom Thumb wedding spectacle *and* hint at its media construction. One *New York Advertiser* article reprinted in the *Chicago Tribune*, while gesturing towards a sense of community by stating that "the marriage will certainly take place at one of our best known churches," also draws attention to the generic conventions of news reporting. "As it is customary when distinguished persons enter the matrimonial condition, to give a biographical sketch of their lives," the writer explains, "we propose, on this extraordinary occasion, to treat the General and his bride in the same manner" ("All About It"). The article goes on to state that "in the language of our fraternity," Warren's gifts can be "'better imagined than described," drawing attention to rather than obscuring that the press is a discourse community with its own codes for representing the world ("All About It").

The *New York Times*'s "Loving Lilliputians" article, often cited for constituting a full page of what was at that moment an eight-page newspaper, is perhaps the most canny about its own role in contributing to the Tom Thumb wedding hype. The piece is self-reflexive from its beginning, where it states that "Thumb was born (so runs the legend), of poor but honest parents." While on the one hand the reference to "the legend" contributes to the aspects of the Tom Thumb reporting that seemed to take America outside of lived, historical time and into the comforting realm of myth, on the other hand

this parenthetical remark seems to acknowledge the role of the mass media in such mythmaking. Indeed, the *Times* reporter consistently brings up the news media's prominent role in constructing the very Tom Thumb story it is now relating, noting that "[h]is tour through the States, through England, and over the continent are matters of record with the newspapers," and describing "the [American Museum] advertisements of 'only one week/ only one week"--ads such as those which appeared in the *Times* itself--that appeared in the lead-up to the wedding. Even more explicit is the article's account of the ceremony itself, which states at one point, "It can hardly be considered the correct thing to newspaperize the presence of private individuals, however conspicuously placed or dressed, but the appearance of Maj. Gen. Burnside we may mention with propriety" ("Loving Lilliputians"). While couched in a middle-class apology meant to protect the writer from charges of poor taste, the neologism "newspaperize" nevertheless makes apparent the media's role in shaping the public interest it claims to merely report.<sup>161</sup>

Finally, equally notable for our consideration of the Tom Thumb wedding as a media event--and this media event's relation to questions of national union and belonging--are the Southern reports of the Tom Thumb wedding whose intentions are hard, if not impossible, to decipher. The issue tends to be one of context, as when South Carolina's *Edgefield Advertiser* quips at one point that "Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb have arrived safely at Washington, and been presented to President Lincoln at the White House. The General is to be assigned to an important command under Stanton and Halleck" ("Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb have arrived…") The tone seems somewhat menacing here, and yet this is, in fact, the same sort of topical witticism that was uttered lovingly in the Northern papers. Similarly, the *Macon Telegraph* at one point reprints

verbatim from a Harrisonburg, Pennsylvania account that "Tom Thumb and his equally diminutive bride were received by President and Mrs. Lincoln at the White House last Friday" and that "[a]mong the distinguished guests present were Secretaries Chase and Welles, Major Generals Butler and Cassius M. Clay, and Mssrs. Crittendon and Wilson, and many prominent diplomats." The article appends no additional commentary to this report, so that if we are to assume an ironic cast in this instance to the term "distinguished guests," we must do so entirely on the basis of its re-publication in a Confederate state ("Various"). The wide-ranging, complicated, and contradictory Tom Thumb wedding archive, then, ultimately serves as a reminder of the unpredictable relationship between an embodied event and its textual invocations, as well as the impossibility of pinning down once and for all the ideological valences of either.<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, two notable instances of the Tom Thumb wedding's afterlife make particularly clear the unstable resonances of the event. The first is the phenomenon of mock wedding ceremonies, performed by children at churches or other community centers, which were inspired by the Strattons' public nuptials and known by the name of "Tom Thumb weddings." As early as May of 1863, notices of these children's reenactments began appearing in newspapers, as in a Concord, New Hampshire paper's description of one such event put on by the "ladies of the Unitarian Society" ("May"). While the New Hampshire paper praises the resemblance between this event and the original--"the representation of the marriage of Tom Thumb was so perfect that it drew forth great applause from the audience"--twentieth-century Tom Thumb weddings, as described by Susan Stewart, became opportunities for inventive burlesque. In addition to "effecting a satire of contemporary relations between the spouses," the performances

allow local communities to confront class and race privilege (Stewart 120). *The Blue Ridge Guide* from April 25, 1928, for example, advertises a Virginia Tom Thumb wedding in which 75 children, ages three to ten years old, "will give a complete imitation of a 'Society Wedding'" (Stewart 121). In this case, Stewart explains, the community "has an opportunity to demonstrate its skill and familiarity with upper-class values at the same time that it parodies them by substituting the vernacular at the level of content" (Stewart 121). Similarly, a 1982 triple Tom Thumb wedding that took place as part of Neighborhood Festivals Day in Philadelphia and gave its three "couples" the names of "Flinstones," "Smurfs," and "Jeffersons," allowed, in Stewart's reading, the black community involved to mock "not only the child dressed as the adult, the toy come to life, but also the racist caricatures of the mass culture" (121). In these reenactments, the event that originally served to police the parameters of the national family becomes, instead, an opportunity to assert community belonging and to protest the limiting social categories of class and race.<sup>163</sup>

A second example of the Tom Thumb wedding's afterlife is Melanie Benjamin's *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb: A Novel*, which appeared in 2011 amidst a flurry of media interest in the Civil War given the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its inception. Written from the perspective of Lavinia Warren in the 1880s, the novel, somewhat similarly to my chapter, puts the Tom Thumb wedding in relation to the national political scene. "The Civil War was still raging, but you would not know it by looking at the front pages of the New York newspapers; body counts and war maneuvers were displaced by articles about my upcoming nuptials," narrates Lavinia (202). The novel also intersperses newspaper clippings on various contemporaneous subjects in the

"intermissions" that appear between each chapter, and even draws several overt parallels between slavery and Lavinia's first freak show gig, while seeming to recognize Lavinia's white privilege in an anecdote about her being offered a slave during a tour stop in New Orleans. The novel is most concerned, however, with offering a sort of feminist revision of the Tom Thumb wedding, promising to divulge what the newspapers "did not recount" and presenting Lavinia as a spunky heroine eager to see the world--someone who chose to seek out Barnum's management rather than die in obscurity (4).<sup>164</sup> The novel consistently aligns the obstacles that face Lavinia due to her status as a woman with those that face her as a little person, as crystallized in the references to the make-shift, particularly ill-fitting, and uncomfortable corset that appear throughout the first portions of the novel. The result, lamentably for the novel's depiction of disability, is that Lavinia's entrance into the male-coded public sphere is thus cast in the terms of having "overcome" her disability, living up to her "big dreams" in spite of her small stature (120).<sup>165</sup> Despite what are therefore its considerable failings, we can recognize here another instance in which an event that was so important to constructing a particular notion of the American "public" is re-engaged with intended counterpublic sentiment. Thus, I have aimed, in this chapter, to draw on the Civil War, immediately post-Emancipation moment order to better illuminate the workings of the Tom Thumb wedding, as well as to use the Tom Thumb wedding in order to better illuminate the ways in which racial and national belonging were deployed in one of the cultural forms of midcentury America. And yet what the history of invocations of the Tom Thumb wedding also reminds us is that the freak show, as it makes its way into various cultural locations, has the potential for endlessly surprising political implications.

## Chapter Three:

## "Extraordinary Twins" and "Unaccountable Freaks": Mark Twain's Freak Show Aesthetics

"And that accursed eye-sore to me, Tom Thumb's wedding party, which airs its smirking imbecility in every photograph album in America, is not only set forth here in ghastly wax, but repeated! Why does not some philanthropist burn the Museum again?" --Letter XI (1867)

"I came in with Halley's comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's comet. The Almighty said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together.'" --quoted in *Mark Twain: A Biography*, by Alfred Bigelow Paine (1910)

## I. Introduction

On January 1, 1907, the *New York Times* ran a front-page account detailing Mark Twain's New Year's Eve gathering the night before.<sup>166</sup> As the article tells it, "the score or so of guests who had passed the evening playing charades and other games were surprised to see Mr. Clemens enter the drawing room onto the little stage, at 11:30, dressed in the white suit he wore recently on Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington" to testify before Congress on a new copyright bill. Most unusually, Twain was joined on stage by an unnamed accomplice in a similar white suit; the two had their arms around each other, and their clothing was "fastened together with a pink ribbon supposed to represent a ligature."<sup>167</sup> "We come from afar," Twain told his captive audience of party guests, "as far as New Jersey," and the two embarked upon a farcical routine in which Twain pretended to be a teetotaler made drunk by his "Siamese brother's" imbibing ("Mark Twain and Twin"). If the incident was perhaps the author's strangest engagement with the mass cultural form known as the freak show, it was, as we will see, far from his first. Twain's career included, to name just a few examples: twenty years of

correspondence with master showman P.T. Barnum; a magazine sketch based on the famous "Siamese Twins," Chang and Eng Bunker; a story, "Those Extraordinary Twins," which featured freak show performers; and, as I will argue in this chapter, a reliance on the style and content of the freak show in that "hypercanonical" Twain text, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>168</sup>

In the very image of the white-suited Twain delighting in his freakish imitation, however, we have an apt introduction to the complex set of linkages between Twain and the freak show that I will unpack here. In the previous chapter I returned to a pair of freak show celebrities who were household names in their own time, if not necessarily in ours, in order to unearth the racial politics of their media reception.<sup>169</sup> I turn now to a literary celebrity whose name recognition has extended from his own lifetime to ours, and who has come to be canonized as one of the preeminent American writers on questions of race and slavery, in order to ask what we might see anew by considering his corpus in relation to the freak show.<sup>170</sup> What does it mean for freak show references to surface with such regularity in Twain's writing? What might exploring such references teach us about Twain's fiction, the cultural moment out of which he wrote, and our own critical vocabularies for assessing both? What articulations among "freakishness," disability, and race come into focus when we imagine the so-called "Lincoln of our Literature" engaged in his flagrant dinner-party performance of disability drag?<sup>171</sup> As I argue in this chapter, shifting the focus from minstrelsy to freakery in studies of Twain and popular culture sheds new light on the questions of embodiment and social identity that percolated both in Twain's writing and in the intersecting discourses of politics, medicine, and the law. Mark Twain's "freak show aesthetic," I suggest, indexes competing versions of African-

American personhood that vied for attention at the end of the century, while also suggesting the surprising resources of freakery for elaborating new models of subjectivity.

Twain's career in print was in fact book-ended by encounters with "the freakish." In August of 1853, roughly half a century before the *Times* would capture the iconic, white-suited body of Twain in the midst of a freak-show style entertainment, a young Sam Clemens wrote a letter home to his mother that would be printed in the *Hannibal Journal* the following month. The style of the letter, as Joe Fulton has argued, indicates that Clemens likely knew that his brother, Orion, would publish it, making this putatively private epistle the very marker of Clemens' entrance into the public sphere of letters (8). Working as a printer and traveling east to see the Crystal Palace Exposition at the New York City World's Fair, Clemens' inaugural account details the logistics of his journey and some of the notable sights he had seen along the way. The Syracuse Court House--where in 1851 a crowd of citizens had demanded the release of a captive fugitive slave--prompts one particularly infamous remark: "I reckon I had better black my face," the teenaged Clemens writes, "for in these Eastern states niggers are considerably better than white people" ("Letter").

The comment is arresting: in one sentence it powerfully indexes both the unsavory racial sentiments of the young Samuel Clemens, as well as the minstrel mask's foundational role in his written oeuvre. Less often cited, however, is the longest paragraph in Clemens' account, which provides a detailed description of a pair of human "curiosities" he appears to have witnessed on the streets of New York City. As the letter tells it, the men were being advertised as the natives of the island of Borneo; they are "the

only ones of the species ever discovered," a line that Clemens seems to have taken at face value ("Letter"). While their exact identities are unknown, the "freaks" may have been the so-called "Wild Men of Borneo" that P.T. Barnum would exhibit decades later--or rather, Hiram and Barney Davis, cognitively disabled and short-statured brothers from Ohio, whom Barnum described as having been captured in the wild after a struggle with armed sailors ("Letter" note 9). In any case, it is apparent that in this first-published text by the writer we would come to know as Mark Twain, as in the culture that produced him, racial sentiment would turn out to be significantly bound up with the figure of the freak.

The exhibit, as many freak show exhibits are constructed to do, successfully confounds Clemens' classificatory abilities. In particular, witnessing the street-side freak show display wreaks havoc on Clemens' ability to deploy racial categories in alignment with his culture's ideas about animality and humanity. "I saw a curiosity today," he begins, "but I don't know what to call it. Two beings, about like common people, with the exception of their faces, which are more like the "phiz" [or physiognomy] of an ourang-outang, than human." He adds, in a tone of puzzlement that collapses personhood with whiteness, "They are white, though, like other people." Such a bewildering experience propels the narrative on and on, as Clemens details other contradictions observed during roughly an hour of standing and watching the pair: they are small--the size, Clemens explains, of a neighbor boy back home--and yet possess amazing strength. They have "bright, intelligent eyes, that seem as if they would look through you," but are said to have scarcely any memory, and to "forget tomorrow what transpired today." "I

I have nothing else to write about," closing the letter with a brief reference to the Crystal Palace that reads, after such sustained attention to the freakish spectacle, as a mere afterthought ("Letter").

In a letter written to fill Clemens' mother in on the sights and sounds of his sojourn in the east, the "Wild Men of Borneo" take on a significant narrative burden: displacing the Crystal Palace as, literally, the letter's most note-worthy sight, the "freaks" come to stand for the all of the disorientations and wonders of urban modernity. They are, for the fresh-faced letter-writer, something like the modern urban experience incarnate, where the order of things as he knows them are visibly thrown into disarray. How can the same beings have "faces like ourang-outangs" and yet be "white, like other people," Clemens' letter implicitly asks? What does this mean for the way the categories of "white" and "non-white," "person" and "nonperson," work in this bewildering new public space? And given this challenge to the extant racial taxonomies, can we retain any confidence in other identity categories--or might the contradictions continue to proliferate, as in the remainder of Clemens' run-on paragraph?

This early epistle provides us with a sort of origin story: not so much for Samuel Clemens' interest in the freak show--for I am less interested here in a biographical reading--but rather for the persistent intertwining of freakishness and race in his writing, as well as the tendency for Twain criticism to overlook this pattern even while devoting considerable attention to minstrelsy. It is not only the minstrel show metaphor of "blacking one's face," in other words, that organizes the letter's relation to the 1850s racial scene. Rather, it is also quite insistently the freaks who have "faces like ourang-

outangs" and yet are "white, like other people," and who in several other respects trouble the certainty with which Clemens feels he can read the bodies before him.

Looking to freakery as well as minstrelsy in Twain's writing thus enriches the questions we can pose about embodied identity in his work, for in the letter--as in the other Twain texts I discuss here--confrontations with race are structured in significant ways by responses to the freakish body. On the one hand, the performers' disabilities (their short stature, cognitive disability, and supposed animal-like physiognomy) strike Clemens as inconsistent with their apparent whiteness. This detail reflects the freak show's long history of displaying cognitively disabled people and little people as ethnically "other," and one important point here is to recognize the ways in which disability has been wielded to exclude certain populations from the privileges of whiteness.<sup>1</sup> And yet it is also worth exploring the more politically productive possibilities lurking within this identity shake-up: worth taking seriously the image of the young Clemens as enraptured spectator, everything he thought he knew about the relation between appearance and essence suddenly called into question. This tension--between overtly racist displays and the ontological disruptions they entail--will appear again and again in Twain's productions.

## II. Mr. Clemens and the "Prince of Humbugs": Freakery pre and post-Huck

While Twain did not always portray himself as such an inexperienced and captivated spectator of the freak show, both the style and the content of the shows continued to surface as an important imaginative resource in his published works. The genre of Southwestern humor on which Twain's earliest writing drew so heavily, for

example, includes structural, stylistic, and thematic parallels with the freak show.<sup>172</sup> As Susan Gillman has written, southwestern humor frequently took as its subject the processes of gullibility and duping, thus drawing on the "national appetite for fraud" exploited so well by Barnum and other showmen (21, 15).<sup>173</sup> Twain put these elements into play in the pieces which first made his reputation in the Western press: the newspaper hoaxes he wrote for the Virginia City, Nevada Territorial Enterprise. In sketches such as "Petrified Man," (1862), which claimed to report on the discovery of a petrified man near the mining camps, "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson" (1863), a fake account of a man murdering his wife and children after being led astray by the San Francisco Bulletin's investment advice, and the "Letter from Mark Twain" of April 25, 1864, which claimed to report on preparations for a Sanitary Fair ball that would benefit "a Miscegenation Society somewhere in the East," Twain fed his readers fabricated stories masquerading as "news" (Gillman 14; Fulton 51, 74). In these articles, "[t]he punch line is always in the knowing that one has been deceived, and so not until the 'egress' is one finally 'taken in'" (Gillman 15). This writing strategy in fact drew ire from some news editors and readers who had been duped by Twain's accounts, much as news editors fooled by Barnum's account of Joice Heth in his infamous first stint as showman complained bitterly of him in their papers (Fulton 85; see Reiss on the latter point).

Each of these works used satire or burlesque for a particular political purpose; the "Bloody Massacre" article, for example, was Twain's jab against what he saw as the *Bulletin's* abdication of its responsibility to report on the unethical business practices of California companies. "[A]ggravating those in power, often through the satirical thrusts of hoaxes, burlesques, and satires," Joe Fulton writes, these works "helped Sam Clemens

to become the Mark Twain we know" (56). In the case of the April 25 letter, the satirical political commentary was, importantly, bound up with issues of race. Twain's persona in this article is that of Copperhead agitator, outraged that the funds for a Carson City ball were, as he (falsely) claims, being diverted by the St. Louis Sanitary Fund to support "amalgamation." In fact, Twain's real target was self-righteous donors who claimed an interest in the well-being of wounded Union soldiers, but were merely contributing to whatever charity was fashionable (Fulton 71-81). As Fulton points out, Twain's hoax should be read in relation to David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman's anonymously published 1863 pamphlet, which introduced the word "miscegenation" into the lexicon. Entitled, Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and the Negro, and discussed by Barnum in his 1865 The Humbugs of the World, the pamphlet covertly attacked the Republican party by passing itself off as the work of abolitionists stridently promoting "miscegenetic reform" (Fulton 75-76). This "Letter from Mark Twain" thus provides an example of the way that Twain's work, as well as the other texts with which his work interacts, have addressed issues of race through the hoaxing, duping, and exaggeration common to the freak show.

The letter also, by extension, suggests something of the potential paradoxes of the Southwestern humor. Another characteristic of the genre is its well-documented use of racial stereotypes: relying on physical types, stock characters, and eye dialect, Southwestern humor produced texts notoriously "detrimental to the black image" (Subryan 94; see also Smith 108 and Bell 128). The genre's simultaneous reliance on exaggeration and its tendency to play on readers' gullibility, however, also has the potential to unravel some of the assumptions on which stereotypes rely. Works coming

out of this tradition traded in the supposed certainties of black inferiority at the same time that they troubled the very "truths" the white reader thinks he or she possesses. This tension between the staging of embodied racial otherness and doubts about the authenticity of that display is a dynamic that flourished at the freak show, which both "verified and questioned the order of things" (Garland Thomson "Cultural Work" 67).

While these early 1860s pieces thus drew on the conventions of Southwestern humor that shared much with the notorious distortions of the freak show, the other side of Twain's writing persona that developed during this decade was a decided deflation of exaggeration. In several late 1860s journalistic sketches, Twain casts himself in explicit opposition to Barnumesque strategies of narration. Here, too, however, the freak show proved a useful imaginative resource, as Twain takes up Barnum's actual exhibitions and public presentation in articles that show off his developing skills as a satirist. Even as Twain evinces some ambivalence or even scorn towards the value of the freak show, then, his writings are drawn to it again and again.

One such example is a March 2, 1867 piece for the San Francisco *Alta California*, in which Twain reports on a visit to Barnum's American Museum in New York. The Museum had burned to the ground several years before, and Twain suggests that the reconstructed version--which included the wax figures of the Tom Thumb wedding party in the first epigraph--was nothing to be proud of. Taking a tour through the museum provides Twain with the opportunity to mock the freak show's overblown advertising rhetoric, wielding his talent for exaggeration in a critique of exaggeration itself. "How Are the Mighty Fallen!" Twain charges, complaining that "there is little or nothing in the place worth seeing, and yet how it draws!" ("Letter XI" 116). Twain runs through a

catalogue of disappointing museum exhibits: for example, "There is a prodigious woman, eight feet high, and well proportioned, but there was no one to stir her up and make her show her points, so she sat down all the time. And there is a giant, also, just her own size; but he appeared to be sick with love for her, and so he sat morosely on his platform, in his astonishing military uniform, and wrought no wonders." Bringing his humorous tone of disenchantment to its apotheosis, Twain reminds us that these "human wonders" are, simply, employees on the job: "If I was impresario of that menagerie, I would make that couple prance around some, or I would dock their rations" ("Letter XI" 116). He calls for "some philanthropist to burn the Museum again," a call that would prove inadvertently prophetic when the American Museum did, in fact, burn to the ground for the second time the following year ("Letter XI" 117).

Twain enacts similar strategies in another article published the same month, this time in the *New York Evening Express*. Titled "Barnum's First Speech in Congress," and said to be reported from the future by "spiritual telegraph," the article burlesqued Barnum's ongoing run for a U.S. Congressional seat representing Connecticut by presenting the speech Twain imagines Barnum would deliver if elected. At its most basic level, the article serves as a parody of what Neil Harris has termed Barnum's "incessant self-advertisement," as well as an attack on Barnum's motives in running for public office (190). "Mr. P.T. Barnum will find the House of Representatives a most excellent advertising medium, in case he is elected to Congress," Twain writes; it will be a "genuine pity if his justly-famed sagacity fails to point out to him how he can dove-tail business and patriotism together to the mutual benefit of himself and the Great Republic" ("Barnum's First Speech" 24). In transcribing this fake political speech, full of classical

rhetorical constructions and exclamations, the article also implies an equation between the inflated language of the freak show and the politician's spiel. The conceit of the article even allows Twain to take a rather pointed jab at Congress, referring to them, under the cover of his fictional Barnum, as a sort of menagerie: "Even as one sent to warn ye of fearful peril, I cry Help! Help! for the stricken land! I appeal to you--and to you-and to you, sir--to every true heart in this august menagerie!," he writes, the ventriloquized voice of Barnum perfectly suiting his satirical ends ("Barnum's First Speech" 25-6).

Several of Barnum's famous exhibits also appear throughout the article as vehicles for commenting on the current political climate. Written in the aftermath of the Civil War, and while the Fourteenth Amendment was being bitterly debated in Congress, the article posits Barnum's "Happy Family" display as figure for national disunion. A popular exhibit that brought together animals thought to be enemies in nature, the "Happy Family," Twain's article suggests, is no more, even as he also questions Barnum's genuine concern over this point: "The lawmaking powers and the Executive are at daggers drawn, State after State flings defiance at the Amendment, and lo! The Happy Family of the Union is broken up! Woe is me!" ("Barnum's First Speech" 26).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the article, however, is its use of one of Barnum's racial exhibits to comment on the current political scene. The article invokes Barnum's "Leopard Child" as a figure for mocking Barnum's--and, by implication, a number of white Americans'--fickle interest in the fate of black Americans. Barnum had made a rather dramatic public conversion from long-time Democrat to outspoken Republican in the 1850s, going on to deliver an 1865 speech on the floor of the

Connecticut state legislature that argued for an expanded franchise (Fulton 125). "Where is the poor negro?" Twain has his Barnum say, "How hath he fared? Alas! His regeneration is incomplete; he is free, but he cannot vote; ye have only made him white in spots, like my wonderful Leopard Boy from the wilds of Africa!," his statement of concern for African-American civil rights quickly seguing into self-promotion ("Barnum's First Speech" 26). While Twain's own political proclivities at this moment are far from unimpeachable, his freak show image turns out to be an apt one for capturing the absurdities and ironies of black Americans' incomplete emancipation. This meaning resonates especially in the fictional Barnum's language of possession: "Because the Wonderful Spotted Human Phenomenon, the Leopard Child from the wilds of Africa, is *mine*, shall I exult in my happiness and be silent when my country's life is threatened? No!," Twain's Barnum shouts, his use of "my" and "mine" undermining any sense of his true dedication to African-American rights and indexing the extent to which black Americans' political futures are still considered white property ("Barnum's First Speech" 24, my emphasis).

Despite the attack on Barnum in this article, Clemens would go on, in the 1870s and 80s, to become a correspondent with the showman, his letters indicating several family visits at each other's homes (Saxon 257). In fact, the correspondence provides an intriguing glimpse into a planned collaboration between Twain and the Prince of Humbugs. Beginning in 1874, at Clemens' request, Barnum began sending the author samples of entertaining letters he received from individuals around the country (Barnum n.2). The letter-writers consisted of people hoping to make a dollar by exhibiting themselves--or someone or something close to them--under Barnum's management: one

woman states that she is "small in size," weighing only 110 pounds and with small hands and feet; another man promises that he is the "ugliest man...in the United States or Canada" (Barnum; "Letters that Barnum Gets" 6). Clemens planned to make a dollar of his own by publishing an edited collection of the correspondence. "My dear Barnum," Clemens intoned in February of 1875, after receiving one such batch: "It is an admirable lot of letters. Headless mice, four-legged hens, human-handed sacred bulls, 'professional' Gypsies, ditto 'Sacasians,' deformed human beings anxious to trade on their horrors, school-teachers who can't spell,--it is a perfect feast of queer literature! Again I beseech you, don't burn a single specimen, but remember that all are wanted and possess value in the eyes of your friend" (Clemens). The project never came to fruition. But the trace it left behind in the Twain archive is telling: we see here a remarkable instantiation of Clemens's interest in the singular, the unique the freakish--the "value" he finds in this wealth of "queer literature" that takes up bodily excess, lack, and hybridity.

Indeed, just two years after the article lampooning "Barnum's First Speech in Congress," Twain again turned to freakery to comment on the post-war nation in "Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins," a fictionalized account of Chang and Eng Bunker that was first printed in *Packard's Monthly* in 1869. In this piece, Twain introduced the trope that would resurface in his New Year's Eve dinner-party performance and in his 1894 story "Those Extraordinary Twins": that of the conundrum of a body that irrevocably joins two competing wills. Taking as his point of departure the Bunker twins' reputation for squabbling, Twain distorts the details of their biography in order to make the twins figures for national disunion and reconciliation. Most notably, while in actuality both Bunker twins supported the Confederacy, Twain concocts a

scenario in which "during the War they were strong partisans, and both fought gallantly all through the great struggle--Eng on the Union side and Chang on the Confederate." But, because they must, they learn to live together: "By-and-bye Eng fell in love with his sister-in-law's sister, and married her, and since that day they have all lived together, night and day, in an exceeding sociability which is touching and beautiful to behold, and is a scathing rebuke to our boasted civilization" ("Personal"). As Susan Gillman writes, "The voice of the funny man, ostensibly unaware of the twins' lack of volition in their 'perfect accord,'...does not disguise or mitigate the intended rebuke" toward a postbellum America that seems unable to get along nearly as well (59).<sup>174</sup>

"Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins" provides an instance in which a commonplace of Twain criticism--the frequent appearance in Twain's texts of twins, doubles, imposters, and switched or mistaken identities--comes into collision with the freak show references in his work. One strong tradition in Twain scholarship reads the persistence of hybrid identities in Twain's oeuvre back to various contradictions in the author himself. As Gillman puts it, "Certain biographical explanations are repeatedly, almost ritually cited as evidence that Twain felt himself to be a man divided: he was a southerner living in the North; a frontier bohemian transplanted to urban life in genteel Hartford; an American who lived in Europe for at least ten years of his life; a rebel who criticized, inhabited, and even named the world of the Gilded Age" (2).<sup>175</sup> These interpretations have their merits, but in reading Twain's Siamese Twins as yet another manifestation of the author's own divided sense of self, they repeat Twain's move of reducing disability to metaphor. These interpretations also miss an opportunity to consider the way that Twain's texts draw on and contribute to other material and

discursive aspects of U.S. culture: in particular, for my purposes here, constructions of disability and race as they appeared in the freak show and in several other social locations. While Gillman has done the useful work of linking Twain's writing to Barnum's famous flair for humbug, a disability studies lens is needed in order to fully explore the way that Twain, like Barnum, paired disability and blackness in his cultural productions, at times reinforcing and at times unraveling the way these categories were treated elsewhere in the American public sphere.<sup>176</sup>

Twain's story "Those Extraordinary Twins" and Emily Russell's chapter on this text in her 2011 monograph *Reading Embodied Citizenship* provide an example of how this methodology might play out. "Those Extraordinary Twins" constitutes the most lengthy and explicit use of freakery in Twain's fiction, while Russell's work constitutes the most extensive critical treatment of Twain and the freak show to date. The story, published together with Puddn'head Wilson in 1894 as The Tragedy of Puddn'head Wilson and the Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins, was inspired by the U.S. tour of Italian conjoined twins, the Tocci brothers; an 1899 edition drove this point home with a frontispiece depicting a white-suited Twain gazing on what is supposed to be the Toccis' promotional poster. Twain names his twins Angelo and Luigi Capello, and details their arrival in a small, antebellum Missouri town, and the disruptions they cause to law and custom therein. Following a pattern now familiar to us, the story drew much of its humor from the conundrum of conjoined bodies that bring into conflict two competing wills: Angelo insists on Bible class, while Luigi insists on Freethinkers' meetings; Angelo belongs to a prohibition society; Luigi, a drinker, prefers circus and horse races.

And yet it is also the issue of race that flits around the edges of this narrative as an unelaborated but palpable source of the tension, much like the "two negro men...each carrying a trunk" who precede the appearance of the twins and who disappear from the narrative as soon as that "stupefying apparition--a double-head human creature with four arms, one body, and a single pair of legs!" materializes (PW 236). If Chang and Eng in "Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins" served as a figure for white national reunion, Angelo and Luigi in "Those Extraordinary Twins" seem more a figure for a postbellum "miscegenated" national body, in which whites and former slaves exist uneasily as citizens. Italian-Americans at this point were themselves imperfectly assimilated into dominant U.S. constructions of whiteness, but within the text Patsy Cooper also pegs one twin, Luigi, as the "dark-skinned one" (PW 235). The narrator hints, further, that twins' conjoining of light and dark is just as much a freakish category confusion in the society of Dawson's Landing: regarding the brothers' neckbands, the narrator writes, "Each cravat, as to color, was in perfect taste, so far as its owner's complexion was concerned-a delicate pink, in the case of the blonde brother, a violet scarlet in the case of the brunette--but as a combination they broke all the laws of taste known to civilization" (PW 240, my italics). With such statements, "Those Extraordinary Twins" satirizes concerns about individual and national "miscegenation," using the "comedy" of the freaks to introduce themes that would come to full fruition in the "tragedy" of Puddn'head.

Twain's preface, in fact, links the more obvious racial themes of *Puddn'head* with his so-called "Extraordinary Twins." He states, taking obvious relish in his metaphors, that the story was originally "tangled together" with the work that would become *Puddn'head*, until the latter's tale of the black and white babies swapped at birth began to

overtake that of the freaks, and he performed the "literary Caesarean operation" that would separate the two pieces (*PW* 229, 230).<sup>177</sup> In linking the plot of the conjoined twin story with *Puddn'head*, the preface hints at the extent to which race is in this volume is mediated through the figure of the freak, even if the racial elements are muted in "Those Extraordinary Twins" proper. Indeed, while Twain presents the situation as one of surprise--he set out to "tell a little tale" about the freakish twins and ended up with a novel about the doublings spawned by race-slavery--my dissertation suggests that this is in fact not much of a surprise at all, as freakery repeatedly surfaces to mediate 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century writers' claims about racial identity (*PW* 229).

Russell has made a similar point, suggesting that "the alignment of conjoined twins and African Americans [in "Those Extraordinary Twins"] is no accident of plot, but instead marks the intertwining of these figures in the national imagination. The failures of the political system to address the physical difference of disability extend as well to the persistent location of blacks outside the guaranteed rights of the liberal citizen" (33). Russell refers in particular here to the ending of the story, in which Angelo and Luigi are hung after the townspeople cannot determine which twin powered the leg that kicked Tom Driscoll, setting off a court case that Russell reads as revealing the limits of the time-honored tenet of American individualism. She cautions, however, that stopping there to read this parallel to black American's subjection to extra-legal violence as the "secret theme" of "Those Extraordinary Twins" risks subordinating the importance of the text's disability representation to that of race. "In my analysis," Russell writes, "embodiment is not 'more profound' than the racial story, but can be read, in fact, as the same story" (33).

Russell's model is a useful as we travel backwards in time from *The Tragedy of Puddn'head Wilson and the Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins* to take up Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a work begun in 1876 as Reconstruction was collapsing and published in 1885 when the failures of Reconstruction had become apparent. I turn to *Huck* because this is a novel where freakery is a less explicit element, but where disability, race, and freakishness are, in fact, no less "tangled together." It is also a text whose popular and critical reception has served as a yardstick for American cultural preoccupations. In shifting our frame of reference for *Huck*, therefore, I aim to unpack some of the assumptions of both American culture *and* American cultural studies with regard to embodied social identity.

## III. Wonders, Nonesuches, and Sick Arabs: Huck Finn Meets the Freak Show

Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has spawned controversy from the moment of its appearance on the U.S. literary scene. Nineteenth-century concerns about the novel's respectability have given way in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to disagreements about its racial politics. From the Concord Library's 1885 verdict that the novel was "trash and suitable only for the slums," to anti-*Huck* crusader John Wallace's description of the book, roughly one-hundred years later, as "the most grotesque example of racist trash ever given our children to read" (Chwast 469), and from *Century Magazine* censoring references to nakedness and dead cats in the excerpts it printed prior to the book's publication, to the more recent editions of *Huck* that have removed each of the 213 instances of the word "nigger," responses to the text have remained charged even as the terms of the debate have shifted (Kaplan 371, Arac 439).<sup>178</sup>

From the mid-twentieth century onward, critics have intervened in debates about the racial politics of Twain's text by tracing the novel's indebtedness to blackface minstrelsy. Ralph Ellison, writing in 1958, described how Twain constructed Jim's character in accordance with minstrel show stereotypes: "Writing at a time when the blackface minstrel was still popular, and shortly after a war which left even the abolitionists weary of those problems associated with the Negro, Twain fitted Jim into the outlines of the minstrel tradition, and it is from behind this stereotype mask that we see Jim's dignity and human capacity--and Twain's complexity--emerge." (104). Minstrelsy, Ellison's work suggests, lies behind the novel's contradictory racial sentiments, the minstrelized elements of Jim's character making him appear boyishly naïve even as other moments emphasize his roles as adult and parent. Eric Lott has extended this analysis, demonstrating how the text's rhetorical strategies and structure are thoroughly indebted to minstrelsy, even at its most racially progressive moments ("Mr. Clemens and Jim Crow" 113-14). "Without the minstrel show," he puts it at one point, "there would have been no...Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (Love and Theft 5).

While the novel mentions a minstrel show only once and never features one within the diegesis of the text, these scholars have helped us to recognize the extent to which *Huck* is saturated with the logic of blackface minstrelsy, as well as the far-reaching implications of this point for the novel's treatment of race and slavery. But what of the freak show, that other popular entertainment genre that put otherness on display, negotiated the boundaries between identity categories, and traded in questions of authenticity and counterfeit? As with the minstrel show, the freak show is absent from the plot of *Huckleberry Finn*. However, I want to suggest that the novel is saturated with a

freak show aesthetic, in which anomalous bodies become a source of profit and pleasure; characters and sometimes readers are confronted with disentangling "real" from hoaxed identities; and, as in the sideshow itself, blackness and disability become symbolically linked. I suggest, further, that considering the novel's indebtedness to the freak show can provide us with a new purchase on its famously complicated treatment of identity and difference. For as attending to the freak show aesthetic makes clear, the novel's contradictory racial representations are thoroughly bound up with its equally conflicted presentation of disability, with freakery surfacing in *Huck* both to challenge and to confirm minstrelized versions of blackness. Freakery props up the contradictions of white racial sentiment in *Huck*, revealing mutually constitutive intersections between blackness and disability that can help us to navigate the muddy waters of postbellum discourses on citizenship and personhood.

Christopher Krentz's study of the "deaf presence" in *Huck* has paved the way for this approach by drawing our attention to the novel's investment in categories of embodied difference beyond the axis of race. From the sentimental story of Jim's deafened daughter, which serves to humanize Jim as a father figure, to the duke's "humorous" attempt at passing for deaf in order to swindle the Wilks daughters of their inheritance, deafness provides the text with a multivalent plot device, capable of inspiring both sympathy and laughs. As Krentz points out, "acting deaf" also raises similar issues as performing in blackface, at once making entertainment from the difference between identities on either side of the hearing or color line *and* revealing the instability of such binary constructions (172-3, 192).<sup>179</sup>

In addition to the "deaf presence," which engages a largely invisible embodied difference, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is replete with images of the physical body made strange: old Hank Bunker falls off a shot tower and becomes "just a kind of a layer" (65); a man in a steamboat accident is "crippled," amputated, and "turn[s] blue all over" (279); the late Emmeline Grangerford leaves behind an unfinished sketch of a woman with several sets of arms yet to be erased, prompting Huck to remark that the woman in the drawing appears "too spidery" for his liking (138). In each of these instances of bodily excess, lack, or hybridity, a scene of violence or death is supplanted with an image of the anomalous body as joke. Mentioned once and then discarded, these eccentric bodies form a part of a textual economy in which radically de-formed bodies are offered up in the service of entertainment. It is this pattern that at least some performances of *Big River*, the 1980s Broadway musical based on *Huck Finn*, seem to have picked up on and made explicit, inserting a scene in which the king dresses as a freak show woman with one breast in the middle of her chest (Shaw).

Within this textual economy, the novel's much-discussed strategies of racial representation intersect with substantive and stylistic elements of the freak show. If freakery mediates the novel's treatment of race and performance, however, it does not always do so in the manner we might expect. As Rachel Adams has suggested, race-based exhibits such as the freak show's "wild men" were the most easily and regularly fabricated of all attractions, to the point that "one of the primary pleasures of viewing a racial exhibit was to disclose its fraudulence" (163). Adams cautions that viewers' pleasure in unmasking fraudulent racial exhibits did not necessarily translate to enlightened attitudes about race. However, her point does suggest that the freak show,

usually thought of as a space in which viewers were simply confirmed in their normalcy in contrast to the "freaks" on display, actually had the potential to raise questions about the extent to which identity is essence or performance, as well the confidence with which viewers might disentangle the two.<sup>180</sup>

Thus, while freakery underwrites many of the novel's depictions of Jim, it does not always do so in ways that simply discredit him. Instead, in a number of instances, Twain's text trades in the widely recognized distortions of the freak show, raising questions about the nature and possibility of an essential black identity. One such instance in which the freak show aesthetic raises, rather than shuts down, questions about race and performance occurs quite early in the novel. Tom has just tricked Jim into believing that it is witches who have slipped his hat from his head while he slept and hung it on a tree branch above him. As Forrest Robinson puts it, "Jim first appears in the novel as the unwitting butt of a practical joke conceived by Tom to expose his gullibility and superstition," calling up stereotypes of slaves' credulity that circulated widely in the minstrel-show and in other cultural productions (119). However, if Jim thus begins this episode in the position of the dupe or rube--a position also exploited by the sideshow--his role quickly grows more complicated. Huck narrates:

Afterwards Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it. And next time Jim told it he said they rode him down to New Orleans; and after that, every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by and by he said they rode him all over the world, and tired him most to death, and his back was all over saddleboils. Jim was monstrous proud about it,

and he got so he wouldn't hardly notice the other niggers. Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country. Strange niggers would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, *same as if he was a wonder*" (*HF* 7-8, emphasis mine)

In comparing Jim to a "wonder," the text draws on one of the most common terms from 19<sup>th</sup>-century freak display. <sup>181</sup> Freak show promotional materials touted their performers as human "marvels," "wonders," or "prodigies," drawing anachronistically on the pre-Enlightenment language that framed these bodies as divine portents rather than, as nineteenth-century science increasingly did, nature's mistakes (Garland Thompson "Introduction" 3). Huck's description here thus aligns Jim with the non-normative bodies one would see in the dime museum or the sideshow--an alignment that, one might speculate, *Huck's* early readers may have picked up on more easily than we do today.

However, while the comparison of Jim with a wonder aligns him with the freak performer, his increasingly hyperbolic tale also aligns him with the figure of the sideshow barker. A showman of the self, Jim successfully draws in spectators who bring him a modicum of fame as well as material reward. After Jim describes the five-cent piece Tom had left behind as a charm given to him by the devil, the other slaves would "come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a sight of that five-center piece" (*HF* 8). By allowing Jim to earn some profit from his storytelling, the witch episode provides an antidote to Jim's status as human chattel, according to which, of course, his labor is stolen and his ability to make profits upended.<sup>182</sup>

Scholars have long debated whether we must necessarily read this episode as an example of Jim as minstrelized dupe, or whether we can read him as signifying on white

assumptions about black gullibility and superstition. On one side of this debate, Fredrick Woodard and Donnarae MacCann have argued that "Jim and the other slaves have the superstition-steeped minds that give the whole scene a minstrel flavor, a quality that cannot be explained away by concluding that Jim has been successfully hustling the other blacks" (145). Shelley Fisher Fishkin, on the other hand, has read the episode differently by interpreting it in the context of African-American vernacular culture. Slaves told tales of being ridden by witches, Fishkin writes, in order to comment covertly on slavemasters' practices of attempting to scare their slaves with tales of supernatural beings, or sometimes even dressing up as ghosts themselves. As she puts it, "If we posit African-American folk traditions as the frame of reference rather than white minstrelsy, Jim's utterances reveal an alternative set of meanings," one which puts Jim in the role of the signifying cultural hero (83).

Adding the freak show as an additional "frame of reference" through which we might interpret this episode, its ambiguity and perhaps even ultimate undecidability come into focus. The competing freak show echoes in Jim's performance keep the question of how to read it permanently in suspension: if in some ways these echoes seems to compound Jim's dehumanization by making him the stuff of freakish display, they also refuse to foreclose the more subversive possibility that Jim is the canny showman who knows how to manipulate assumptions about his identity. The freak show underpinnings of the scene, in other words, destabilize totalizing assumptions about Jim's identity just at the moment the text might seem to pin them down. We as readers would do well to accept the uncertain position we're placed in here--a position not unlike that of the 19<sup>th</sup>-

century freak show spectator, alternately convinced and skeptical of the radical claims being made about the body before him.

The statement of Huck's that closes this episode adds a final--and telling-complication. "Jim was most ruined, for a servant," Huck says, "because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches" (*HF* 8). Regardless of the motives we accord to Jim in this episode, Jim's freakish singularity appears to have some unexpectedly transgressive resonances, undercutting his supposed fungibility as a slave. In other words, while the position of the "slave" and that of the "freak" have some obvious parallels, in that in both cases human beings are reduced to commodified bodies in order to provide profits for another, Huck's statement disrupts this easy alignment. Rendered literally *wonder*-ful by his supposed experiences with witches, Jim's particularity works at counterpurposes to the racial discourses that would render him an exchangeable and "expendable creature" (Smith 106).

The "Sick Arab" episode, one of the many schemes thought up by those "lowdown humbugs and frauds," the king and the duke, constitutes another moment in which the depiction of Jim is underwritten by a freak show aesthetic (*HF* 165). In this episode, the duke dresses Jim in a gown that served as a King Lear outfit and uses theater paint to "paint[] Jim's face and hands and ears and neck all over a dead dull solid blue" (*HF* 203). As the final outrageous element of the disguise, the duke creates a sign that reads, "Sick Arab--but harmless when not out of his head," and instructs Jim to "hop out of the wigwam, and carry on a little, and fetch a howl or two like a wild beast" if anyone were to come near him (*HF* 203). The disguise, as Mary Kemp Davis rightly points out, is meant as a "*deterrent* to the curious" (83), and yet it resonates with a number of the

presentation styles meant to draw curious spectators to freak displays: the identifying sign; the instructions to move and howl like the freak show's "wild men" or geeks; and even the blue skin have their parallels in the freak show, which famously featured "self-made freaks" who covered the entirety of their exposed skin with tattoos, as well as people whose skin had been stained a bluish color from a condition called argyria (Bogdan *Freak Show* 235, Hartzman 228). The costume, in fact, combines the two most common patterns of presentation in freak exhibits: "the exotic mode," which gave the exhibit "an identity that appealed to people's interest in the culturally strange, the primitive, the bestial, the exotic," and the "aggrandized mode," which "laid claim to the superiority of the freak" with pseudo-ironic titles such as "General," "Prince," or "King" (Bogdan "Social Construction" 28-29).

Once again, the implications of Jim's freakish performance are not so clear-cut as we might initially assume. The over-the-top disguise is, to be sure, degrading to Jim, not to mention offensive to the various groups upon whose characteristics it claims to draw. However, in engaging in "passing" at the levels of both race/ethnicity and cognitive disability, the disguise partakes of the uncertainty about fixed identity categories that passing scenarios tend to call up. In particular, the freakish blue skin of the disguise--an unnatural skin color that does not fall within any conception of "normal" human variation--serves to negotiate Jim's relationship to Huck, drawing connections between the characters and destabilizing racial distinctions. Indeed, Huck is threatened with the mark of blue skin several times, most explicitly in the raftsmen episode that formed part of the completed manuscript of *Huck* but was cut at the publisher's suggestion for reasons of length (Fishkin 14). In this episode, the men on the raft that Huck has snuck onto

threaten to "get out the paint pot and paint him a sky blue all over from head to heel" before heaving him overboard (*HF* 120). When the raftsmen set him free, they also remind him, "Blast it, boy, some raftsmen would rawhide you till you were black and blue!," which echoes Pap's previous threat to "cowhide [Huck] until [he] was black and blue" (*HF* 123, 26). As these references make clear, both black and white skin can be made "blue."<sup>183</sup> This freakish signifier disrupts the polarity of the black/white binary, symbolically linking characters across race in ways that momentarily displace it as the determinative feature of identity.<sup>184</sup>

Furthermore, within the plot of the text, the "Sick Arab" performance constitutes a marked improvement upon Jim's previous situation, in which he was lying tied with rope during daylight hours in order to appear to be a captured fugitive. In that situation, his disguise as captive came to be indistinguishable from his actual lived experience. Huck explains, "You see, when we left him all alone we had to tie him, because if anybody happened on him all by himself and not tied, it wouldn't look much like he was a runaway nigger, you know," and Jim says that "it got mighty heavy and tiresome to him when he had to lay all day in the wigwam tied with the rope" (*HF* 203). Releasing Jim from this imitation of a captured fugitive that was coming to resemble the real thing, the costume created by the duke provides Jim with some measure of relative mobility, and his identity with some measure of play.<sup>185</sup>

While freakery--with its insinuations of performance and humbug--affords some resources for black identity, other intersections of blackness and disability in the novel turn out to be less promising. One prime instance occurs when Huck and Jim, foraging in the floating house that we later learn contains Pap's dead body, find a wooden leg. Huck

says, in classic deadpan fashion, "It was a good enough leg, though it was too long for me and not long enough for Jim, and we couldn't find the other one, though we hunted all around" (*HF* 62).

The joke works on several levels, the most obvious one being Huck's apparent ignorance regarding the purpose of a prosthetic limb. With its invocation of a "third leg," the prosthetic leg joke may also amuse for the implied phallic reference. Embedded in Huck's seemingly innocent comment, however, are some important assumptions about embodiment and identity. To his mind, the leg would work for either himself or Jim, if not for the misfit in terms of proportion. Huck's view highlights their difference in size (or, by implication, age) while minimizing racial distinctions. A prosthetic limb that could be incorporated by either body thus works something like blue skin in the Sick Arab episode, traversing the white-black divide. At the same time, however, the joke is funny--the joke *works*--because the reader understands that the leg would be a completely superfluous possession for either character.<sup>186</sup> Huck's comments thus reveal the unstated norm of ability underlying the text in this moment: whereas Huck and Jim's racial difference can be read as the engine that drives much of the plot, their shared able-bodied status is so taken for granted that readers may not even be aware of it until this quip brings it into relief. The joke closes the gap between blackness and whiteness by making disability the ultimate marker of difference, endowing Jim with masculine privilege only by calling up and disavowing the disabled body.<sup>187</sup>

Jim's personhood relies here upon normative notions of embodiment, which proves to be a rather tenuous foundation in a text littered with bodies that become maimed, flattened, and disfigured. In fact, an episode that takes place just before Huck

and Jim find the prosthetic leg reveals the danger of predicating cross-racial alliance on the able body. Jim describes losing money at the hands of another enslaved character, "Misto Bradish's" "one-laigged nigger," whose missing leg is mentioned twice in the short description of him and is further underscored by E.W. Kemble's illustration (*HF* 55). Leaving the man otherwise unnamed, the text emphasizes and naturalizes the link between his status as chattel and his disability. The only other detail we learn about this character in the short time we are with him is that he encouraged his fellow slaves to invest in his "bank" and then claimed that the bank "busted" (*HF* 55-56). He is, in other words, the "cunning slave," the "deformed villain," his physical lack quickly cuing readers to his lacking moral sense. Unlike Jim, whose tales of witches provide his audience with entertainment if nothing else, Master Bradish's slave is the black confidence man as unredeemed fraud, his representation confirming rather than unraveling the "master script" of minstrelsy (Brooks 2).

A final example of the freak show aesthetic in *Huck* sums up the pervasive contradictions in the novel's treatment of disability, singularity, and race. This is the king and the duke's performance of the "King's Camelopard, or, THE ROYAL NONESUCH," a cryptically advertised piece that plays out before an Arkansas audience just before Jim dons the Sick Arab disguise. The performance consists of the king capering about onstage, naked, on all fours, and painted with streaks and stripes (*HF* 195).<sup>188</sup> The show, with its white performer in painted white skin, bears some clear resonances with minstrelsy, and yet it also resonates on several levels with P.T. Barnum's exhibitions.

The first link lies in the very title. Barnum was known for exhibiting "camelopards" (giraffes) in his American Museum at a time when they would not have been otherwise familiar to American audiences. An 1855 broadside for the Museum dedicates roughly half of its space to an advertisement for the "beautiful LIVING GIRAFFE, OR, CAMELOPARD," now on exhibition, a "pair of which were imported from Egypt in 1853 by Mr. P.T. Barnum at an expense of \$30,000" ("Barnum's American"). Always interested in displaying animals that were "exotic" in the terms of nineteenth-century America, Barnum was particularly invested in creatures that supposedly combined several species. The "camelopard" itself, so-called for having an appearance that joined characteristics of the camel with that of the leopard, was in fact only the tip of the iceberg. Barnum's "Woolly Horse," for example, was said to include elements of the elephant, deer, horse, buffalo, camel, and sheep in one (Cook 147).

Barnum flaunted such category confusion in his human displays, as well. One of the most famous instances was Barnum's so-called "What Is It?," a race-based exhibit that bears some overlap with the Royal Nonesuch routine.<sup>189</sup> The "What Is It?" character was created in 1860 and served as a staple of freak display through the first decades of the twentieth century. The role was played most consistently by William Henry Johnson, a cognitively disabled black man from New Jersey, who, as far as the record shows, was "sold" into employment with Barnum by his parents, former slaves who were unable to support their son financially. Capitalizing on the recent fame of Darwin's work, the "What Is It?" was advertised as a newly discovered and not yet categorized species, one that possibly constituted the "missing link" between man and animal (Cook 139). Barnum referred to Johnson repeatedly in his promotional materials as a "nondescript"--a

sort of "nonesuch," if you will--a term which emphasized his supposed singularity and ambiguous position within the family of man (148).<sup>190</sup>

The exhibit relied upon deliberate categorical imprecision, soliciting viewers' judgments on whether the person before them was more man or more beast, capable of being fully "civilized" or likely to further degenerate. Most incredibly, James W. Cook points out that the "What Is It?" was displayed as inter-act entertainment at an 1864 Freedman's Benefit in New York (154). As this detail suggests, Barnum's exhibit appealed not only to overtly anti-black, pro-slavery Democrats, but also to white citizens who were active on the abolitionist circuit. What comes across today as the height of irony--racist freakery as abolitionist fundraiser; a man "purchased" by Barnum displayed for the benefit of recently emancipated slaves--appears to have registered as less of a contradiction at the time. Freakery undergirds both openly racist and supposedly enlightened views towards race in nineteenth-century America, revealing the significant correspondence between these two positions.

Read in this way, the Nonesuch performance can help us to make sense of the controversial final eleven chapters of the novel: the so-called "evasion" section, in which Huck acquiesces to Tom's elaborate play-acting at "helping" Jim to "evade" his captors, and which many critics have suggested constitutes an "evasion" of the moral themes developed in the text up to that point. Certainly, in a number of key ways the ending of *Huck Finn* becomes a freak show in its own right, in which Jim's textual body is sold out for the purposes of entertainment.<sup>191</sup> With the text given over wholly to burlesque, Tom's momentary idea to "saw Jim's leg off," for example, certainly reads as ludicrous, and yet does not necessarily seem calculated to inspire real outrage on behalf of Jim. Tom's

ludicrousness itself is the point--it *is* the show--and Jim must be sacrificed to serve these ends (*HF* 299).<sup>192</sup> Twain's working notes for the novel, which show that he considered having Huck ride out of the text on an elephant, further index the circus-like atmosphere of the final chapters (Carlyon 21). The text evinces too much delight in elaborating Tom and Huck's absurd antics for the interpretations of the ending as a harsh satire of post-Reconstruction policies to be entirely convincing.<sup>193</sup>

As *Huck*'s consistently split use of freakishness as a trope should remind us, however, the text was shot through with contradictions from the beginning. It is not so much that the ending is a falling off from what has come before, but rather that the text has repeatedly vacillated in its conception of personhood: this is a work that can't, or won't, decide whether it privileges singularity or normality, whether blackness is inherently freakish or merely canny performance, whether shared ability is enough to override Jim's racial difference. If we expect a "happy" ending, which, as Toni Morrison puts it, was never "signaled or guaranteed," we have perhaps merely fallen under the spell of Twain the confidence man, whose fantasy of cross-racial amity seems to overshadow the repeated warnings of its collapse along the way (xxxi).<sup>194</sup> Twain might just as aptly be termed the Barnum of our Literature as our Lincoln, laying his "nondescript" text before a reading public who have been puzzling over it ever since.

## IV. Disabled Bodies, Disfigured Texts: Twain and Huck in a Reconstructed America

When the Concord Library banned *Huck* in 1885, *The Boston Evening Traveller* weighed in with an editorial in support of the decision. The portions of the novel that have "*disfigured* the *Century* magazine," the paper wrote, "are enough to tell any reader

how offensive the whole thing must be" (quoted in Fishkin 115, my italics). Affronted by the novel's celebration of vernacular culture and its challenge to the genteel tradition, the *Traveller* figured *Huck* as a blemish on the face of American letters. In doing so, the Boston paper inaugurated a long tradition of describing the text in terms of illness, disability and contagion, prompting defenses couched just as emphatically in the language of symmetry, wholeness, and robustness.

With the rise of New Criticism in the mid-twentieth century, the criteria by which the novel would now be judged was its unity of purpose and execution, with the last eleven chapters sparking the most heated debate (Graff and Phelan 277). Against Bernard DeVoto's 1932 pronouncement that the "extemporized burlesque" of the evasion section was a "*defacement* of [Twain's] purer work," Lionel Trilling and T.S. Eliot came to *Huck*'s defense in their respective 1948 and 1950 introductions to the novel (Graff and Phelan 278, my italics). Each argued that what appeared to be an ending that was inconsistent with the rest of the book--"In form and style *Huckleberry Finn* is an almost perfect work," Trilling asserted, though admittedly the ending is "too long"--was ultimately necessary in order to allow Huck to retreat to the shadows, lending a cyclical nature or a "certain formal aptness" to the novel's pattern of characterization (quoted in Graff and Phelan, 284). Both of these critics, so integral to the canonization of *Huck* that we have inherited today, thus supplanted images of the novel as disfiguring and disfigured with those of a text that is well-constructed, symmetrical, and shapely.

While neither initial reviewers nor these early-to-mid twentieth century scholars touched on issues of race, *Huck's* status as a racist or anti-racist novel has been debated since the era of *Brown v. Board of Education*, when newly integrated classrooms

emerged alongside the still-ongoing disputes about whether the novel should be pulled from school curricula (Henry 25).<sup>195</sup> Scholars on both sides of *this* debate, too, have couched their arguments in the metaphorics of disability. "Let us review the alleged *defects* of the last quarter of the novel," Spencer Brown wrote in 1967, going on to argue for an interpretation of *Huck* that would exonerate the text of its racism and thereby make it whole again (41). Other readers and scholars have called for, as Toni Morrison has termed it, "amputat[ing] the problem" (xxxi). Some follow Hemingway's famous injunction to ignore the ending of the novel in making an evaluation of the text, while others produce the new editions of *Huck* which excise each instance of its offending word.

As part of this debate, scholars and public figures have also discussed the novel's *readers* in disability terms. John Wallace, outlining the social threat posed by a teacher using the word "nigger" in the course of discussing *Huck Finn*, puts it thusly: "[V]arious psychological theories suggest that the black students' covert reactions to the social threat would constitute an important source of *intellectual impairment*" (19, my italics).<sup>196</sup> Responding to such accusations, Twain biographer Justin Kaplan has gone so far as to assert: "It seems unlikely that anyone, of any color, who had actually read *Huckleberry Finn*, instead of merely reading or hearing about it, and who had allowed him or herself even the barest minimum of intelligent response to its underlying spirit and intention, could accuse it of being 'racist' because some of its characters use offensive racial epithets" (378). In this formulation, failing to interpret *Huck* in line with Kaplan's assessment of its greatness amounts to an intellectual disability. Christopher Hitchens has offered a similar pronouncement; in what Jonathan Arac calls an "astonishing swing of

medicalizing normativity," Hitchens characterizes those who wish to remove *Huck* from schools on the basis that it is racially offensive as "neurotics" (Arac 441). If those on one side of this debate argue that reading *Huck* has the potential to disable black youth, the other side snaps that you'd have to be disabled already to feel this way.

In making these pronouncements, critics of *Huck Finn* are not necessarily unique; they are drawing on a longstanding equation between the work of art and the material body that goes back as far as Aristotle's *Poetics*. "Beauty is a matter of size as well as order," writes Aristotle in George Whalley's translation, comparing tragedy to a "living creature" that should not be too small, for then you cannot get a close enough look at it, nor too big, for then you cannot take it all in in one sitting (77, 79). Disability studies scholarship has now given us the tools with which to unpack such comparisons, revealing the implications of reducing disability to a metaphor for that which is defective, faulty, or incomplete. What these readings of *Huck* also miss, however, is the role of the disabled body in rendering consensus on the novel's racial politics so elusive. Invoking disability merely as a metaphor for the text or for its textual effects, we overlook the ways in which disability and "freakishness" both confirm and unravel dominant white conceptions of black identity in *Huck*--the way bodily anomaly works to keep the racial logic of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn so conflicted, open to interpretation, and perhaps ultimately undecidable.

Barnum's "What Is It?," and its echoes within *Huck*, thus points us to the first lesson provided by the novel's freak show aesthetic. This is the need to attend to the politics of disability in American literary history, *and* to analyze disability and race in intersectional, rather than analogical, terms. Much as Barnum exploited the confluence of

black skin and cognitive disability in his outrageously problematic exhibit--the two qualities combining to suggest the "What Is It's?" ambiguous position in the family of man--the novel's racial politics cannot be extricated from its equally ambivalent treatment of the other embodied differences staged at the freak show. Disability props up the contradictions of white racial sentiment in both Barnum's exhibit and in Twain's famous novel.

This is a lesson for reading *Huck Finn*, but it is also a lesson for American literary and cultural studies more broadly. While it has become commonplace to consider Twain's text in relation to the minstrel show, reading disability and race in intersectional terms recovers the submerged role of disability within minstrelsy itself. According to 19<sup>th</sup>-century lore, blackface originator T.D. Rice learned to "jump Jim Crow" while by watching the spontaneous dance moves of an elderly and disabled black stableman in Louisville. An 1881 *New York Times* article presenting the reminiscences of Edmon Conner, an actor who worked with Rice early in his career, recreates the scene as such:

Back of the theatre was a livery-stable kept by a man named Crow. The actors could look into the stable yard from the theater, and were particularly amused by an old decrepit negro, who used to do odd jobs for Crow. As was then usual with slaves, they called themselves after their owner, so that old Daddy had assumed the name of Jim Crow. He was very much deformed, the right shoulder being drawn high up, the left leg stiff and crooked at the knee, giving him a painful, but at same time laughable, limp. He used to croon a queer old tune with words of his own, and at the end of each verse would give a little jump, and when he came

down he set his 'heel a-rockin.' He called it 'jumping Jim Crow.' ("An Old Actor's" 10)

The tale is likely apocryphal. As Eric Lott, Bryan Wagner, and others have addressed, "Jim Crow's" origins are so shrouded in layers of nostalgic aggrandizing that "legend" becomes "the closest we are going to get to truth in the matter" (*Love and Theft* 51). And yet, the article's value as an origin story for minstrelsy is, if anything, only increased by its doubtful veracity. What we see here is the role that disability--or, a fantasy of disability--played in constructing the fantasy of blackness performed on the minstrel show stage. Disability overseen, the disabled body as ready-made spectacle, helps construct the white version of blackness deemed pleasing, consumable, and authentic enough for wide dissemination. Minstrelsy, this article makes clear, was disability drag all along.<sup>197</sup>

Finally, attending to the freak show aesthetic in *Huck* brings into focus the shifting intersections of disability and race that also structured several other 19<sup>th</sup>-century discourses. Much of this chapter has been devoted to arguing that the "freakish" body plays a crucial but overlooked role in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, one that helps to explain why critical consensus on the racial politics of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been so famously elusive. I want to close here by offering some thoughts on *Huck's* relationship to the last decades of the nineteenth century, a pivotal time in the nation's response to the Civil War. As David Blight and others have shown, the dominant public memory produced at this moment in sites as diverse as literature, statuary, and commemorative rituals entailed troubling acts of forgetting, as well: Lost Causeism in the south, as well as a growing acceptance of sectional reconciliation in the North, tended to

paper over "the deep causes and consequences of the Civil War--the role of slavery and the challenge of racial equality" (15).<sup>198</sup> Adventures of Huckleberry Finn--begun by Twain in 1876 as Reconstruction was collapsing and published in 1885 when the failures of Reconstruction had become apparent--thus emerged at what was also a crucial moment in the "reconstruction" of Civil War remembrances. Such reconstructions often hinged on and produced new understandings of embodiment, from the cartoon images of the disabled black veteran, to the black subject recognized as "civilly disabled" by the courts. *Huck's* freak show aesthetic, I suggest, brings into focus the shifting intersections of blackness and disability as they structured the postbellum discourses of journalism, medicine, and the law. The novel predicts their dangers, their points of similarity, and their lasting power, while also gesturing towards the possibility that freakishness might open up onto an alternative, more flexible model of black subjectivity.

Kirk Savage has succinctly formulated the motivating question behind the legislative agenda of Reconstruction and its aftermath as follows: "Would [the slave] come to hold the conventional prerogatives that defined white manhood--in other words, would the sameness of gender overcome the difference of race--or would both his rights and manhood be called into question?" (78). The immediate postwar period witnessed a plethora of journalistic depictions of the African-American Civil War veteran that answered the first half of this question in the affirmative: illustrations and editorials made the case that military service proved the black soldier's manhood, and thus his fitness for citizenship.<sup>199</sup> One such illustration, in the April 1865 issue of *Harper's Weekly*, shows how such assertions of manhood were often signaled by disability. Entitled "A Man Knows A Man," the image depicts a white and a black veteran, each one missing his left

leg, face-to-face and engaged in a vigorous handshake. The caption reads, "Give me your hand, Comrade! We have each lost a LEG for the good cause; but, thank God, we never lost HEART" [See Figure 5].<sup>200</sup>

Disability as a war-time badge of honor traverses the color line in this illustration, conferring shared humanity through bodily lack. On the one hand, the "equivalence" posited by *Harper's* is rather striking: the black soldier is depicted not as the grateful recipient of the boon of Emancipation, but rather a "Man" who has secured his own right to recognition as such (Schweik 227). A number of ambivalent meanings, however, haunt such an image. The first is the figurative labor that the image must undertake in order to posit this equation between blackness and manhood. Manhood, and by implication personhood, is achieved here (only) through subjection to injury.<sup>201</sup> While putatively celebrating the African-American veteran's freedom, then, the illustration inadvertently recycles some of the tired bodily configurations from the antebellum era: the display of the wounded slave body on the abolitionist circuit, with its attendant problems of voyeurism and objectification, and even the slave codes that construed a slave as a subject to the extent that he was "wounded flesh or a pained body" (Hartman 94).<sup>202</sup> Positive on its face, the illustration uses disability in ways that may actually be continuous with the logic of the body that prevailed under slavery.<sup>203</sup>

While on their surface these journalist representations could not be more different from the postbellum medical accounts of African-American bodies that gained ascendance in the last decades of the nineteenth century, both discourses ultimately assumed that black personhood could be adjudicated with reference to embodiment. If representations of disabled black veterans presumed an initially able-bodied status, and

construed disability acquired on the battlefield as proof of fitness for citizenship, medical science ascribed inherent disabilities to African Americans that served to disqualify them from the rights of the citizen. "Degeneration" theories, such as those espoused by physician J.F. Miller in the *North Carolina Medical Journal*, put the issue most bluntly, positing that African Americans' innate physical and mental inferiorities would lead them to deteriorate and even disappear as a race altogether under the strenuous conditions of freedom. Freedom had brought the former slave a "harvest of mental and physical degeneration," as Miller put it, writing just before the turn of the century, "and he is now becoming a martyr to a heredity thus established" (Baynton 39).<sup>204</sup>

A number of scholars have done the important work of recovering the (seemingly) more positive depictions of the African-American soldier that were largely superseded by such medical accounts.<sup>205</sup> In drawing on disability to prop up its own racial contradictions, however, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has done the equally crucial work of dramatizing the correspondence between anti-racist and racist representation in the postbellum United States. If Jim's association with the "wonder" of the disabled freak at times provides him with an individuated subjectivity, at other moments it becomes clear how quickly the able body can be reclaimed as a property of whiteness. For example, Tom's threat to "saw Jim's leg off" in the "evasion" section of the novel shows how easily Jim might be made to resemble Master Bradish's slave, and his common humanity with Huck revoked (299).<sup>206</sup>

The dual role of the disabled body in the legal realm--another discourse that drew on disability in the service of making pronouncements on black subjectivity--brings these contradictions to their strange conclusion. In this case, disability was often used

metaphorically, in the sense of "civil disability," defined as "a restriction imposed upon a person's civil rights because of a criminal conviction; or for some other reason" ("civil disability"). In 1883, the Supreme Court released a decision in the so-called Civil Rights Cases, a consolidated group of five cases determining the validity of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had provided that all citizens--regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude--were entitled to the "full and equal enjoyment" of hotels, trains, theaters, and other public spaces ("Civil Rights"). The 1883 decision overturned the Civil Rights Act, restricting the government's ability to guarantee equal rights to black Americans and paving the way for Jim Crow laws.

Both Judge Joseph B. Bradley's opinion and Judge John M. Harlan's dissent draw on the language of disability, though they interpret its relation to the Civil Rights Act quite differently. While Harlan's dissent speaks of the "burdens and *disabilities* which constitute badges of slavery and servitude," Bradley, in deciding against the plaintiffs, writes,

Individual invasion of individual rights is not the subject-matter of the [Fourteenth] Amendment. It has a deeper and broader scope. It nullifies and makes void all state legislation, and state action of every kind, which *impairs* the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States, or which *injures* them in life, liberty or property without due process of law, or which denies to any of them the equal protection of the laws. ("Civil Rights," my emphasis)

In one stroke, Bradley claims that the laws of the land protect against the civil disability of being a former slave, while gutting Congress's ability to fully legislate such protections.

Both Bradley and Harlan, furthermore, make appeals to the concept of Constitutional equality, though again they interpret the relationship between equality and the Civil Rights Act differently. Bradley writes, "When a man has emerged from slavery, and by the aid of beneficent legislation has shaken off the inseparable concomitants of that state, there must be some stage in the progress of his elevation when he takes the rank of a mere citizen, and ceases to be the special favorite of the laws" ("Civil Rights"). His interpretation places undue faith in abstract "equality" while construing "particularity" as favoritism. Harlan disagrees, writing that the law is meant to "secure and protect rights belonging to them as freemen and citizens; nothing more," and that "[t]he one underlying purpose of the legislation has been to allow the black race to the take the rank of mere citizens" ("Civil Rights"). If in this instance Bradley attempts to lay claim to civil rights for African Americans on the basis of abstract equality, however, in another moment he relies on an embodied metaphor to cast them as deserving subjects. The Reconstruction Amendments, Harlan writes, "had reference...to a people which (although the larger part of them were in slavery) had been invited by an act of congress to aid, by their strong right arms, in saving from overthrow a government" ("Civil Rights"). While it is easy, from today's standpoint, to malign the overtly racist medical doctrines of the day, the wounded soldier and legal discourses surveyed here place faith in a vision of either disembodied "equality" or an ableist equality derived from the body.<sup>207</sup>

If legal challenges have the potential to make certain injuries cognizable, they can also lead to a dead-end of identity. As the "Sick Arab" and "witch" episodes in *Huck* make clear, there may be some measure of power in being represented instead as singular,

strange, unaccountable--outside the bounds of social classification altogether. This was a power that Twain himself recognized. Shortly before his death, Twain is said to have commented on the coincidence of his birth with one of the wonders of astronomy: "I came in with Halley's comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it," he mused. "It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's comet. The Almighty said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together'" (Paine 1511). Twain could, of course, take on the position of the "freak" with far fewer repercussions than either his black characters or real-life counterparts. <sup>208</sup> And yet, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* suggests that mutually discrediting depictions of blackness, disability, and freakishness were not inevitable; the outcome of these associations could not be predicted ahead of time, but had to be constantly re-articulated anew. The power of *and* continuing controversy over Twain's novel has much to do with its tendency not to smooth over such vexing complexities and contradictions in US culture, but rather to lay them bare.

## From Invisible Man to "Ballad of a Thin Man": A Coda

I have chosen to focus this dissertation on the nineteenth century, the period in which the freak show emerged as an organized mass cultural form and held the greatest cultural capital. The shows continued, however, in the form of circus sideshows and traveling fairs, until the second World War.<sup>209</sup> The "freak show aesthetic" that I have traced throughout this project--and the imaginative linkages between disability, race, and freakery that it forwarded--continued as well, though in different forms and with different stakes. This coda will briefly highlight some examples of the how black male writers and activists in the twentieth-century invoked the freak show in their cultural productions, suggesting that the mid-century turn to the freak show by the likes of Ralph Ellison and Huey Newton--strange bedfellows in many other regards--brought the counterpublic engagements with the freak show of the nineteenth-century to new heights. At the same time, however, the style of their recourse to freakery has instantiated the contemporary understanding of the freak show as necessarily reinforcing existing power dynamics, a move that has obscured the more unpredictable cultural work of the freak show aesthetic in the previous century.

In the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, during a moment commonly referred to as the "nadir" in American race relations, the literature of racial uplift frequently turned to the language of "handicap" or "disability" to describe the social experience of blackness under the devastating legal and social conditions in the United States. In Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), for example, the character Robert asks Iola's brother, Harry, "Were you aware of the virulence of caste prejudice and the disabilities which surround the coloured people when you cast your lost with

them?" (158). In another moment, the white Dr. Gresham who courts Iola asks an acquaintance, "Don't you think...that we have been too hasty in our judgment of the negro? He has come *handicapped* into life, and is now on trial before the world. But it is not fair to subject him to the same tests that you would a white man. I believe that there are possibilities of growth in the race which we have never comprehended" (176, my emphasis). James D. Corrothers' *In Spite of the Handicap: An Autobiography* (1916) goes further, installing the handicap metaphor in the very title of his work.<sup>210</sup>

At mid-century, however, something of a shift appears to occur, as the language of freakery supersedes that of disability or handicap. At the moment of the freak show's decline as an extant cultural form, in other words, it gained new life as rhetorical trope. Perhaps the most striking example is the often forgotten freak show metaphor that, in fact, structures the entire invisibility conceit of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The prologue begins,

I am invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids--and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me. (3)

While earlier references to blackness as a "handicap" acknowledge the social construction of the meaning of race in America, Ellison's trope is inherently invested in specular dynamics: the kinds of misrepresentation and mis-seeing best captured, for him, by the "distorting" apparati of freak show display. Taking on the figure of the "bodiless head" to concretize the point, Ellison shows that the narrator's social positioning can't be said to derive from any quality of blackness itself, but "simply" because "people refuse to see [him]" (3).

What is interesting to me about this freak show metaphor--lodged at the very beginning of Ellison's masterpiece, and then forgotten by the majority of writers, critics, and activists who have drawn upon the concept of invisibility since--is its indeterminacy. It is not entirely clear from the narrator's description whether the "bodiless head" does, in fact, represent a disabled body, further exaggerated by mirrors that surround him, or whether the entire appearance of non-normativity--a "bodiless head"--is a hoax.<sup>211</sup> The reality of the situation matters less, here, than the reality constructed by the onlookers' gaze. The race of the "bodiless head" is also left uncertain. While it's possible to read a white body into the passage, which would make the exceptional disabilities of the freak show stage a sort of analogue to race in mid-century America, it's also possible that the "bodiless head" represents a black, disabled person--himself the ultimate "invisible man" in Chris Bell's formulation of white disability studies (280). The passage throws readers back onto themselves, opening up several interpretative possibilities that stage the visual processes by which we impose meaning on the bodies of others.<sup>212</sup>

Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton, whose politics were a far cry from Ellison's integrationist stance, similarly drew upon the freak show to comment on the

lived experience of race in mid-century America. As Bobby Seale narrates it in Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton, Newton saw the interaction between the sideshow geek and spectator in Bob Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man" as a perfect description of race relations in America, to the extent that "[t]his song Bobby Dylan was singing became a very big part of that whole publishing operation of the Black Panther paper" (186). Indeed Dylan's "Thin Man," as Seale describes it, became the continual background noise for the production of the Panthers' first print publications.<sup>213</sup> The examples of Ellison and Newton point to the continued resonance of the freak show well over one hundred years after its consolidation as a genre of mass entertainment. They also, however, posit our current common-sense understanding of the freak show as an embarrassingly problematic and passé cultural form. Such utterances, though they do the hugely important work of testifying to the freak show's exploitative nature, threaten to obscure the uncertain meanings it produced. As a form of mass entertainment that put disability and race on display, and yet which was often calculated to inspire in viewers a sense of doubt that what they were seeing was accurate, the freak show's ideological implications were always open to various forms of manipulation.

The examples of Ellison and Newton represent just two illustrations of the many other directions an exploration of the freak show aesthetic in the twentieth-century might take. While Rachel Adams, for example, has unpacked the way freakery intersects with queerness in the work of Carson McCullers, one might also look to how McCullers' work stages freakery with regard to race. Adams focuses her attention on the figure of the Half-Man Half-Woman, arguing that this freak performer represents the binary logic of sexual division that the rest of the text deconstructs. Looking at the role of the so-called "Wild

Nigger" performer, however, reveals how *The Member of the Wedding* posits sexuality to be thoroughly bound up with issues of race and region. A man who is advertised as hailing from a "savage island" but is rumored to actually be a "crazy colored man from Selma," the Wild Nigger embodies the trope of cognitive disability that pervades the text in its frequent repetition of the word "crazy" and its numerous references to the state asylum (3, 6, 20.) With these associations, the text suggests that the structures of society that would allow for such a racist spectacle are the same ones assiduously regulating the boundaries of white femininity so oppressive to the maturing Frankie.

If disability, freakery, and race are connected in this text from the Southern Gothic tradition, they also emerge in the oeuvre of another mid-century white female writer: Willa Cather. The appearance of freakery and disability in two of Cather's novels, My Antonia and Sapphira and the Slave Girl--which were published just two years before the achievement of women's suffrage and twenty years afterward, respectively--enact ambivalences relevant to first-wave feminism's fraught relationship to questions of race. My Antonia features a piano concert by Blind d'Arnault, a character based on the real-life Thomas Wiggins, better known as "Blind Tom," an enslaved musical prodigy who became the first black musician to perform at the White House and who continued to be exhibited by his former owner in freak show-style performances after 1863. If the concert of Blind d'Arnault works as Garland-Thomson would suggest the freak show is supposed to, emphasizing the relative assimilation of the Bohemian immigrant girls who are in the position to consume his performance, this formula breaks down in Sapphira and the Slave Girl, when the white disabled woman's increasing dependence on her "slave girl" literalizes the prosthetic relation between black and white subjectivity. This nexus of

disability, race, and gender in one of Cather's most famous and one of her most maligned novels invites exploration of role of embodiment in constructions of the New Woman, as well as the racial disavowals structuring the campaign for women's enfranchisement in the Jim Crow era.<sup>214</sup>

John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* (1961)--an account of the author's experimental "blackening" through the use of anti-vitiligo drugs and excessive exposure to UV rays, and his subsequent travel through the segregated U.S. passing as black--provides another interesting area in which to trace the connections between freakery, race, and disability in the twentieth-century. Griffin's freakish experiment resonates with the nineteenth-century freak show display of racial category confusion, seen in such exhibits as "The African Albino Family" and "The Leopard Boy." The occasion of *Black Like Me* also presents some provocative echoes of the concerns with authenticity and fraudulence that dogged the reception of the nineteenth-century slave narrative, and which were discussed in Chapter One of this project. Griffin's text might be usefully read alongside "hoaxed" slave narratives from the nineteenth century, such as the 1856 *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, written by the white author Mattie Griffith Browne.

Indeed, the imbrications of disability, freakishness, and race continue at the beginning of the twenty-first century, from news reports that continue to enfreak the black population, to debates about whether *Precious* constitutes socially-aware film or a modern-day freak show, to the disproportionate imprisonment of black Americans that maintains them, as the legal term would have it, in a state of "civil disability."<sup>215</sup> Freakishness is also important to the paradox of the representative versus the exceptional black subject, an issue that has trailed President Obama throughout his campaign and

presidency. As Obama himself said in a statement accompanying the release of his longform birth certificate after years of harassment by the "birther" movement, "We're not going to be able to solve our problems if we get distracted by sideshows and carnival barkers" (Silverlieb). While typical of the contemporary use of the sideshow as a "dead metaphor" to signify the marginal, the unimportant--all that distracts from "the main event" of policy and politics--Obama's language obscures just how central the freak show has been to the history of race in America.

I have chosen to focus on the particular moments my dissertation takes up, however, in order to explore how ideas drawn from the freak show served as vehicles for new formulations of race and disability at key junctures in American racial history: the antebellum era, as the popularity of slave narratives drastically changed the constitution of the literary public sphere; the Civil War, immediately post-Emancipation moment; and the decades of the late-nineteenth century, when the failures of Reconstruction had become apparent. The project has been interested, as well, in tracking the appearance of freakery in a range of genres, from slave narratives to political cartoons, and from newspaper articles to novels. Overall, I have been interested in capturing how racial meaning in the nineteenth-century U.S. relied upon the versions of disability made available on the freak show stage, and the consequences for both categories of embodied social identity. As we have seen, the "de-commodification of the African-American body that accompanies the transformation from chattel to citizenry" was accompanied, as well, by numerous depictions of the thoroughly commodified body of the freak (Wiegman 82). While in some arenas the recourse to freakery was a way of making blackness "freakish"--and therefore external to the disembodied subject posited by the citizenship contract--in

other moments the outcome was far more complicated. While the dominant, white press at midcentury drew on the freak show to forward racially circumscribed visions of the body politic, other texts from U.S. print culture invoked the freak show in less predictably regressive ways: questioning the reliability of visible physical identity, probing the relationship between disability and race, and interrogating the embodied requirements of citizenship. Notes

<sup>1</sup> Garland-Thomson, something of a mother to U.S. freakery studies, has provided an influential model for understanding the power hierarchies that both structured and were reinforced by the freak show, suggesting that the shows' popularity from the Jacksonian through the Progressive eras reflected the audience members' desire to "reaffirm the difference between 'them' and 'us' at a time when immigration, emancipation of the slaves, and female suffrage confounded previously reliable physical indices of status and privilege such as maleness and Western European features" (Extraordinary 65). Her work has addressed, as well, the particular allure of freakery under the conditions of a democratic republic, in which "[f]reaks embodied the threat of individuation running rampant into chaos," so that "the spectator was at once shaken by the limitless possibilities unleashed by the freak's anarchic body and mollified by having his own seeming ordinariness verified and the peril of difference restrained" (*Extraordinary* 66). Adams takes up the freak show's afterlife in twentieth-century movies, literature, photography, and political discourse, arguing that the shows served as a "stage" for many of the nation's "most charged political and social controversies" (2). Adams has tweaked Garland-Thomson's model by pointing to the disruptions inherent in the live performance context, where a performer might talk back to his audience or audience members might unmask a fraudulent exhibit. Finally, Reiss's work has been influential--to this project and to freakery studies as a whole--for suggesting the ways that Joice Heth's exhibition spurned antebellum debates about the constitution of the races and the propriety of

slavery, working closely with newspaper articles on Heth's display to track freakery's important relationship with print culture.

<sup>2</sup> See Ellen Samuels, "A Complication of Complaints': Untangling Disability, Race, and Gender in William and Ellen Craft's 'Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom'" (Fall 2006); Samuels, "Examining Millie and Christine McKoy: Where Enslavement and Enfreakment Meet" (Autumn 2011); Susan Schweik, The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public (2009); Schweik, "Disability Politics and American Literary History: Some Suggestions" (Spring/Summer 2008); and Schweik, "Lomax's Matrix: Disability, Solidarity, and the Black Power of 504" (2011). In the past few years, several review articles and introductions to special journal issues have also addressed the increasing intersection of disability and race studies. See Jennifer C. James and Cynthia Wu, "Editors' Introduction: Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature: Intersections and Interventions" <sup>3</sup> Some scholars have begun to use the term "debility," referring to a wide range of conditions brought about by aging, chronic illness, environmental, or political factors as a more capacious alternative to "disability." See Jasbir Puar, "Prognosis Time: Toward a Geopolitics of Affect, Debility, and Capacity" (2009). While I am more interested in retaining the term disability and acknowledging the uncertainty of its boundaries in different registers (everyday speech, art, the law), I appreciate the move of probing the parameters of disability identity.

<sup>4</sup> During a talk at the University of Virginia in October of 2014, McRuer also discussed the UK's valorization of its Paralympian athletes, even as austerity measures such as the so-called "bedroom tax"--which reduces housing benefits to households found to have

one or more spare bedroom--disproportionately affect families with disabled members. ("Cripping Austerity: Disability, Globalization, and Culture," October 24, 2014.) <sup>5</sup> The impairments McRuer refers to are a host of psychological disorders brought on by confinement. Similarly to McRuer, Alison Kafer, in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, is interested in those moments in which disability identity, as we know it, "fail[s] to hold" (10). <sup>6</sup> Barnum in particular had a flair for casting the freak show as respectable middle-class entertainment. His museum was in operation from 1841 to 1865, when it was destroyed by fire; a short-lived second museum also burned to the ground in 1868. See also Andrea Stulman Dennett, on the "classy" dime museums of the 1880s, an outgrowth of Barnum's museum. For more on the decline of the freak show in the next century, see Rachel Adams' *Sideshow U.S.A.* Adams argues that the freak show fell out favor largely as a result of the medicalization of disability in the early twentieth-century, as well as the ascendance of new technologies of visual mass culture such as cinema.

<sup>7</sup> See also Elizabeth Grosz on freaks as ambiguous beings "whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life" (57).

<sup>8</sup> Barnum's "Woolly Horse" was a horse with curly hair that he claimed combined characteristics of the elephant, deer, horse, buffalo, camel, and sheep (Cook 147). His "Feejee Mermaid," which almost ruined his career when it was unmasked, consisted of a monkey's head and body sutured onto a fish's tail. "Tom Thumb," the basis of the next chapter in this project, was the stage name for Charles Sherwood Stratton, a little person whom Barnum exhibited in the aggrandized mode. While the display of Tom Thumb was not fraudulent to the same extent as the Woolly Horse or the Fejee Mermaid, Barnum

initially lied about Stratton's age and parentage, claiming he was of English birth and adding several years onto his age to exaggerate the effect of his small size.

<sup>9</sup> The editorial further expounds upon its Barnum comparison in the next page: "Mr. Barnum has proved, in the course of his life, that any great merit in the object of a *furor* is not indispensably necessary to the *volitare per ora virum* and the gathering of renown and mammon. A notoriety or celebrity can be improvised, now-a-days--done to order. A lively dinning is kept up for a time in the ears of the people, and then, like bees that come swarming to the music of brass candlesticks, they follow the noise: *et voila tout!*" (210). While critical of Barnum, the article accurately identifies his talent for drumming up interest in his displays. With its reference to "now-a-days," the article also identifies the sort of media event created by Barnum as a peculiarly modern phenomenon.

<sup>10</sup> See Nichols, "Who Read the Slave Narrative?" for numerical data on the circulation of slave narratives.

<sup>11</sup> The debates over the authenticity of slave narratives were in fact another instantiation of the skepticism that has faced the African American literary project from its inception. See Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "Mr. Jefferson and the Trials of Phillis Wheatley" on the authorship trials--literal and figurative--of the first published African American woman. In the case of the nineteenth-century slave narrative, the authenticity concerns dovetailed with a number of important factors: the growth of the print trade; a literary nationalist movement concerned about determining the parameters of American literature; increasing sectional division over the question of slavery; the rise of urbanization, with its concomitant anxieties about correctly "reading" the bodies of strangers; and, as I point out here, the rise of the freak show.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, and William Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography*, 1760-1865.

<sup>13</sup> The classic scholarship on the U.S. freak show often points to 1835 as its origin. See, *e.g.*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's chapter, "The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows, 1835-1940" in Extraordinary Bodies. Leonard Cassuto, too, points out the concurrent emergence of highly visible abolitionism and the freak show: "The freak show entered American society when institutionalized racism became the subject of increased social scrutiny and public debate and the socially constructed barriers separating black from white came under increasing attack" (235). I use this chapter to explore further how this historical "co-incidence" structures nineteenth-century constructions of disability and race, in writing by both white and black authors. For more on the Heth affair, and how responses to Barnum's exhibit catalyzed debates about the institution of slavery, see Reiss's The Showman and the Slave. Reiss's text has been indispensable to this chapter. <sup>14</sup> On the longstanding association between whiteness and literacy and its implications for the reception of African-American literature, see *e.g.* Gates, "Mr. Jefferson and the Trials of Phillis Wheatley." On these category confusions, see Garland-Thomson's introduction to *Freakery*: "Bodies whose forms appeared to transgress rigid social categories such as race, gender, and personhood were particularly good grist for the freak mill...Such hybridity, along with excess and absence, are the threatening organizational principles that constituted freakdom" (5).

<sup>15</sup> For more on so-called "Armless Wonders," and the feats--including writing--that they would perform for audiences, see Bogdan 216-224. Tripp did not perform until later in

the century, but a "Master Sanders K.G. Nellis," probably the first armless person to exhibit himself, made his debut in 1830 (Bogdan 216). The freak show was not the only nineteenth-century site that put the act of writing on display. See Krentz on the exhibitions at the National Institute for the Deaf in Paris, in which the school's hearing director would ask a question that was interpreted into French Sign Language, and Laurent Clerc and Jean Massieu, both deaf men, would "write their replies in French on a chalkboard for all to see" (26). Similarly, thousands of visitors in the 1840s came to the school of Laura Bridgman, who was deaf and blind, to watch her demonstrate the effects of her education. As Jennifer Greiman has noted, the number of visitors for Bridgman approximated those for Barnum's most successful exhibits (163). See also Jordan on the left-handed penmanship contests (though entries were written remotely) organized for the benefit of Union veterans who had lost limbs in the war. While writing exhibitions have thus been used for a variety of purposes--demonstrating the capabilities of a minority group, shoring up patriotism--the freak show versions took the wondrousness of the act of writing to its extreme.

<sup>16</sup> Vernon Loggins echoed this sentiment, in which interest in black writing lies in the successful accomplishment of the task, in the twentieth century: "The social history of the African in America has been such that until the race produces a Pushkin or a Dumas, a creator whose work is of such excellence that his own personality is entirely overshadowed by it, there is going to be *more interest in how a Negro has achieved a certain accomplishment* than in the accomplishment itself. The life of practically every Negro who has achieved distinction in every field of activity has been an evolution filled with drama" (quoted in Nichols 152).

<sup>17</sup> On the language of freakery, see, *e.g.*, Robert Bogdan's list: "'Curiosities,' 'lusus naturae,' 'freaks of nature,' 'rarities,' 'oddities,' 'eccentricities,' 'wonders,' 'marvels,' 'nature's mistakes,' 'strange people,' 'prodigies,' 'monsters,' 'very special people,' and 'freaks' form a partial list. The exact use and definition of these words vary from user to user and from time to time" (6).

<sup>18</sup> Several other genres of writing that circulated at the same moment as the slave narrative might be said to further cast doubt on the authenticity of the narratives, and to contribute to the sense of "fun" or "pleasure" reviewers evince when they make their definitive judgments of authenticity. One genre is the pseudoautobiographies of Jim Crow discussed by Laura Langer Cohen (90). Titles such as *The Life of Jim Crow*, *Showing How He Got His Inspiration as a Poet* (1835), and "A Faithful Account of the Life of Jim Crow, an American Negro Poet" in the songbook, *Jim Crow's Vagaries, Or, Black Flights of Fancy* (1840), made ironic claims to authenticity that arguably further raised the bar for slave narrators. Another genre is the often fictionalized freak biographies and autobiographies that were sold as pamphlets along with many of the performances, and claimed to tell the history of the person being exhibited. While I'm suggesting that the existence of such texts posed problems for African American narrators, I also want to point out the ways that these writers played with themes of authenticity, as well.

<sup>19</sup> With the term "white slave," Coffin's passage also echoes the many Barnum exhibits that staged category confusions between races. Most directly, the white slave echoes Barnum's "African Albino" family: performers who "looked" white but were "actually" black.

<sup>20</sup> I would add that Douglass's use of the phrase "brand new fact" prefigures one of Barnum's most longstanding racial exhibits: the "What Is It?," a character played most consistently by William Henry Johnson, a black man with microcephaly. Barnum advertised the "What Is It?" as a newly discovered, not yet categorized species, which he termed a "nondescript." For more on the "What Is It?," which will reappear in chapter 3 of this project, see Cook's *The Arts of Deception*.

<sup>21</sup> Strategies we might see as fighting *against* enfreakment include the move towards selfpresentation as respectable, middle-class subjects (as in Harriet Jacobs' narrative), as well as the many tactics slave narrators used to prove their honesty and credibility (including using names and dates in their accounts when it was safe to do so). See Ann Fabian on the "demonstrations of sincerity" necessary to winning over white audiences (Cohen 124). I'm interested in those moments when slave narratives don't, in fact, profess respectability or sincerity, but rather play with questions of authenticity and bodily display.

<sup>22</sup> Newspaper descriptions of Clarke's speeches also consistently use the language of spectacle. The *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle*, published in Boston, described the "thrilling account" Clarke related to a Lowell crowd; another issue of the paper described a Milton meeting where "Lewis Clarke of Kentucky then took the desk, and gave a spirited account of some of his own adventures" ("Lewis"; "Milton").

<sup>23</sup> Another interesting aside in Clarke's narrative uses an image of bodily self-possession to suggests the very different meaning that disability holds in the slavery context than under conditions of freedom. Clarke writes, "When I stepped ashore here, I said, sure enough I AM FREE. Good heaven! what a sensation, when it first visits the bosom of a

full grown man--one, born to bondage--one, who had been taught from early infancy, that this was his inevitable lot for life. Not till then, did I dare to cherish for a moment the feeling that one of the limbs of my body, was my own. The slaves often say, when cut in the hand or foot, 'plague on the old foot, or the old hand, it is master's--let him take care of it--Nigger don't care if he never get well.' My hands, my feet, were now my own. But what to do with them was the next question'' (38-39). Clarke suggests here that the enslaved people he knew resignified bodily injury in an act of covert resistance against their masters.

<sup>24</sup> I am echoing here Lennard Davis's formulation that "Disability is not an object—a woman with a cane--but a social process" (2). In another moment of the journey, Clarke and his brother Cyrus end up "limp[ing] badly." In a strange detail, Clarke notes, "A young lady whom we met, noticing that we walked lame, cried out, mocking us, 'O my feet, my feet, how sore" (54). Whether the woman believes they are faking injury or whether she merely wants to relish their pain is unclear; what is clear, however, is that the journey to freedom has entailed, for Clarke, another temporary disability.

<sup>25</sup> On the next page, the Crafts offer up another similar example, relating the story of a white boy who, "at the age of seven, was stolen from his home in Ohio, tanned and stained in such a way that he could not be distinguished from a person of colour, and then sold as a slave in Virginia" (4). The possibility of hoaxed racial identity raised by this anecdote is calculated to cast significant doubt upon readers' confidence in their powers of visual discernment.

<sup>26</sup> The probable authentication in 2013 of *The Bondswoman's Narrative* suggests that the origin point of the African American fictional tradition may definitively shift yet again.

Until 2002, it had been assumed that the pseudonymous author, "Hannah Crafts," was white; after this point, the identity of the author still remained a mystery. Gregg Hecimovich of Winthrop University has recently made the case that the author is Hannah Bond, a former slave from North Carolina (Bosman). As The Bondswoman's Narrative was published some time between 1853 and 1861, Wilson may turn out to have been our nation's *second* published black author. Such distinctions matter less for my argument than Wilson's recuperation as an important author in the African American literary canon, and my desire to place her within the canon of disability writing, as well. <sup>27</sup> Eric Gardner has used the extant copies of *Our Nig* to construct a picture of its early readership, which seems to have consisted of mostly white, middle-class families near Wilson's home in Milford. Many of the books belonged to residents under the age of 21, which suggests that the novel may have been seen as carrying messages of moral improvement for young readers (227). As Gardner also suggests, however, his "research into the publishing history of Our Nig suggests not only that abolitionists knew about the book, but that they may have consciously chosen not to publish it" (227). George C. Rand, who printed the book for the author (rather than publishing it, which implies some publicity and distribution work, as well), had strong abolitionist leanings and had done previous printings for the abolitionist cause; his office, furthermore, was located a mere two blocks from the American Anti-Slavery Society. William Lloyd Garrison Jr., less famous than his father but an abolitionist all the same, is now known to have possessed a copy of Our Nig at the time of his death. While we cannot know whether Garrison Jr. read Wilson's novel, the "Garrison copy does prove, however, that *Our Nig* touched the inner circle of New England white abolitionism" (235). Such details, and the subsequent

lack of promotion of *Our Nig*, suggest the "relatively narrow goals of the white abolitionist movement," aimed at abolishing slavery but declining to address other iterations of racism in the North (Gardner 242).

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer James and Cynthia Wu discuss Wilson's *Our Nig* in their introduction to a 2006 special issue of *MELUS* dedicated to the intersection of race and disability. They write, "Although many critics have examined Wilson's depiction of the torture 'Nig' suffered at the hands of her tormentors, none have explored Wilson's analysis of the black disabled body produced by this violent subjugation," a point which holds true at the time of this writing (8).

<sup>29</sup> This is the view of the freak show captured, for example, in Garland-Thomson's seminal formulation. She argues that the freak show's existence from the Jacksonian through the Progressive eras reflected audience members' desire to "reaffirm the difference between 'them' and 'us' at a time when immigration, emancipation of the slaves, and female suffrage confounded previously reliable physical indices of status and privilege such as maleness and Western European features" (*Extraordinary* 65).
<sup>30</sup> The correspondence between Wilson's text and the slave narrative is great enough, in fact, that until a few months before this writing, the Wikipedia page on *Our Nig* erroneously referred to Wilson as an enslaved writer. Furthermore, we should remember here that while Gates has classified the book as a "novel," many of the elements are factual, as further confirmed by Barbara White's research on the correspondence between the fictional Bellmonts and the Nehemiah Haywards, the family for whom Wilson appears to have labored.

<sup>31</sup> And as Hartman puts it, scenes of violence inflicted upon black bodies reveal the "repressive effects of empathy," in which "the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned [imaginatively] in the place of the blackbody in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible" (19-20). For another example of how depictions of black suffering might erase black subjectivity, see "A Typical Negro" in the July 4, 1863 issue of *Harper's Weekly*. The article includes information and illustrations of a slave, sometimes named Gordon in the many visual depictions of him, who escaped to Union lines. "Gordon's" medical examinations revealed a back covered in a complex web of scars; daguerreotypes of Gordon were printed by the McAllister Brothers of Philadelphia and labeled and circulated under the name "The Scourged Back." Cassandra Jackson has analyzed how depictions of "Gordon" made the singularly wounded black body representative of blackness writ large; titles such as "A Typical Negro" and "The Scourged Back" further this ideological work (33).

<sup>32</sup> In "Universal Design: The Work of Disability in an Age of Globalization," Michael Davidson suggests that the narrative prosthesis model cannot be easily transported to analysis of non-Western literature. If disability tends to work metaphorically in the Western canon, it testifies instead to real historical impairments caused by the ravages of globalization in the works he studies, such as the films of Senegalese filmmaker Jibril Diop Mambety. I offer here another complication to the narrative prosthesis model, suggesting that the term might be used differently than in Mitchell and Snyder's sense when describing writing by minoritarian subjects within the U.S. In the case of Wilson, her entire texts hinges "prosthetically" upon disability, though it functions as a

justification for her critique of U.S. racist labor practices rather than as a metaphor for something more abstract about the human condition.

<sup>33</sup> As the notes to *Our Nig* make clear, "economic hardship and the necessary support of their families were seen as acceptable reasons to [publish writing], while self-expression or the desire to impact public opinion were seen as decidedly unfeminine or unacceptable" (Foreman and Pitts 82 n5).

<sup>34</sup> My point here is consonant with Cynthia Davis's argument in "Speaking the Body's Pain: Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*." Davis suggests that many nineteenth-century black women writers, including Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, chose to respond to racist white constructions of black women's bodies as excessively physical and lascivious by representing themselves "not as physical but as spiritual beings, not as bodies but as souls" (5). In contrast, Wilson--Davis argues--does *not* take the route of countering damaging depictions of black female embodiment by retreating to a state of disembodiedness: "Frado refuses to supplant her definition of herself as a body in pain with the more conventional one of a soul in glory" (6).

<sup>35</sup> See also Ellis's description of Frado's resistance at the woodpile, where she refuses to allow Mrs. Bellmont to hurt her further: "No thrilling chase of runaways ensues, but rather an anticlimactic recognition of uncrossable racist boundaries and how these impinge on attempted resistance: Frado can never strike back at Mrs. B" (113). Cynthia Davis makes a similar point, showing that we are only afforded "glimpses" of Frado's body while she is being tortured by Mrs. Bellmont (15 n3).

<sup>36</sup> See also James and Wu on how *Our Nig* suggests that "the production of black subjectivity and the production of the disabled body are coterminous" (7).

<sup>37</sup> As Foreman and Pitts put it, speaking of the historical Wilson, "[f]or much of her childhood...she was probably the only female 'free colored person' in all of Milford (xxvii). The 1850 census lists Wilson as the only black female living in Milford; there were two black men (Gardner 233).

<sup>38</sup> As a number of scholars have pointed out, the third and first person narrative voices tend to blur near the end of Wilson's novel. While purportedly describing the actions of the fictional character Frado, Wilson's final page asks for aid clearly meant for the historical Wilson herself: "Still an invalid, she asks your sympathy, gentle reader. Refuse not, because some part of her history is unknown, save by the Omniscient God. Enough has been unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid" (72).

<sup>39</sup> For more on Williams' narrative, see Cohen's chapter 3, "'Slavery Never Can Be Represented: James Williams and the Racial Politics of Imposture." In 1854, for example, *London's Anti-Slavery Reporter* printed an article entitled "Colored Lecturers--Caution." The article warned, "We have to caution the public--and especially our antislavery friends--against certain coloured lectures on American Slavery, temperance, and other subjects." The article "strongly recommend[s] our friends, throughout the country, not to give countenance to any individuals professing to be fugitive slaves, unless the latter present some satisfactory recommendations, and can give an account of themselves and the manner in which they reached the country, which will bear investigation" (quoted in *Wilson* 97 n3).

<sup>40</sup> Wilson writes, "A short acquaintance was indeed an objection [to their marriage], but she saw him often, and thought she knew him. He never spoke of his enslavement to her when alone, but she felt that, like her own oppression, it was painful to disturb oftener than was needful" (70).

<sup>41</sup>A few years earlier, another black American-Canadian writer and activist, Mary Shadd Cary, had also invoked the Barnumesque term "humbug" for somewhat similar ends. In an article entitled "The Humbug of Reform" in an 1854 issue of *The Provincial Freeman*, Cary warns that the public is being duped by "the most important movement now engrossing the attention of the people of America: the Abolition question" (quoted in Zackodnik 87). She points to the "humbug connected with this abolition reform," namely, that white abolitionists are not selfless advocates for enslaved African Americans, but in fact have their own interests in mind, including ridding the country of Africans through colonization (quoted in Zackodnik 89).

<sup>42</sup> The full quote reads, "Our 'Helots of the West' are apparently at a premium with the publishers just now; and we have Northern folks as anxious to make money of them, as the Southrons can be, for their lives" (209). See also Cohen on what we can learn from the faked slave narrative of James Williams: "Williams's apparent decision to exchange his status as freeman for that of fugitive slave suggests that there was more cultural (and even financial) capital within the anti-slavery movement in being black and enslaved than in being black and free" (116).

<sup>43</sup> I see this move as in line with Lewis Clarke's description of the green glasses that distort his vision during his escape, but in contradistinction with William and Ellen Crafts' attempt to divorce their bodies from the disability disguise they assumed.
<sup>44</sup> In the case of Wilson's own situation, she ends her narrative by suggesting, "Still an invalid, she asks your sympathy, gentle reader. Refuse not, because some part of her

history is unknown, save by the Omniscient God. Enough has been unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid" (72). Instead of assuring readers that she has told all relevant facts of her story, she encourages readers to act on their partial knowledge. In a world in which authenticity and fraudulence may be difficult, or impossible, to distinguish, she seems to suggest, humility in the face of uncertainty may be the only viable approach. <sup>45</sup> The text of *Our Nig* also includes many references to the idea that people often *prefer* to be deceived, a Barnumesque idea through and through. The references begin in the epigraph to Chapter III, a poem by Eliza Cook, which makes the claim that hope is deceptive mercy: "For if Hope be a star that may lead us astray,/ And 'deceiveth the heart,' as the aged ones preach;/ Yet 'twas Mercy that gave it, to beacon our way,/ Though its halo illumes where it never can reach" (15). Within the plot of the text, Jane's fiancé Henry wants to be deceived; he learns that Jane loves another, but would refuses to hear more. The Bellmonts also practice self-deception in the sense that, upon Mr. and Mrs. Bellmont's sojourn to Baltimore, "Mary was installed housekeeper--in name merely, for Nig was the only moving power in the house" (35). Gates also (if perhaps inadvertently) provides another such example of *Our Nig*'s tendency to trouble the boundary between truth and fiction, noting, in his description of Wilson's adoption of sentimental tropes, that "Our Nig's plot even repeats a few crucial events found in Mattie Griffith's novel, *The Autobiography of a Female Slave*, suggesting more than a passing acquaintance on H.E. Wilson's part with Griffith's book" (xxxix). This intriguing connection between Wilson's text and a fake slave narrative written by a white author further suggests the extent to which Wilson's text appears to have to played with questions of truth and falsity.

<sup>46</sup> See John Ernest's "Economies of Identity in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*," which describes Wilson's "insistence on the book's status as a product in the marketplace" (424). Ironically, while Wilson's text failed to procure an audience that could keep her and her son out of the poor house, she appears to have found success in the other ventures she embarked upon: first, selling hair dye, and later, lecturing as a spiritualist preacher. Known as the "Colored Medium," Wilson would go on to give speeches before audiences of thousands (Foreman and Pitts x).

<sup>47</sup> "Beginning in 1857, two years before the publication of *Our Nig*, her advertisements began appearing in a local New Hampshire paper...In 1860 and 1861, at least 1,500 ads for Mrs. Wilson's hair products appeared in a score of papers across New England and as far south as New Jersey. They ran in nine different papers in New York state alone. In the New York Times, a wholesaler listed more than 4,000 bottles of her products for sale--if the buyer could pay in cash" (Foreman and Flynn).

<sup>48</sup> See Karen Haltunnen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women* for more on the shifting status of products such as make-up and hair dye in the nineteenth century. The 1850s saw an "easing of the sentimental condemnations of cosmetics" for proper, middle class women, as the "cult of sincerity [in dress and appearance] was gradually yielding space in the pages of *Godey Lady's Book* to a new cult of individual style" (160, 159). Even as late as 1863, however, advertisements for skin treatments were encouraging women to "give up rouge and other 'humbugs." "Nothing is worthy of more admiration than skin white as alabaster," the ad suggested. Wilson's advertisements reverse this use of the term "humbug," shifting the question of authenticity from the dye itself to its value ("Ladies!").

<sup>49</sup> For the source of my chapter title, see "The Biggest Little Marriage on Record," *Daily State and Republican Gazette* [Trenton], 14 Feb. 1863: 3. For scholarly accounts of the wedding and of Stratton's show business career more generally, see B. Adams, Bogdan, Chemers, Harris, Merish, Saxon, and Stewart. For Warren's autobiographical manuscript, written in the early years of the twentieth-century published by A.H. Saxon in 1979, see M. Lavinia Magri, *The Autobiography of Mrs. Tom Thumb (Some of My Life* 

*Experiences*). For Barnum's take on the Tom Thumb wedding, see Chapter XXXVIII of his 1889 autobiography: "Mr. and Mrs. General Tom Thumb": 217-228. Saxon makes the claim that "over his lifetime Thumb probably appeared before more spectators than any other performer of the nineteenth century" (155), a quote which helps us to recognize Stratton's central role in nineteenth-century American culture. As this point also makes clear, the freak show, due in large part to Barnum's efforts, had a position in mainstream American culture at this moment that it will cease to have in the later decades. (See, *e.g.*, Reiss 242 on Barnum's "increasingly 'clean'" portrayals of his entertainments, beginning in the 1850s, that marked his engagement with the urban middle class, and B. Adams 115 on the classed "bifurcation" in U.S. museum culture following the 1868 fire at the American Museum.) Mid-nineteenth century America was, as Chemers puts it, a "Golden Age for freaks" (55). As we will see, the shifting status of the freak show affects the ways in which the texts discussed in this dissertation invoke it to uphold or challenge constructions of the American polity.

<sup>50</sup> As this *New York Observer* article explains its hyperbolic claim, "We know of no instance of the kind before where such diminutive and yet perfect specimens of humanity have been joined in wedlock." For a sense of the scale of the Tom Thumb wedding

spectacle, see, *e.g.*, "The Latest Sensation," *The Sun* [Baltimore], 12 Feb. 1863: 1, taking news from the *New York Express*, which claims that the crowd outside the church had swelled to ten thousand by the time the first carriages of invited guests arrived. For other articles that emphasize the transformation of New York City before and during the wedding, see, *e.g.*, "The Loving Lilliputians," *The New York Times*, 11 Feb. 1863: 8: "All the buildings in the vicinity of the church were made subservient to the general curiosity, and not a door, or window, or balcony, which would in the least facilitate view, but was put into practical service...Stages, and all vehicles excepting the carriages which contained invited guests and holders of tickets, were turned off Broadway at Ninth-street below the church, and at Twelfth-street above." See also "The Tom Thumb Wedding," *New York Herald*, 11 Feb. 1863: 1; "Local and Maine News," *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* 5 Feb. 1863: col. C; and "The Lilliputian Wedding--Marriage of Gen. Tom Thumb," *Wisconsin State Register* [Portage] 21 Feb. 1863: col. G.

<sup>51</sup> The February 9, 1863 issue of the *New York Herald* provides an index to this event's ubiquity in the press. Given the longstanding antagonism between Barnum and *Herald* editor James Gordon Bennett (see, *e.g.*, Reiss 37, 113-14), the *Herald* was one of the few New York papers that used the wedding as an opportunity to critique Barnum. However, the very issue that featured a critical article also included a news item on the wedding in its "Operatic and Theatrical" section, an advertisement for photographs of Stratton and Warren, and a classified advertisement from a reader willing to pay forty dollars for tickets to the event, a staggering amount of money given that admission to Barnum's museum at this moment cost twenty-five cents. For this chapter, I looked at over three-

hundred such articles and advertisements on the Tom Thumb wedding that appeared in newspapers throughout the country in the early years of 1863.

<sup>52</sup> For the full text of the Emancipation Proclamation, see

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured\_documents/emancipation\_proclamation/transc ript.html.

<sup>53</sup> I echo here the sentiment of Benjamin Reiss, who states that his "understanding of culture as a field of socially contested meanings is derived largely from the Birmingham school of cultural studies," especially Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,' and that his "conception of the interpenetration of antebellum popular and political realms owes much to Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*"--though my chapter, of course, treats the wartime and not the antebellum moment (228n8).

<sup>54</sup> See, *e.g.*, Chemers, whose discussion of the Tom Thumb wedding is mostly interested in how it draws on and revises ideas about disability, and Merish, who analyzes the largely female crowd that gathered to witness the Tom Thumb wedding in terms of the nineteenth-century's shifting gender and class constructs. Merish provides one exception to the critical silence about race in the Tom Thumb wedding. Merish discusses the racialized dimensions of cuteness--a point that I will take up more fully later in this chapter. However, I also hope to extend her work by considering these dimensions in light of their immediately post-Emancipation, Civil War context.

<sup>55</sup> I am drawing here on the vibrant discourse of "whiteness studies," as deployed in texts such as Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*, Eric Lott's *Love and Theft*, and David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*. This discourse critiques the belief that it "is necessary to talk about race…only when discussing people of color" (Yarbro-Bejarano,

as quoted in Muñoz 10) and recognizes that "whiteness is itself a racial category" (Savage 19). Scholarly texts which have done the important work of considering the intersection of race and disability in the exhibition of non-white freak show performers include Garland-Thomson's discussion of Julia Pastrana, "The Ugliest Woman in the World," in *Extraordinary Bodies*, and Benjamin Reiss's *The Showman and the Slave*, which connects the presentation of Joice Heth, "Washington's nurse," to the nineteenthcentury racial ideologies invoked in the slavery debate.

<sup>56</sup> I use the term "mediation" here in Fredric Jameson's sense, "whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm" (79).

<sup>57</sup> See, *e.g.*, Savage 116 on "the real historical limitations of Lincoln's act" of emancipation.

<sup>58</sup> See, *e.g.*, the section entitled "The Civil War in N.Y.C." on The Lost Museum website: "By the 1860s, New York was the nation's largest city and, with the coming of the Civil War, possibly its most divided...As the city's volunteer militia companies, many composed of Irish and German New Yorkers, marched off to battle the Confederacy, the wartime city was rent with political sympathies toward the South."

<sup>59</sup> Congress passed the Enrollment Act in March of 1863, one month after the Tom Thumb wedding. Because the Strattons continued to tour and receive extensive press coverage for months following the ceremony, reports of the two events frequently existed side by side. Furthermore, conscription was a subject in the press even before the passage of the federal act; the previous year had witnessed an act determining state quotas for military service and authorizing militia drafts for states unable to meet these quotas. The

first Confederate draft, furthermore, passed in March of 1862. For more on the New York City draft riots, see, *e.g.*, "A City Divided: New York and the Civil War" on the Lost Museum website.

<sup>60</sup> The issue of substitution comes to the fore in Barnum's own biography. As Alexander Saxon tells us, Barnum--who was at the time of the draft too old to be in danger of conscription--paid for several volunteers to serve in the Union army (217). Barnum's action, which was meant to suggest his generosity and patriotism, dealt with volunteers rather than draftees; nevertheless, it raises the thorny issue of the substitution of bodies based on class status. Saxon tells us, furthermore, that soldiers sometimes stood guard at Barnum's home following the draft riots, which suggests his awareness of his position as a possible target of working-class violence (217).

<sup>61</sup> For a political cartoon from the 1860s that makes this point quote memorably, see Nudelman 147. As Nudelman discusses, the cartoon spells out "Hemp for traitors, North or South" with what appears to be hanging rope in order to suggest the "indiscriminate nature of state-sponsored execution." Nudelman also helpfully analyzes the spectacularization of state power during the Civil War years. Noting that the Civil War featured an "unprecedented number of [state] executions"--267 in total, and most commonly for the charge of desertion of the army--she also points out that these executions took place in front of large audiences of troops and civilians at a time when public punishment was considered an anachronism. On one occasion, she tells, us an "estimated 25,000 spectators attended the execution of five deserters" (Nudelman 141-2). Images of these executions were reproduced in the illustrated press, so that the spectacle

of state power made itself known even to those who may not have otherwise felt its direct grip (Nudelman 142).

<sup>62</sup> Agamben himself discusses Lincoln in relation to the state of exception; see *State of Exception*, p20-21.

<sup>63</sup> The dynamics associated with Civil War soldiering bring the white male's ambiguous position with respect to the state into particularly clear focus. While, as we will see, black soldiers during the war faced additional forms of discrimination, soldiering in general entailed the sorts of challenges to self-ownership usually associated with chattel slavery. This association was only furthered by the enlistment of ex-slaves in the Union army (Nudelman 134). One potential correspondence between soldiers and slaves was their subjection to punishment, a correspondence that Congress implicitly acknowledged by outlawing whipping as military punishment (Nudelman 10). Another was their subjection to further violence after death, with "the mutilated bodies of soldiers, abandoned on the battlefield or hastily buried in unmarked graves, recall[ing] the indignities inflicted on the corpses of the poor, African and Native Americans, and criminals" in a moment when white middle-class culture placed great emphasis on rituals of burial and mourning (Nudelman 3). Civil War surgeon John Hill Brinton expressed this subjection of the soldier to state power quite clearly when he stated, in response to a soldier who had applied to the Army Medical Museum for the return of a limb lost in battle, "that he had enlisted for the duration of the war and that until the war is over 'the United States Government is entitled to all of you'" (Nudelman 9).

<sup>64</sup> The layout of these newspapers finds a striking analogue in the spatial organization of the American Museum in the 1860s. Even when Charles Stratton did not appear at the

museum in the flesh, the second floor featured a wax figure of "General Tom Thumb" in an adjoining room to "a one-armed Civil War veteran who guessed weight" (Harris 165). The newspaper and the museum thus serve, for me, as intriguing figures for the way the Tom Thumb wedding and the disablements of the Civil War have been treated in studies to date: adjacent to, and yet cordoned off from, each other. I want to suggest, in contrast, that we can more productively see them as linked.

<sup>65</sup> For other examples of references to draft deserters adjacent to reports of the Tom Thumb wedding, see, e.g., the news summary entitled "Things in General" in the October 2, 1863 issue of the *New Hampshire Statesman*, which reports on the estimated value of Stratton's property and on a Boston journal that publishes a list of deserters. See also the February 23 *Chicago Tribune* "War Items" section, which features both a blurb on Lavinia Warren's patriotism and one on the imprisonment of a Pennsylvania captain who was charged with persuading his soldiers to desert "that he might be able to resign on the ground that he had but half a company, and his services were not needed." For an article reporting directly on the Tom Thumb wedding that makes use of the topicality of the desertion issue, see e.g. the February 13, 1863 *Chicago Tribune*, which uses the tonguein-cheek heading "The Defections" to refer to a bishop and sexton who refused to officiate the Thumb wedding ("Nuptials").

<sup>66</sup> On the contradictory status of the slave under U.S. legal codes, see, *e.g.*, Hartman, who speaks of the "anomalous status of the enslaved," who were "legally recognized as human only to the degree that [they were] criminally culpable" (24). Kirk Savage provides the helpful suggestion that Patterson's model of the slave as "a liminal figure, poised on the boundary between society and chaos, between man and animal…perhaps

helps account better for the representation of slavery than for its lived reality," since "in the varied textures of their actual existence slaves were not liminal; they were fully human of course and also part of society, important members of the master's household or of the overall plantation community"(15). Nevertheless, the concept of liminality is useful for me since this chapter treats constructions of race as perpetuated by the mass media; in other words, I am interested precisely in such white racial fantasies. <sup>67</sup> As with white men, former slaves' military service provides one key index to their indeterminate position. Prior to Emancipation, fugitive slaves who escaped to Union territory were considered "contraband of war," a term which reflected their status as chattel even in supposedly non-slaveholding territory (Nudelman 150). With the enactment of the Proclamation, former slaves were purportedly "free" to enlist on their own terms, a move which some saw as an opportunity to assert their self-possession. The first regiment of free black men, the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup>, enlisted in February 1863, the same month as the Tom Thumb wedding, providing what seemed like an opportunity for former slaves to prove their manhood and heroism to the nation (Nudelman 132). As Nudelman and others have pointed out, however, black soldiers continued to face unique forms of oppression as members of the Union army. They were subject to inequalities of pay, disproportionate execution rates, and lack of POW protections, the last of which eventually caused Frederick Douglass to cease his earlier campaign to encourage black enlistment (Nudelman 154, 160). Lincoln's own words convey in startling form the ambiguous status of recently freed slaves, who were now in a position when they might be incorporated into the body politic proper and yet continued to be particularly subject to the grip of state power. Writing in an 1864 letter that Emancipation allowed him to place

"a strong hand upon the colored element" in a moment when the Union seemed likely to lose the war, Lincoln's statement reveals the ways that "from the first, new freedoms for black men entailed 'new forms of compulsion'" (Nudelman 87; 150, citing Ira Berlin, *Freedom's Soldiers*.)

<sup>68</sup> Harper's Weekly, for example, addresses the question of "colored soldiers" in nearly every one of its issues in the early months of 1863. A number of articles on black troops are telling simply for detailing the particular depredations that they faced. "Our Washington Letter" in the February 21, 1863 issue of the *Chicago Tribune*, for example, includes a section entitled "Gen. Foster for Freedom: His Colored Organizations," which reveals that each brigade under the command of this particular general features "black pioneers" who "go in the advance to remove obstructions, to build bridges, and to do other hazardous work for which the greatest bravery and intelligence is required." Despite the laudatory language, this passage shows the extent to which the lives of black soldiers continued to be regarded as of lesser value. In addition, the article reports on other black men in the regiments who are "ostensibly acting as servants to the soldiers, but usually bearing arms, and, in the case of necessity, using them by the side of those whose muskets they clean and whose tents they keep in order." While the article suggests that "the white and black men so related are excellent friends," the relationship depicted here sounds much more in line with the white fantasy of the loyal slave than an equal partnership ("Our Washington"). Similarly, the "City News" section of the November 7, 1863 issue of the New Haven Daily Palladium relays the reports from a "New Haven boy, acting as Captain in a new regiment of colored troops" ("City"). The captain remarks on "the wonderful proficiency of the black troops in the drill. Their well known

aptitude for 'time' and their long accustomed ideas of obedience render the 'school of the soldier' comparatively easy to them and thus they readily fall in with the requirements of soldier life" ("City"). While this letter's implicit suggestion that soldiering is largely a matter of obedience has the possibility to undermine the status of white soldiers, the explicit aim of the passage is to mitigate any heroic associations that might accrue to black troops, representing their military service with stereotypes drawn from the minstrel stage and other white fantasies of slavery.

<sup>69</sup> For background on *Harper's Weekly*, which I will be further analyzing later in this chapter, see *e.g.* John Adler's "Background: *Harper's Weekly*" on the HarpWeek website. Adler writes: "Harper's was aimed at the middle and upper socio-economic classes, and tried not to print anything that it considered unfit for the entire family to read...From its founding in 1857 until the Civil War broke out in April 1861, the publication took a moderate editorial stance on slavery and related volatile issues of the day. It had substantial readership in the South, and wanted to preserve the Union at all costs. Some critics called it 'Harper's Weakly.' *Harper's Weekly* would have preferred William Seward or possibly even Stephen Douglas for president in 1860, and was lukewarm towards Lincoln early in his administration. When war came, however, its editorials embraced Lincoln, preservation of the Union, and the Republican Party." An article in the February 21, 1863 issue, however, was still claiming that the magazine was simply "patriotic" rather than "partisan" ("Lounger").

<sup>70</sup> As Robyn Wiegman has suggested in her analysis of ritualized castration in postbellum lynchings, "if the black male's lack must be corporeally *achieved*, his threat to white

masculine power arises from the frightening possibility of masculine sameness and not simply from a fear of racial difference" (14).

<sup>71</sup> On racial hybridity as freakery, see also R. Adams 106. On freakery as generally connected to various category confusions, see also Grosz 57: "[T]he freak is an *ambiguous* being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life." As we will see, the Strattons and other "perfectly formed" little people were seen as troubling the distinctions of child and adult; they were fully "mature" and "developed" individuals, as nineteenth-century newspapers loved to tout, who were nonetheless the size of children.

<sup>72</sup> See, *e.g.*, the previously discussed "Proclamation by P.T. Barnum" advertisement, which references the "Curious Albino Family" on exhibit.

<sup>73</sup> Lincoln's initial support of a colonization scheme, of course, suggests the anxiety about the proximity of black bodies that lurked behind even much abolitionist rhetoric. See Gates 3 on Lincoln's interest in colonization.

<sup>74</sup> Of course, in emphasizing the sovereign role of Lincoln in bringing about the state of exception under which Emancipation took place, I risk "trivializ[ing] the role of slaves and other African Americans in bringing about their own liberation (Savage 65). Again, however, this strategy seems necessary in a chapter in which I'm largely analyzing white representations of this moment in the mass media.

<sup>75</sup> To be clear, it is not my aim to collapse the positions of white and enslaved Americans, or to diminish in any way the unique depredations of the system of chattel slavery. I am, however, suggesting that ambiguity attached to subject positions on both sides of the color line at this moment.

<sup>76</sup> On the term "nondescript," see Cook, Jr: "For two centuries previously [to Barnum's 'What is It?' exhibit], the word had referred rather to a *lack* of description, a thing or person not *yet* described. Thus, a hitherto unknown but recently discovered species might have been labeled in eighteenth-century scientific discourse as a 'nondescript'--*until* it received official classification...By the first decades of the nineteenth century, however, the word was also taking on a distinct, secondary meaning: the more liminal sense of *resisting* classification, or *straddling* descriptive boundaries" ("Of Men" 147).

<sup>77</sup> If, as Eric Lott suggests, the "chief concern and special ability of cultural studies" is to yield "an understanding of 'historical forms of consciousness and subjectivity"" (11, quoting Richard Johnson), I hope to explore how the largely white, male writers of the dominant news media used the Tom Thumb wedding to assert a transcendent white, male subjectivity that would overpower distinctions of section, politics, and class. On the identity of the news writers, see Reiss 144 (whose discussion of the antebellum moment remains largely relevant here): "What seemed stable beneath the shifting surfaces of the press coverage, though, was a common bond that all the participants--save [Joice Heth]--shared: their whiteness and maleness."

<sup>78</sup> Rachel Adams has helpfully complicated this seminal model by pointing to the disruptions inherent in the live performance context, where a performer might talk back to his audience or audience members might unmask a fraudulent exhibit (163). This point will be taken up further in the next chapter.

<sup>79</sup> The Strattons, in other words, represent an example of the dynamic described by Emily Russell, in which freaks become, unexpectedly, a metaphor for the "proper national body" (28). (Russell's example is the conjoined freak show performers in Mark Twain's

*Those Extraordinary Twins*, a text that will be discussed in the next chapter of this project.) As such, the Strattons provide a complication to Douglas Baynton's otherwise useful model. Baynton, describing the way that disability has been attributed to ex-slaves, women, and immigrants in American citizenship debates, suggests, "When categories of citizenship were questioned, challenged, and disrupted, disability was called on to clarify and define who deserved, and who was deservedly excluded from, citizenship" (33). In the case of the Tom Thumb wedding, these freak show performers become, instead, representatives of those deemed worthy of inclusion on the national family.

<sup>80</sup> I emphasize this point in order to complicate Michael Chemers's interesting claim that Stratton's performances "challeng[ed] some deeply held prejudices about people with disabilities" and therefore "advance the causes of disability activism in measurable ways" (4, 17). Chemers refers to the fact that descriptions of Stratton upended longstanding assumptions that little people had, of necessity, subpar mental functioning, using this fact to suggest that Stratton was "one of the most celebrated *actors* of nineteenth-century America" rather than a mere curiosity (4, my italics). I appreciate Chemers's goal of recuperating the humanity of this freak show performer; as Chemers himself has suggested, in critiquing the oppressive function of the freak show, those of us who study it risk re-enfreaking its participants by portraying them in one-dimensional terms (see, e.g., 131-35). However, the news media's descriptions of the Strattons' intelligence seems more to uphold racial privilege--a point I will discuss shortly--than to dismantle prejudice against little people. In fact, much as Frederick Douglass, according to Benjamin Reiss, was "viewed as a freakish exception to the rule of racial inferiority rather than a representative of his race's potential--akin to a learned pig or dancing bear,"

the Strattons' intelligence *added* to their status as curiosities, rather than detracted from it (85). As a San Francisco Bulletin article from April 24, 1863 states, "Crowds are generally attracted by curiosities. The same or even a greater number of people would have gone out to see a calf with two heads" ("Last Diamond"). A Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper piece from February 21 of the same year refers to Stratton as "a strange freak of nature," revealing that even if Barnum never used this term in his promotional materials, news writers certainly did ("Gen. Tom Thumb: Some Account"). And a June 6 New York Herald ad suggests that Stratton, Warren, and the other little people in their wedding party "are not only the greatest curiosities in the world AS THE SMALLEST OUARTETTE OF HUMANITY...but also INTERESTING AND TALENTED PERFORMERS," their status as curiosities still remaining paramount ("Barnum's"). Furthermore, when detached from descriptions of Stratton himself, references to "Tom Thumb's" small stature were wielded as negative metaphors for a "smallness" of character. An article from the Frederick Douglass paper in the 1850s, for example, says that Stephen Douglas "[i]s falsely called the 'Giant of the West!' And yet this Tom Thumb Titan is not seen Save when he climbs upon a Negro's back" ("Stephen"). Finally, the fact that recuperation of the Strattons' abilities depended, in large part, upon their normative proportions (and their whiteness) did nothing to challenge the stigma against those little people known as "dwarves." If anything, it exacerbated it, as can be seen in an October 28, 1865 Harper's Weekly reference to a Chinese "dwarf, called Chung, who stands but three feet high and is not so wellproportioned a figure as General Tom Thumb" ("Chinese").

<sup>81</sup> The phrase "Marriage in Miniature" appears as a caption for an illustration on page 228 of Barnum's autobiography.

<sup>82</sup> See Bogdan 155 on Barnum's guest list, which was "limited to two thousand." As the newspaper archive indicates, people also sent presents to Lavinia Warren in hopes of receiving an invitation, or posted advertisements offering as much as \$60 for a ticket to the affair. See, *e.g.*, *The Bangor Daily Whig and Courier* of February 13, 1863, and *The New York Herald* of February 9, 1863. Newspaper ads for *carte de visites* of the wedding party capitalized on the fact that most readers wouldn't have had a first-hand experience of the spectacle, stating, for example, that the images "give[] as good an idea of how the little pair looked, as can be obtained" ("Beautiful").

<sup>83</sup> See Saxon 209 on the couple's packed prenuptial levees at the American Museum, and their postnuptial "extensive tours of America and Europe, culminating in a grand trip around the world in 1860-72 that took in the American West, Japan and China, Indonesia, Australia and Tasmania, India and Ceylon, Arabia, Egypt, and Europe again."

<sup>84</sup> Jamison also writes that "[b]y 1860 America boasted the largest circulating daily newspaper in the world, the *New York Herald*, with an average daily press run of 77,000." See also Saxon 75, on an English theatrical manager who visited America in the 1850s and was "amazed to learn that in a country of slightly over 23 million there were nearly 3000 newspapers, whose annual circulation was said to exceed 420 million copies."

<sup>85</sup> For more on the beginnings of the commercial press in the U.S., see Reiss, especially35-41, and Saxton 95-108.

<sup>86</sup> As *Herald* editor James Gordon Bennett described the impact of the telegraph, "[T]he whole nation is impressed with the same idea at the same moment. One feeling and one impulse are thus created and maintained from the center of land to its uttermost extremities" (Nudelman 118). Bennett's quote, which implicitly metaphorizes the nation as a unified body, is interesting given the fact that his paper was one of the few in New York to buck consensus and criticize the Tom Thumb wedding spectacle.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, "Details of Eastern News," *Daily Evening Bulletin* [San Francisco], 24 Jan. 1863: 3, which reprints news from the Bridgeport *Standard*, as does an untitled news blurb on Stratton in the *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot* from January 5. The Baltimore *Sun's* "Latest Sensation" article repeats some elements almost verbatim from a February 11 *Philadelphia Inquirer* piece, though it doesn't attribute them to this (or any) source.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Roach provides an important performance studies critique of the limits of Anderson's model, adding theater to the novel and the newspaper, those forms that Anderson claims are particularly conducive to imagining secular communities. Roach writes, "More intensely than the solitary experience of readership, the provocative spectacle of the theatrical audience summons the idea of nationhood" (74). I hope to bridge these two models by considering textual representations of an event in which embodiment is of the utmost importance, and further, by theorizing that relationship. What, in other words, does it mean for our understanding of disability, of race, and of nationalism to see performers' and spectators' bodies pressed into service as figures for national belonging or exclusion? I also hope to add to Anderson's model my consideration of the white, male news writers behind the disembodied reporter persona.

<sup>89</sup> On the one hand, I'm interested in the textual juxtaposition of the seemingly disparate events of the Proclamation and the wedding, and what effect this juxtaposition might have on readers. On the other hand, as I've suggested, I read these two events as more related than they initially appear. The title of one news summary that includes a postnuptial update on General Tom Thumb wonderfully captures the miscellany of the newspaper: see "Things in General," *New Hampshire Statesman* (Concord), 2 Oct. 1863: col. D.

<sup>90</sup> While this understanding of media may seem common-sense today. Barnum himself had a large role in making these dynamics visible. As Harris says, Barnum was, "in Daniel Boorstin's phrase, the master of the pseudoevent, the planned happening that occurs primarily for the purpose of being reported" (124). For an example of how the media reporting plays out in the case of another famous Barnum exhibition, see Reiss 143: "As dozens of papers announced their sole possession of the 'truth' [about Joice Heth's identity], the story they were investigating increasingly came unstuck from any tangible referent. This, in Jean Baudrillard's view, is one of the central the effects of capitalism on culture: to produce a free-floating system of signs--imitations, copies, counterfeits--that come to constitute their own economy." The reporting on the Tom Thumb wedding features many instances of language that has come "unstuck from any tangible referent." The phrase "the observed of all observers," used the first time I came across it to describe General Burnside, who attended the ceremony, becomes a freefloating reference that attaches itself in other articles to a woman in the crowd with a spectacular hair-do, and even--nonsensically, given that he was the performer and not an

observer at all--to Stratton himself ("The Great Marriage!," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 28 Feb. 1863: 359).

<sup>91</sup> Reiss also points out that the woodcut image of Joice Heth that appeared in the *Herald* was one of the very first images to ever accompany a news story in print--further support for the historical linkages between freakery and "news" (160).

<sup>92</sup> Bluford Adams, Reiss, and Saxon all emphasize the "symbiotic relationship between the newspapers and Barnum's museum" (B. Adams, 87). While Barnum's exhibits provided newspapers with content that increased circulation, newspapers provided Barnum with the necessary publicity. In a letter written a few days before his death, Barnum said, "I am indebted to the press of the United States for almost every dollar I possess and for every success as an amusement manager which I have ever achieved" (Saxon 76). On an earlier occasion he reportedly said, "[Y]es, without printer's ink I should have been no bigger than Tom Thumb" (Saxon 76). "Tom Thumb" himself was first introduced to the American public, decades before his famous wedding, largely through the medium of the newspaper. As Barnum and a young Stratton toured Europe in the 1840s, the *New York Atlas* published a series of letters from Barnum detailing their exploits abroad (see, *e.g.*, B. Adams 11).

<sup>93</sup> If Roach adds a focus on performance to Anderson's discussion of the newspaper and nationalism, these accounts help us to recognize the newspaper's tendency to take on the protocols of live entertainment--the convergence, in other words, of textual and embodied performance. Several authors also point to the blurry line between "news" and "advertisement," a point which adds to the sense that these news editors were working somewhat like literary showmen. On this point, see, *e.g.*, Reiss 37 on the "puff" pieces

that editors often wrote about Barnum's exhibits, and Wicke 59: "Barnum subsequently saw the newspaper as a pure instrument of promotion, because he made no invidious distinction between 'news' and 'ads.""

<sup>94</sup> On the differences between so-called "dwarfs" and "midgets," see also Harris 49. Some of the news articles do use the term "dwarf" when discussing Stratton or Warren, but their descriptions tend to align with the qualities attached at this moment to "midgets," suggesting that a distinction between the two concepts remained even as the terms became scrambled.

<sup>95</sup> If the war produced many disabled veterans, it also, of course, led to large numbers of war dead, and their contorted bodies were on display for the American public in unprecedented fashion in the fall of 1862. As Nudelman discusses, Alexander Gardner, assisted by James Gibson, photographed the aftermath of the battle of Antietam, creating what were some of the first known images of dead soldiers. These images, which represented corpses in various positions of contortion and disarray, "reached a Northern public quickly: within a month they were exhibited in Mathew Brady's New York gallery and reproduced in Harper's Weekly" (106).

<sup>96</sup> This reading, I'd point out, is more in line with the way that Barnum himself worked references to the war into his own American Museum programming and advertising. Rather than avoiding the war altogether, Barnum worked elements of it into his exhibits, thus allowing the exhibits themselves to stand as antidotes to wartime privations. One such example can be found in an August 14, 1862 puff appearing in the *New York Evangelist*, which reads: "[N]ow in consideration of its being war times, and a scarcity of small change, the public can, for the same admission fee, view *both* of these little

prodigies," referring here to Stratton and to Nutt ("Barnum's Museum"). Another example is the wax figure of Jefferson Davis in the petticoats he was supposedly captured in while attempting escape that Barnum erected in his Museum (Saxon 217). <sup>97</sup> In this way, the Strattons might be seen as doing similar work to the postbellum "common soldier statues" analyzed by Savage. Savage refers to the statues as "realistic effigy[ies]" (248n1); however, as Savage points out elsewhere, in depicting the "intact and vigorous white male body," the statues erase the disabled veteran from view (164). As such, the statues reflect a fantasy of universal able-bodiedness more than they serve as representative depictions of the veteran population.

<sup>98</sup> For a similar example, see the *Chicago Tribune* piece on the wedding party's postnuptial tour. The *Tribune* writes, "Little Major Gen. Tom Thumb, with his wife, the elfin Minnie Warren, and Commodore Nutt, being the rank and file of the Lilliput army, opened their campaign at Bryan Hall, yesterday. Of course everybody and his children will visit the camp," describing their exhibition with tongue-in-cheek military terms ("Amusements"). Another little person performer, surprisingly absent in chronicles of the freak show, makes an even more explicit connection between the aggrandized title of "General" and actual Civil War generals. A *New York Times* advertisement from February, 1864 makes reference to a "dwarf" who goes by the name of General Grant, Jr. ("Classified").

<sup>99</sup> See also "Tom Thumb's Marriage," *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, 12 Feb. 1863: col B, which makes a tongue-in-cheek reference to the war with the following (true) account: "The *Post* says, 'the President and Mrs. Lincoln, with various members of their Cabinet, were unable to accept the invitation tendered to them. It is said that important business at

Washington detained them." On the role of humor more generally during the U.S. Civil War, see Grinspan, "Laugh During Wartime." Interestingly, while my chapter focuses on the representation of the Strattons in the dominant (read: white) press, a short story from the African American paper *The Christian Recorder* uses a reference to "General Tom Thumb" in a similar way. The story features a precocious fourteen-year-old boy, Augustus, who talks about "the temptation 'a fellow' had to volunteer." Augustus's friend Dick laughs and responds, "Yes, Gus, you might volunteer under General Tom Thumb," thus converting a reference to young male enlistment into a topical witticism ("Conceit").

<sup>100</sup> For more on this see, *e.g.*, Lineberry, "The Boys of War": "With hopes of adventure and glory, tens of thousands of boys under age 18 answered the call of the Civil War, many of them rushing to join Union and Confederate troops in the earliest days of battle."
<sup>101</sup> See the advertisement on p.7 of the June 25, 1863 *New York Times*. See also Saxon 126 on this custom of inviting children on stage next to Stratton.

<sup>102</sup> I say "supposedly" because, while Saxon does not mention this aspect of the Hendershot story, the main facts of his tale remain in dispute. See, *e.g.*, "America's Civil War: Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock," which discusses "the young man's propensity for self-promotion and exaggeration" and the controversy surrounding his claims to heroism.

<sup>103</sup> For an image of Hendershot, see "The Boys of War" and the associated "Far From Home" slideshow. For an image of Stratton in his Napoleon costume with miniature sword, see the photographs in Saxon following page 210. Interestingly, my modern-day sources on these drummer boys tend to emphasize their youth and smallness by listing

their exact measurements, thus following in the footsteps of standard nineteenth-century freak show advertising of little people. For example, the "America's Civil War" piece tells us that "[w]hen he enlisted, Hendershot was a slight-framed boy, 4 1/2 feet tall, with fair hair, hazel eyes and a ruddy complexion."

<sup>104</sup> On the question of affective registers, see Merish 191. Merish suggests that in the case of both the Tom Thumb wedding and Shirley Temple's celebrity, "cuteness derived from the merger of two different representational modes (and their corollary emotional structures): the mock heroic, in which the pretensions of the 'low' were satirically mocked; and the sentimental, in which the powerless were sympathized with and pitied." Strattons' public persona, I'm suggesting, partook of the sentimentalism associated with child soldier exhibits, while also lightening that sentimentalism with farce.

<sup>105</sup> See Savage for more on how the "pioneers of the modern concept of race" drew on classical sculpture as the "benchmark of whiteness" against which they posited the inferiority of the darker races (9, 11). What Savage concludes of sculpture more broadly I suggest is also true of the display and description of the Strattons: "Race was not always discussed but it was always there, at the most basic level of visual representation, the human body" (209). For more on the body stocking, see Chemers 48, who explains that it was "colored to suggest nudity by matching his skin tone." In addition to conceiving of the body stocking routine, Barnum touted Stratton as "symmetrical as an Apollo" (Saxon 123), a phrase that gets picked up in some of the news reporting: see "Gen. Tom Thumb: Some Account of Him," 21 Feb. 1863, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* [New York]: 343. For a similar description of Warren, see the ad in the January 5, 1863 *New York Times* which states that "her bust would be a study for a sculptor" ("Barnum's"). It

is important to note here that while many Tom Thumb exhibitions did partake of the mock-heroic (Merish 191), the body stocking routine seems to have been genuinely designed to show off Stratton's beauty of form, since the routine was cut in later years once Stratton had gained a significant amount of weight (Saxon, "Introduction" 11). Interestingly, then, while racist popular culture posited the "infamous propensity of the Negro for mimicry and imitation," Stratton's imitations of ancient Grecian statues ultimately emphasized not the gap between him and these normatively sized figures, but his successful approximation of them (Hartman 41).

<sup>106</sup> See Chemers 39 on the "growing prejudice" at this moment that little people had mental powers in direct proportion to their brain size, a prejudice that owes much to phrenological thinking. Given these assumptions, "most dwarf performers of the day presented themselves as idiots or savages" (Chemers 40). On the linkage of supposed brain size with mental functioning in phrenology, see *e.g.* Reiss 197 and Savage 219n20. My analysis here of the Strattons' size in relation to racial ideologies is also indebted to Lori Merish, who has usefully emphasized "the construction of cuteness as an aesthetic value that constitutes a marker of racial distinction" (186).

<sup>107</sup> For the (detailed) treatment of the Strattons in the *American Phrenological Journal*, see the previously mentioned articles: "Bantam Men," and "A Bantam Woman: Lavinia Warren." For an example of how phrenological discourse permeated the general news reports on the Strattons, see, *e.g.*, "Mr. Charles S. Stratton (Tom Thumb) and Wife at the White House," an article in Washington, D.C. *Daily National Republican*, which describes Warren as having "a well-developed head" and an "intelligent face." For an example of the way in which Barnum inventively reversed the terms of phrenological

discourse, see the aforementioned "Proclamation" ads, which announce of the Strattons that "elegance and grace are combined in them in inverse ratio to their physical proportions." Similarly, the phrenological account that appeared in Stratton's official promotional pamphlet touted his "large imitation," which "gives him the power to do what he sees done" (*Sketch of the Life of Charles S. Stratton*, quoted in Harris 94). A *New York Herald* ad from January 1863 makes some less explicit but notable connections between bodily form and race, stating "Nature's miniatures often, fair lady, I've seen; but ne'er saw one before from all blemishes free" ("Barnum's"). While "blemishes" here refers to deformity, it also carries racialized overtones of a taint or stain, which become even more apparent in conjunction with the racial exhibits--the Albino family and the "What is It?"--also advertised here.

<sup>108</sup> Susan Stewart has made this link between size and class ideology, considering "the miniature" in various senses--including the children's reenactments of the Tom Thumb wedding that I will take up at the end of this chapter--as a "metaphor for the interior space and time of the bourgeois subject" (xii).

<sup>109</sup> As another ad in the *New York Tribune* puts it, the Strattons are a "happy combination of MANLY DIGNITY AND FEMININE SWEETNESS" ("Barnum's").

<sup>110</sup> *The New York Times*, similarly, describes the Strattons' behavior during the wedding ceremony as "quiet, modest, and proper." The *Times* reporter also uses the term "tasteful" twice to describe Warren's dress, while also emphasizing his own middle-class self-restraint with the assertion that "Queen Lavinia appeared, *soberly speaking*, to great advantage" ("Loving Lilliputians," my italics).

<sup>111</sup> An ad by Barnum in the January 5<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Times* also manages to reconfigure Warren's public levees as proof that she is industrious without being overly avaricious. The ad boasts that Warren appears every day and evening, a "GRAND TRIUMPH OF ENERGY AND PERSEVERENCE," and that she refused Barnum's offer of more money to delay the wedding and continue her pre-nuptial American Museum appearances ("Barnum's"). The belabored references to the Strattons' industry contrast with the representations of recently freed slaves in many of the news articles surveyed. Directly under the cover story on the Strattons in *Harper's Weekly*, for example, is an article entitled "Slaves in Louisiana" which states, "Major General is beginning to realize some of the practical difficulties which beset emancipation...As might have been expected from suddenly freed slaves, they evince a remarkable disinclination to work," which the writer suggests might cause the loss of the Louisiana sugar crop.

<sup>112</sup> For more on the Strattons' fulfillment of middle-class gender roles, see, for example, the *New York Times's* report that Lavinia was taught to be a good housekeeper and also knows fancy work, concluding that she is "an accomplished lady--intelligent, pleasant, modest, and agreeable" ("Loving Lilliputians"), or the *Pittsfield Sun's* description of how Stratton, witnessed at a restaurant, reached up to the counter and paid his bill "just like any other man" ("News"). If the Strattons' exhibition is working in contradistinction to those freak show exhibits that posit racial hybridity or ambiguity, it is also working in contrast to the freak show exhibits that confound gender binaries. See, for example, the May 8, 1863 *New York Herald* ad which invites readers to view the "perfect" specimens of the Tom Thumb wedding party, as well as a so-called bearded lady ("Barnum's").

<sup>113</sup> On such mutual reinforcement of identity categories, see, for example, B. Adams 43 on how the mid-century middle-class's "nascent sense of itself depended largely on its gender conventions," and Kaplan 19 on how "the ideology of separate gendered spheres reinforced the effort to separate races by rendering freed black slaves as foreign to the nation."

<sup>114</sup> On Stratton's entrance into show business, see Cook, Jr.: "Both [Joice] Heth and Thumb were similarly 'sold' into their roles as professional entertainers" ("Of Men" 144), as well as Harris 50 and Saxon 124.

<sup>115</sup> See also the quips by Maine's *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, which uses puns on Stratton's size to reconfigure his value into assertions of his self-possession, or property in himself: "Tom Thumb has an insurance upon his life, and that of Mrs. Thumb, amounting to \$50,000. A high valuation upon small property"; and "Tom is worth \$250,000, which made a very big man of him" ("Tom Thumb has an insurance…" ; "Local and Other Items"). In the case of Warren, her lineage, in addition to her visible physical form and her behavior, was called upon to "prove" her racial distinction. Warren had ancestors who first came to America on the Mayflower, and, others who fought in the Revolutionary War (Bogdan 153). As a *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* article put it, "We ought to mention that Miss Warren is a lineal descendant of the heroic Gen. Warren, who fell at Bunker's Hill," thus securing her native, American whiteness ("Miss Lavinia").

<sup>116</sup> See also Savage 219n25 on slaveholders' tactic of assigning slaves lofty names such as the names of Greek gods in "a parodic inversion of the racial construct."

<sup>117</sup> Further, Bluford Adams points out that "[i]n the scene following the death of Dred, however, Tom Thumb dropped his role--and his trousers--to perform his famous Grecian Statues routine" (142). Stratton's act of "blacking up" was thus quickly supplanted with one of the very routines meant to display his bodily aesthetic superiority.

<sup>118</sup> A different example of the way in which the Strattons were able to overcome the potentially racializing associations of their size occurs with regard to the term "pigmy" or "pygmy." A term that was used most commonly by Western social science and popular culture to describe groups in Africa or Asia (Stewart 109), it seems evacuated of its racial connotations in the reporting on the Strattons; it tends to be used here when it would make for pleasing consonance, as in "the pigmy pair" ("Loving Lilliputians"). If we compare Stratton and Warren's freak show presentation with that of non-white, cognitively disabled, and/or non-proportional little people, their relation to questions of race becomes even more apparent. While the Strattons were often referred to as "Lilliputians" in the media, the previous decade saw the exhibition of the "Aztec Lilliputians," also known as the "Aztec Children" or the "Aztec Twins," who became the subjects of a failed wedding spectacle in London a few years after the Tom Thumb wedding (see e.g. Bogdan 130-31). Maximo and Bartola Espina were a brother and sister from St. Salvador whose mother was tricked into handing them over to Spanish trader who promised to cure them (Bogdan 127-8). They were of short stature and had microcephaly, and as with several cognitively disabled exhibits, they were advertised as belonging to a "lost race." An account of the "Aztec twins" by Horace Greeley that is reprinted in the *Frederick Douglass Paper* begins, tellingly, by having to assert their very humanity: "That they are human beings, though of a low grade morally

and intellectually, as well as diminutive physically, there can be no doubt" ("Aztec"). If the Strattons are seen as combining adult qualities of sophistication and civilization with childlike size and appearance, it is the Espinas' abilities and behavior that are compared to children's: "Idiotic they are not; but their intellect and language are those of children of three or four years, to whom their gait also assimilates them" ("Aztec"). Further, whereas the Strattons are seen as proper subjects of interest to white, middle-class adults--not to mention famous personages such as Generals and presidents--the "Aztec Twins" are seen as appealing specifically to children and ethnologists: "To the moralist, the student, the physiologist, they are subjects deserving of careful scrutiny and thoughtful observation; while to those whose highest motive is the gratification of curiosity, but especially to children, they must be the objects of vivid interest" ("Aztec").

<sup>119</sup> Harris does not clarify the newspaper's or his own use of the term "race," and it seems likely that the overt meaning is simply something like "mankind." Savage's exegesis of the term is helpful here, however: "The term 'race' was (and still is) used loosely, with a variety of meanings. Ambiguity and contradiction were inevitable since the concept embraced both biological and nonbiological characteristics, the bodily and the spiritual. Sometimes the term could even be used to describe a people or a nationality with no common physical characteristics (e.g., Americans), but I would argue that even in this case the appeal to the concept of race implied a certain bodily conformation (whiteness, to be sure)" (217n8). If anything, then, the ambiguity is instructive for the way that it collapses the idea of humanity with whiteness, so that the white "race" *becomes* mankind. <sup>120</sup> The *Harper's Weekly* issue featuring the Strattons on its cover, for example, features "The Soldier's Farewell"--a poem from a dying soldier--who, incidentally, has lost his

arm--to his wife, while a poem from a dying soldier to his mother sits next to an almost full-page article on the Tom Thumb wedding in the February 21, 1863 *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. The "Fortune Teller" section of the *American Phrenological Journal* states, "The man born in the month of June will be of small stature (a Tom Thumb?) and fond of children. The lady will marry young (i.e. if she can. *But suppose the young men are all gone to the war?*)" ("More"). *Godey's Lady's Book* suggests that the "curiosity" inspired by a young widow is akin to that inspired by a Tom Thumb, a bearded lady, or a five-legged sheep, representing the combination of youth and widowhood as a freakish contradiction of terms brought about by the war ("Widows"). <sup>121</sup> See also Stewart 117, on the middle-class associations of marriage: "Of all bourgeois rituals, [marriage] is the most significant, the most emblematic of class relations."

<sup>122</sup> In her discussion of imperialism and antebellum American culture, Amy Kaplan has similarly pointed to "the double meaning of 'domestic' as both the space of the nation and of the familial household" (18). This confluence of meaning suggests the way in which the domestic space implied in marriage can come to stand in for and delimit the imagined national space. As Kaplan goes on to say, the term also carries within it the sense of an active "process of domestication," which determines who is deemed as belonging to this space: "domestication implies that the home contains within itself those wild or foreign elements that must be tamed" (25-6). If Kaplan is thus interested in "how the concept of domesticity made the nation into home at a time when its geopolitical borders were expanding rapidly through violent confrontations with Mexicans and Native Americans," I'm interested in this chapter in how the Tom Thumb wedding draws on and solidifies this concept of nation of as a "home delimited by race" at a time when the

nation is figured as sundered or in disarray, and when its future constitution is uncertain (26, 40).

<sup>123</sup> See, *e.g.*, Reiss 166 on the "common expression of working-class resentment of abolitionist activity cast in sexual terms."

<sup>124</sup> The newspapers' emphasis on the Strattons' contractual agency is all the more important here given the speculation by some sources about Barnum's role in the love match. The *New York Times*, for example, goes out of its way to suggest that Stratton's affection for Warren was real--in other words, that his proposal was not coerced by the showman. Insisting that the spectacular nature of the nuptials augments rather than makes suspect the authenticity of Stratton's feelings, the *Times* claims that "he did just as any other man would do, with the possible exception that his admiration was an all-time affair, public as well as private" ("Loving Lilliputians").

<sup>125</sup> Comparing the Strattons' portrayal with the depiction of recently freed slaves in *Harper's* is particularly instructive. In the cover image for the February 21 issue, Stratton and Warren appear as model domestic subjects: they are posing calmly, in their wedding attire, in an ornate indoor setting that appears to be inside the church itself, thus lending the aura of religious sanction to the scene. In contrast, the next image to appear--entitled "The Effects of the Proclamation--Freed Negroes Coming Into Our Lines at Newbern, North Carolina"--depicts a disorderly looking crew of black men, women, and children (116). Far from appearing in a domestic setting, they are depicted in the liminal space of the road, lending support to the notion that the "capacity for domesticity" is an "innate defining characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Kaplan 39). Paradoxically, while the Tom Thumb wedding reporting draws on the spectacular nature of the affair to reinforce

the superiority of whiteness, *Harper's* image of the ex-slaves and the accompanying story repeatedly undercuts the possibility that recently freed ex-slaves might be capable contractual subjects by figuring Emancipation in the terms of spectacle. The illustration makes use of stock figures from the minstrel stage: a black "dandy," in top hat, bowtie, and vest marches with what appears to be a farm implement, while others, in caps and overalls, lounge by the side of the road. Neither "type" looks very promising as a soldier, thus converting Emancipation's challenge to white supremacy into a "humorous" depiction of the nuisance of having to try to incorporate this rag-tag army of ineffectual men into the fold. The associated narrative--consisting mostly of a letter from the amateur artist responsible for the sketch-- engages its subjects only in aesthetic (or, rather, antiaesthetic) terms: they are a "very interesting procession" who appeared to the regiment in "every imaginable style." In doing so, *Harper's* again masks the real threat to white supremacy by making these ex-slaves into unwitting performers for the reading public. At work here, in other words, is something akin to what José Muñoz has termed the "burden of liveness," in which minoritarian subjects are expected to perform rather than to claim political and civil rights (182). Saidiya Hartman's work on the "terror" to be found in those instances in which slaves were made to sing and dance for their masters is also relevant here, as *Harper's* places its entire readership in the position to bemused by the supposed antics of these recently free slaves (4). This short Harper's piece, in other words, attempts to convert the citizen's passivity in the face of Lincoln's Emancipation decision into the power-laden position of the distant, disembodied spectator--one who can digest the nation's massive political upheavals in the form of a comforting spectacle of black buffoonery.

<sup>126</sup> Agamben "calls into question every theory of the contractual origin of state power" by proposing that the state of exception or ban, and not the contract, is actually what structures the relationship between the state and its citizens (*Homo* 181). The idea of the contract nevertheless retains imaginative power as a way of thinking about this relationship, and the Tom Thumb wedding is a dramatic example of the way in which marriage, as a figure for the social contract, does the ideological work of portraying it as uniformly consensual, positive, and protective.

<sup>127</sup> A New York Times advertisement from January 5 1863 makes clear that Warren was first exhibited as part of a pair with "Commodore Nutt": "[A] perfect model woman, with as sweet a face as ever smiled upon a sighing swain...will be exhibited with Commodore Nutt, making THE SMALLEST PAIR of human beings ever seen on the face of the globe" ("Barnum's"). Even before Stratton was in the picture, then, Barnum was invested in exhibiting little people as a couple--any two, in a sense, would do, as long as they could be figured as symmetrical. Unlike another popular freak show trend of advertising the marriages--sometimes real, often not--of "opposites such as the "skeleton man" and the "fat lady," a stunt meant to inspire curiosity about such disproportionate spouses, the Tom Thumb wedding was thus orchestrated to emphasize the proportionality of the pair. As such, not only were Stratton and Warren's individual bodies seen as paragons of perfection and symmetry, but the two parties to the marriage also reflected such symmetry in their relationship to each other. Barnum also extended this emphasis on symmetry to the entire wedding party tableaux; he is said to have "suggested" Nutt and Minnie Warren as the members of the wedding party in order to have a perfect quartet of little people (see *e.g.* Bogdan 154). News reporters took the bait, frequently, as in the

*Hartford Daily Courant* article from February 12, 1863, predicting that Nutt and the younger Warren would be the next to "make a match of it," predictions which furthered the emphasis on proportional pairs ("Big").

<sup>128</sup> A *Chicago Tribune* article reporting on a new pair of little people exhibiting themselves at the American Museum in the year following the Tom Thumb wedding makes this link explicit. The article states of the rumors of the couple's impending engagement: "The public need not bother themselves about it except to offer congratulations, for it is in accordance with the fitness of things that these diminutive people marry" ("Marriage in High Life").

<sup>129</sup> Merish reads the reference to "smiling twins" as a "curtailment of desire" in the Strattons' portrayal (195). However, given the same article's investment depicting Stratton as a sort of lady-killer, this reference seems to me more about suggesting homogeneity in a marital relationship than about evacuating sexuality.

<sup>130</sup> See Cott 99 on the fact that more laws "criminalizing marriage across the color line...were passed during the Civil War and Reconstruction than in any comparably short period." Notably, it was in 1863 that a new term for "amalgamation" emerged: "In 1863 enemies of the Republican Party coined the word 'miscegenation,' meaning mixing of species, to brand the practice" (Cott 98).

<sup>131</sup> I suggested earlier that the Strattons' portrayal as "display piece[s] of the race" positions them as representatives of a fantasized body politic (Harris 51). Susan Stewart's descriptions of the way the wedding tableaux suggests a bounded totality adds further resonances to the Strattons' role as stand-ins for the national family. (See Stewart 48 on the tableaux as "spatial closure" and the "complete filling out of 'point of view.") In this

vision of the nation-space, any non-white elements are banished entirely from the scene-a powerful symbolic commentary on national belonging.

<sup>132</sup> When their supposed offspring reached the age when they could no longer maintain the hoax, Barnum announced, in a typically outrageous charade, that the child had "died of an inflammation of the brain" (Bogdan 157).

<sup>133</sup> See the *American Phrenological Journal* article entitled "Bantam Men," in which the author is preoccupied with determining how it is that full grown people produce those of small stature, including positing maternal impression theories. Stratton, the article muses, "was descended form well-formed, intelligent, and healthy parents."

<sup>134</sup> A number of papers, including Kansas's *Freedom's Champion*, printed the following quip on size: "A cute lawyer has started the grave question whether, in case children should be born to Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb, they can legally inherit property from the parents, because of the legal Latin maxim, *de minimus non curator lex*, which being interpreted, 'the law makes no notice of small things'" ("A cute lawyer..."). While meant merely as a joke, this frequently reprinted statement raises issues of property and reproduction at a moment that saw the rise of anti-miscegenation laws in the wake of emancipation.

<sup>135</sup> Interestingly, at least one Southern paper, clearly critical of the Strattons' celebrity status, seems skeptical that this baby is, in fact, of similarly small stature. South Carolina's *Edgefield Advertiser* writes on September 28, 1864, "Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb have got a baby--a real, genuine chip off the old blocks, and three months old at that! Those who have seen the 'blessed brat' describe it as neither a world's wonder nor a world's fright, but a little, cunning, crying doll of a thing, and in no respect peculiar or

remarkable, except in the promise it gives of being a full-sized child, and, if it lives, of becoming as big again as either of its immediate ancestors" ("Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb have got..."). Such skeptical accounts of the Tom Thumb affair will be addressed in the later portion of this chapter.

<sup>136</sup> On polygenetic thinking in America, see B. Adams 155; on the application of Darwin's theory to race, see Chemers 60.

<sup>137</sup> This function of the Tom Thumb baby can be seen in a *Frank Leslie's* article from February 28th. The humor is somewhat strange, but it draws on the nursery as a symbol of perpetuity: "What such little things want to get married for puzzles us extremely. One would suppose there was hardly enough of them to last more than a year or two at most, and here we find them making preparations which will surely lead to a well-furnished house, a billiard room, nursery, and so on" ("Idler"). Some other elements of the Tom Thumb spectacle besides the fake baby stunt, worked, similarly, to gesture towards the future. News articles and ads that proclaimed "We shall never see their like again!" manufactured a sense of nostalgia before the wedding even had time to fade from the press coverage, and in doing so implicitly imagined the future moment from which such nostalgia might (continue to) emanate. Similarly, the fact that Mathew Brady took photos of the Strattons in their wedding costumes well *before* the actual wedding, so that the *carte de visites* could be sold on the actual day, saturated the event with a sort of proleptic nostalgia (Kunhardt 168; on the nostalgia of the souvenir, see Stewart 135). Still other elements of the Tom Thumb wedding seeming to displace the linear unfolding of time altogether in favor of a mythic timelessness. The very name "Tom Thumb," as Susan Stewart tells us, has a long genealogy in narrative, first appearing in print in a sixteenth-

century text on witchcraft, and also in tales of King Arthur's court, where Tom Thumb was the name given to a diminutive knight (46). The appellation "Lilliputians" frequently assigned to the Strattons in the press coverage further links them to a fictional realm outside lived historical time. This comes through in a *Frank Leslie's* article from February 28, 1863, in which the writer says of watching the wedding ceremony: "[W]e expected that the good fairy would appear and with a wave of her wand send them scampering with Cinderella's carriage rolling at their heels...When the ceremony was over we rushed to the door, to see the little bridegroom and bride and the lesser bridesmaid and groomsman pass, and we exclaimed in the enthusiasm of the moment, 'Surely we are in Lilliput!'" ("Idler"). Stewart suggests, in fact, that the miniature has a longstanding association with the fairy world, which itself is seen as ruled by "a type of transcendent time which negates change and the flux of lived reality" (65)--the same sort of confusion of linear time which we might see in the Strattons' presentation as adults who look like children.

<sup>138</sup> Warren's autobiography, in fact, paints quite a different picture. While Warren says relatively little about her day-to-day life as Stratton's wife, devoting much more of her text to descriptions of their exhibitions and travels, what she does say tends to paint Stratton as somewhat naïve and ineffectual--certainly not in charge of all aspects of their relationship. Warren gives an account, for example, of an instance in which Stratton is completely unaware that they've become the targets of an intended robbery: "The General was always exceedingly careless of money or jewels. I never quite decided whether it was because he'd always had someone to look out for him or whether it was an

inherent quality of the masculine mind. Later experiences incline me to the latter opinion (Magri 167).

<sup>139</sup> In keeping with the idea that Warren is being passed from Barnum's control to Stratton's, a number of papers forward the idea--which likely started as a marketing ploy by Barnum to draw crowds to the Strattons' pre-nuptial appearances--that "[t]hose who would see this wonderful woman must go this week, after which she will become private property" ("Idler"). In this instance, Warren's role as a freak show performer thwarts the traditional gender expectations associated with marriage, as Lavinia continued in her role as a public performer long after her marriage to Stratton. A number of other articles seem to inadvertently index the gendered power relations of marriage in the course of reporting on the Tom Thumb wedding. The New York Times wrote in January of 1863 that "[t]he envoy of Gen. Tom Thumb has returned with the joyful information that Miss Warren's kind parents have consented" to their engagement ("Tom Thumb's Courtship"). While many of the articles mentioned earlier portray marriage as the willing union of two consensual subjects, such references remind us that in the case of Warren, it is her parents' consent that is truly operable. Similarly, a *Chicago Tribune* article from 1864 reporting on the Tom Thumb baby states, "The Mrs. General is a strong friend of Old Abe, and told him at the White House last summer that if her husband was drafted she would insist on him serving. She goes for Old Abe's reelection, and pledges The General's vote for him" ("New Baby"). This seemingly benign report is a powerful reminder that marriage law united two people to create "one *full* citizen," with the woman remaining disenfranchised (Cott 12). If marriage has served as a metaphor for national

consent, such examples suggest that citizenship may be more passive and spectatorial than we'd like to imagine. On this issue, see, e.g., Castronovo, Necro Citizenship. <sup>140</sup> Merish notes that the Tom Thumb wedding opened up a "space for feminine mass" spectatorship" in "an era when most commercial amusements were designated for men, and when 'respectable women' were relegated to public invisibility" (194, 193). <sup>141</sup> For another news article that makes use of free indirect discourse to lightly mock the women spectators, see the Baltimore *Sun* article from February 12 entitled "The Latest Sensation": "While waiting for the bridal party to enter, the ladies kept up that murmuring conversation peculiar to matinees and morning receptions," the Sun writes, indexing the growing feminization of commercial amusements that was due, in large part, to Barnum's making attendance at the American Museum "respectable." "Of course everything is talked of," the Sun continues, "'Is it true that Commodore Nutt is heartbroken?, I wonder if she is as young as the people make out? How much did her jewelry cost?"" ("Latest Sensation"). On the one hand, the news writers' anxiety about this large gathering of women in public might be explained by its resonance with political organizing. See, e.g., B. Adams 128 on women's roles in the abolitionist, temperance, and, of course, women's suffrage movements, and the impact of this on middle-class men in the 1860s. On the other hand, however, Adams has also shown us that women's consumerism--for all that we might want to critique it as a false source of power--also had the potential to cause male anxiety at this moment. See 70: "By mid-century [middle class] women were becoming increasingly responsible for shopping for their households, a development that prompted some middle-class ideologists to worry about female extravagance. As early as 1844, the New York Atlas was warning men of 'limited but

respectable means' about the lavish tastes of their wives and daughters"--lavish tastes that we see represented in New York women's desire for the Tom Thumb wedding tickets. <sup>142</sup> Indeed, while I don't have the space in this chapter to delve fully into these dynamics, a number of the Tom Thumb wedding reports, I'd suggest, indirectly engage the question of authority so prominent in this state of exception moment. A number of articles that use a more serious tone when engaging the police presence on the Strattons' wedding day praise the order that they maintained despite the massive crowds. "The system of police was admirably executed. Order was preserved throughout the entire proceedings, and a general good feeling seemed to exist among the people," writes the New York Times, for example ("Loving Lilliputians"). See also the article entitled "Remarkable Wedding" in the *Eclectic Magazine*, and the *Sun*'s "Latest Sensation." Such references recast authority figures as benevolent, protective, and comforting rather than threatening. The descriptions of Lincoln that emerge in the newspapers' coverage of the Strattons' White House reception do similar work. The Warren, Ohio Western Reserve Chronicle, for example, writes "How he must have looked--that little Lilliputian, beside that giant Gulliver!" ("Washington"). The Chicago Tribune, similarly, writes, 'One of the principal features of the evening was a promenade by Gen. Tom Thumb and the President, which, a witty individual remarked, 'was the long and the short of the whole matter'" ("Old General"). While taking a less critical tone than the "Black Republicanism" cartoon mentioned earlier, these articles put Lincoln on display as a freak in his own right, thus recasting him as a harmless object of spectacle.

<sup>143</sup> While these news writers thus attempt draw upon the security of gender hierarchies in this moment of flux, the very act of reporting on this highly feminized event appears to

challenge their sense of male mastery. Repeatedly, the news writers labor to distinguish their reporting from that implicitly feminized mode of discourse: gossip. The *Scientific* American, for example, writes that "gossip will have it that the moment their tiny eyes first gazed into each other, a warm and loving affection at once sprung up" setting itself up as *reporting on* gossip rather gossiping itself ("Great Lilliputian!"). The Wisconsin *State Register*, similarly, writes, "The event which has elicited so much anticipatory" gossip, and will be talked of and quoted in all the newspapers in the world, actually took place to-day," the pivotal "and" of the sentence meant to differentiate news reporting and gossip even as it could also be seen as aligning them ("Lilliputian Wedding"). The fullpage New York Times article appears particularly self-conscious about the overlap between "news" and "gossip," and attempts to align self with former, reinforcing its middle-class credentials in the process by accusing other newspapers of the "ill-bred" habit of gossip. "The absurd reports concerning [Commodore Nutt's] jealousy [of Stratton] are grounded upon an exceedingly ill-bred habit of jesting at the expense of others, in which some people love to indulge. He needed not that the 'collect for the day' should be read as a reminder of his misery." The New York Herald, which differs from other news articles in its more critical take on the wedding, shares with these articles the aim to draw a distinction between what it sees as women's prattle and the witticisms of the newspaper. In a pun that seems calculated to evoke a knowing nod from male readers, the paper writes that Warren's diamonds were subjected to "endless comment, mostly not very brilliant" ("Tom Thumb Wedding"). At the same time that they attempted to differentiate "news" from "gossip," these articles attempted to distinguish their male readers' interest in the event from women's superficial and prying curiosity. For example,

a *Frank Leslie's* article from February 28, 1863 explains, "[T]he first question from our lady friends will be, 'How were they dressed?,' To satisfy their natural curiosity, we vouchsafe the following description" ("Great Marriage!"). With such statements, the male writers reinforce separate spheres ideology in their implied readership--only women are reading the paper for such frivolous details, and these frivolous details are all they read for--allowing men to read about the Tom Thumb wedding while being assured that their interest is superior to the female brand of "natural curiosity."

<sup>144</sup> My analysis here is indebted to Bluford Adams's discussion of the early Barnum newspaper persona Barnaby Diddleum, whose writing, Adams suggests, aims to "keep the peace within the Jacksonian phalanx by directing its class and sectional tensions outward against abolitionists, blacks, and women" (5).

<sup>145</sup> A *Frank Leslie's* article that appears just after the New York City draft riots references Tom Thumb in a direct treatment of the draft issue, a treatment that evinces this paper's desperate attempt to smooth over class differences. The writer states, "The Philadelphia papers record, with a considerable amount of glee, that almost all the lawyers of the 14<sup>th</sup> ward of that 'noble' city are victims of the draft," and points out that "those who have creditors, a conscience, or corns need lawyers, parsons, and physicians." Making reference to Tom Thumb and another famous freak show exhibit, the "What is It?," the paper offers a somewhat tortured metaphor to suggest that anyone who does not have need of these professionals is, in essence, a freak: "The 'What is It?,' 'or any other man,' for the terms are synonymous, who has neither 'a corn, a conscience, or a creditor,' is decidedly a *lusus naturae*, and ought to eclipse the quadruple uniquities at Barnum's, the four unweighable atoms of quadrilateral nothings--the Tom Thumb family. When

troubled in the pocket, the mind or the body, we fly to either our lawyer, our priest, or our physician; and yet, with true human ingratitude, we chuckle over them being forced to fight against their will" ("Notes"). In addition to displacing class tensions onto the women in the crowd, the papers also smooth over class differences by subtly reinforcing the notion of universal middle-class status amongst the news writers and the reading public. Given Barnum's control over the guest list, middle-class residents who headed to Grace Church on February 10, 1863 would have been among those in the great crowd *outside* rather than inside the building. However, newspapers--by their very nature intended to give their readership an "inside" or "eyewitness" take on events-continuously elide this fact in their reporting, providing readers with a view of the Tom Thumb wedding that they would not likely to have been able to obtain even had they tried, while at the same time mocking those who actually did have such an "inside" view. Most illustrations of the Tom Thumb wedding don't depict the spectating crowds at all, but instead give readers an unencumbered view of the main attraction. One of the few illustrations that does represent the crowd, a full page image in the February 21<sup>st</sup> issue of Frank Leslie's entitled "The Fairy Wedding," depicts the scene from a vantage point that none of the attendees, outside or even inside, would have had. Providing an aerial view of at the wedding party and also of the elite spectators, the illustration allows the reader to feel superior to both the "mass of humanity" ("Latest Sensation") outside, but also to the "Upper Tendom" inside ("Big"). The text of a Frank Leslie's piece on the wedding reception performs similar work. "Now that we have them in that elevated position" the writer says, self-reflexively, in his description of the Strattons mounting a piano at their wedding reception in order to be see and be seen, "our readers can survey them at

leisure" ("Great Marriage!"). The reader at home who can survey the scene at his leisure stands in distinct contrast to the upper class audience members who giggle, crane their necks, and stand on seats, and the "mob" outside who shout, jostle in the street, and chase the miniature carriage.

<sup>146</sup> The term "Thumbiana" comes from the subtitle of the *New York Times's* "Loving Lilliputians" article. See also the "Letter from New York: Dwarfiana," *Daily Evening Bulletin* [San Francisco], 28 Feb. 1863: col. F.

<sup>147</sup> See Warner on the various sorts of "publics" that can be invoked. In addition to the sense of a "national public," and the public implied by the circulation of texts (including newspapers), a public can also be a "concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public. Such a public also has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space" (66). The Tom Thumb wedding draws on and aligns these three senses of the public, figuring those who witnessed the Tom Thumb wedding or read about it as not only united in their spectatorship, but also as constituting *the* American public.

<sup>148</sup> Barnum's advertisements, not surprisingly, repeatedly invoke a public that is uniformly adoring of the Strattons. An ad in the January 19 *New York Times*, for example, state, "Everybody [is] rushing headlong to SEE THE FAIRY, MISS LAVINIA WARREN," and that she has been "visited and admired by over TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND PEOPLE, every one of whom has pronounced her the most BEAUTIFUL LITTLE MODEL OF A WOMAN" ("Barnum's"). The "Proclamation" ad I cited at the beginning of this chapter similarly enshrines a vision of consensus by suggesting that "200,000 delighted visitors will fully attest that the Commodore and Little Minnie are the

most enchanting, charming, beautiful, blithe, merry, and fascinating couple that the world has ever seen!" ("Proclamation"). What is more interesting is that many of the news articles follow suit. Indeed, Barnum is able to make use of the positive reviews of the press in his advertisements, such as the January 5<sup>th</sup> *Times* ad which quotes at length from the *New York Tribune, New York Sun,* and *New York Commercial Advertiser,* and then, in a maneuver which explicitly makes a link between the press coverage and the public it supposedly indexes, states, "The opinions of the Press of Miss Warren but express the sentiments of all who have see her" ("Barnum's").

<sup>149</sup> Merish has suggested "the ways in which appreciating cuteness becomes a normative aesthetic response," determining " inclusion of the community of those who 'recognize' cuteness" (186). Merish notes, further, that "valuing cuteness entails the ritualized performance of maternal feeling, designating a model of feminine subjectivity constituted against those (ethnic, class, or national) Others who lack the maternal/sentimental endowments (and aesthetic faculties) to fully appreciate 'the cute'" (186). In this reading, those newspaper readers who are interpellated as properly appreciate of the Strattons are, further, confirmed in their racial superiority.

<sup>150</sup> Many papers extend their hyperbolic claims far outside the category of the nation, thus taking the ideological coherence of the nation for granted. Philadelphia's *North American and United States Gazette*, for example, calls them "the most celebrated dwarfs in Christendom" ("Dramatic"), and *Frank Leslie's* writes, "We confess to sharing with the rest of the world a large amount of curiosity to witness a ceremony the rites of which have never been conferred upon a more extraordinary couple" ("Great Marriage!"). A number of papers also assert a sort of American exceptionalism in their reporting on the

Tom Thumb wedding, a move which we might also see as implying a unified America at a moment when this was not at all the case. The *Daily National Republican*, for example, reports on Prince Albert, whose wedding in England was highly publicized, as "so famously follow[ing] the lead of Tom Thumb" ("Inklings"). *Frank Leslie's*, admittedly reporting on incidents from antebellum America, does so in a way that casts a glow on the America in which the article appeared; it represents the young Stratton leaving his tour of England "a conquerer, loaded with the gifts of the sovereigns and the spoils of the sightseeing populations in Europe" ("Gen. Thumb: Some Account"). The paper then describes Stratton's tour of the U.S. and Havana, returning by way of the Mississippi, where "everywhere the General was received with the utmost courtesy and consideration, making and receiving visits from the most distinguished people in the land."

<sup>151</sup> See, *e.g.*, Chemers, who writes that "Stratton was one of the most celebrated performers of his time, and his appeal transcended boundaries not only of age, but of race, class, gender, and nationality as well. (Lavinia's memoirs describe her travels with Stratton to the Far East as well as all over Europe and America in the 1860s and 1870s: everywhere the General was greeted with throngs of admirers)" (43). I'm not suggesting that Chemers's account is untrue, exactly, but I am interested in how such rehearsals of his popularity might quash dissent and imply a unified American public or culture. The news reports discussed at the end of this chapter suggest, in fact, that the Strattons' appeal wasn't able to fully transcend political or sectional differences at the moment of his wedding, as much as certain articles would have one believe otherwise.

<sup>152</sup> While a full treatment of the Tom Thumb wedding in the African American press is outside the scope of this chapter, it would be useful to know what, and how much, this

discourse community had to say about it. It would also be useful to have some sense of how many black Americans made up the visitors to the Strattons' American Museum levees or part of the crowd on the wedding day; as Cook has told us, black patrons were admitted to the American museum at this moment, though the papers I've cited seem to erase this fact from view. In the databases I used that included African American newspapers, I saw stories about Barnum and his museum but no real references to this particular event, though a more thorough investigation would be necessary in order to make a sufficient analysis.

<sup>153</sup> New Orleans papers, for example, report on the Strattons with no apparent difference of tone from Northern papers, with the February 6, 1863 Daily Delta writing of "life among the lilliputians" ("Tom Thumb to Be Married"), and the March 20, 1863 New Orleans Times Picavune advertising photographs of "Gen. Tom Thumb and his lady" ("Gen. Tom Thumb and Lady"). The notably named *Chattanooga Daily Rebel*, similarly, prints a short report on the Strattons that appears in many Northern papers, as well, with no additional commentary. Writing, "Tom Thumb and his wife, who are at their home in Bridgeport, Connecticut, complain of the effects of their notoriety. Crowds follow them wherever they walk or ride; and bolts and bars do not suffice to keep inquisitive curiosity-mongers out of their parlors and bed-chambers," this story appears no differently than it does in Union papers, suggesting that at least some Southern news sources catered to an interest in the Tom Thumb affair ("Tom Thumb; Bridgeport"). <sup>154</sup> Several articles also show a disenchantment with Stratton himself. The New Orleans *Times Picayune* complains in May of 1863 that "Tom Thumb (who is becoming decidedly general), is showing his little wife in the rural districts." Calling the piece

"Theatrical Gossip," the *Picavune* shows none of the Northern papers' eagerness to distinguish its reporting from such a feminizing charge, but rather seems to hold on to the term in order to deliberately disparage its subject. The story continues, "[T]heir sale of photographs and books at their entertainments is said by one critic to be 'so painfully miserly and avaricious as to be almost repulsive." Strongly reversing the Northern trend of portraying the Strattons as model (moderate, industrious) middle-class subjects, this paper instead portrays them as almost grotesquely greedy. At the same time, the article depicts entrepreneurship--of which Barnum was a powerful symbol at this moment--as a decidedly negative trait. The New Orleans Times, writing several years after the Tom Thumb wedding, mocks Stratton's appearance as he returns from a derby race "like a conquering general" with an "immense cigar" ("Personal"). Unlike than the news reports that portray Stratton as a perfect man in miniature, this paper represents him as comically failing at his attempted masculine role. Lincoln also becomes the butt of jokes in Southern reporting on the Tom Thumb wedding. South Carolina's *Edgefield Advertiser* notes that it is reprinting one of Barnum's American Museum ads specifically to make its readers laugh. It then suggests, "Nothing is wanting in this collection [of wild beasts] but the African Baboon, commonly known as Abe Lincoln, and McClellan's Anaconda," representing Lincoln in a freakish way that is less about making his power appear nonthreatening and more about criticizing him by tainting him with non-whiteness ("Yankee").

<sup>155</sup> "'Jenkins' was a general name for a 'fawning, snobbish journalist'" ("Explanatory," citing M.H. Spielmann, *The History of Punch*.)

<sup>156</sup> Some Southern papers report on the freak show exhibitions of little people who are *not* the Strattons in order to make strange assertions of sectional pride. New Orleans's Daily Delta says of a pair of little people who are touring the area, "We have seen Tom Thumb, but he is a giant to either one of them," bragging of these performers' more exceptional status ("City"). The Daily Richmond Examiner, similarly, advertises the upcoming exhibition of a "Major J.J. VORHINES, A refugee from Tennessee," who "will exhibit himself to the citizens of Richmond." The paper describes him as "35 years, height, 2 feet 4 inches, being two inches less than the celebrated Tom Thumb," and gives him the appellation of the "GREATEST CURIOSITY OF THE SOUTH" ("Corner"). This title exists in tension with Northern papers' tendency to represent the Strattons as representative of a common national culture--or, in hyperbolically suggesting that they are the most exceptional little people in the world, to rhetorically skip over the fractured nation entirely. Further, the Vorhines notice appears along with advertisements for other clearly sectional entertainment, such as "patriotic concerts, by the acknowledged favorite of the South!," "Harry Macarthy, the Rebel Minstrel and Arkansas Comedian," and even impersonations of a "Paddy McCarthy," an Irish caricature presumably meant to reflect the working class citizens of the north. The Daily Delta, in addition to boasting of the size of the little people on display, also uses its article to makes a jab at the federal government. "[T]hese diminutive prodigies have been the guests of the 'crowned heads' at Washington, where they excited the wonder and admiration of the savants at the capital," the *Delta* says, suggesting that the Union government is at once, incompetent and anti-democratic ("City").

<sup>157</sup> The newspaper databases I've used have produced the *Dallas Weekly Herald* article, though not the original *Petersburg Express* article that it cites.

<sup>158</sup> The article ends with the statement that "[h]is occupation was a cotton spinner" ("Chance"). The use of the past-tense verb here romanticizes the work that this "black dwarf" did before the war, whether it was enslaved or free labor. In this way, the article makes another implicit jab at the North, representing it as a region of frivolous spectaclelovers, in contrast to the productive antebellum South.

<sup>159</sup> A separate *Herald* article makes use of Tom Thumb in the figurative sense, as a negative metaphor with which to attack a rival paper's opposing political views. The Herald writer says of a reporter for the Times, "There is nothing more curious and amusing than to hear him review Governor Seymour. It is a pigmy reviewing a lilliputian. It is Commodore Nutt quarreling with Gen. Tom Thumb" ("Seymour"). Another New York paper to criticize the Tom Thumb wedding was the *Knickerbocker Monthly*, which describes the nuptials as "a great absurdity practiced by Mr. P.T. Barnum, with the aid and assistance of the public" ("Marriage of the Dwarves"). Unlike most papers' laudatory view of the Strattons' bodily abnormality, this paper suggests that "the mere joining" together in matrimony of two such monstrosities was to be deplored, and looked very like a burlesque of a solemn ceremony." The article goes on to criticize the fact of this event taking place during wartime: "It is characteristic of the American people to yield to sensations," the writer proclaims, "[b]ut at a time like the present, when the country is in the throes of a terrible fratricidal conflict...it is melancholy to see a spectacle so ridiculous," an assertion that highlights, rather than symbolically sutures, the rifts of war. Recognizing the role of the press in fanning the flames of interest in this widely

publicized event, the paper also states that "the thing had been carried far enough by the newspapers and Barnum's in the weeks before," and laments that now even the church appears to have sanctified the actions of the showman ("Marriage of the Dwarves"). <sup>160</sup> Two days after the wedding, *The Daily Cleveland Herald* concludes, "We think all sensible people will agree...that the little people would have won more respect by being married quietly at the rural home of one or the other. But Barnum must make asses of the New Yorkers and fools of the dwarfs, and Grace Church was just the place for the show" ("Two"). Western papers weighed on in the Tom Thumb wedding, as well, and the San Francisco Bulletin was at times decidedly critical. A March 10 article reprints text from the New York Herald's "The Tom Thumb Wedding" piece from February 11. Exclaiming "Great is P.T.B.!" and "Great is Barnum!," the article mocks Barnum's pervasive influence in terms that echo "Long live the king!" rhetoric ("Great Ado"). Similarly, while other articles praised the police force's presence on the wedding day--in a move that I suggested showed a welcome comfort with authority during this state of exception moment--the *Bulletin* suggests that Barnum was in league with the police, stating that there was "excellent order, by arrangement of P.T.B. and his lieutenants, the Commissioners of Police...Here, there, and everywhere throughout the church there were policemen with their caps on--and order reigned in the matrimonial Warsaw." The article goes on to suggest that "the great Phineas was found to have taken possession of another block of Broadway," further comparing his event's disruption of city space to a military conquest ("Great Ado"). The *Herald* and the *Bulletin*'s critique thus reveals that if the anonymous pamphleteer Cymon, who suggested that the Tom Thumb wedding was a plot between Lincoln and Barnum, was perhaps the most extreme critic of Barnum's power,

he was most certainly not alone. In an article the following month, covering the Strattons' post-nuptial appearance in Philadelphia, the *Bulletin*'s Philadelphia correspondent also critiques, in memorable form, the role of the press in the whole affair: "If Jenkins had only told us how Mrs. Gen. Thumb looked when she sneezed, or when she had a hot potato in her mouth...the picture and history of the brief sojourn of the Lilliputians would have been complete. However, he said enough about their in and outgoings, their eating, drinking, kissing, sleeping, loving, dressing, cooing, etc., to make a lamp post vomit and the very hotel to blush" ("Letter from Philadelphia").

<sup>161</sup> The article, further, makes New York City a metonym for the nation, but unlike the articles whose hyperbolic claims of Stratton's impact seem to naturalize the notion of a coherent American nation, the *Times* version shows the gears at work in such substitutions. Writing that "the *elite*, the *crème de la crème*, the upper ten, the *bon ton*, the select few--the very F.F.'s of the city--nay, of the country--together with many, very many, of what are called 'citizens generally,' found means of being present to view the Lilliputian welcome," the *Times* 's parenthetical "nay" reveals the language work necessary to make New York a figure for the entire (divided) America ("Loving Lilliputian").

<sup>162</sup> Other examples of Southern papers that reprint news about the Strattons, exactly the same way it appears in Northern papers, include "A New York letter writer," *Memphis Daily Appeal* 1 Jul. 1863: 2; "A New York letter writer...," *Chattanooga Daily Rebel* 5 Jul. 1863: col. A; and "Multiple News Items," *Natchez Daily Courier*, 11 Jul 1863: col. D. All of these papers print the following pun about Warren's supposed pregnancy: "A New York letter writer writer writer writer writer some some

new little responsibilities." For an example that seems slightly more critical, Jackson, Mississippi's *Daily Southern Crisis* titles its February 27, 1863 report that includes both war news, political news, and news of the Strattons' levees at the White House "By Telegraph: Northern Intelligence," with the phrase "intelligence" implicitly linking Northern cultural production with the logistics war ("By Telegraph"). For a midwestern example whose tone and intention are difficult to pin down, the *Weekly Wisconsin Paper* writes on February 21, 1863 that "The New York papers are filled with accounts of the marriage of Tom Thumb. A great ado over a small affair" ("New York; Tom Thumb"). It is hard to tell here if the paper merely wants to get leverage out of the pun--the likes of which we've seen in the papers that dote over the Thumbs--or if the joke and the reference to "the New York papers" is meant to distance this source from what it sees as truly trivial news reporting.

<sup>163</sup> In a slightly different but related example, Stewart also discusses a 1982 Cheltenham, Pennsylvania Tom Thumb wedding that took place at a Armenian church: "Although the ceremony itself followed a typical format for an Armenian wedding, including a crowning ceremony, the children were all given parodying names. Norpie Balboosian ("Cold Ice") was the bride; Massis Dakshoonian ("Hot Dog") was the groom, the flower girl and ring-bearer both had the surname Tootzarian, or "mulberry tree" (source of a favorite hard liquor)" (186n44). In this case, the Tom Thumb wedding serves an opportunity to lightly mock the rituals of, while reconfirming belonging in, a particular ethnic group.

<sup>164</sup> Benjamin seems to have taken significant novelistic liberties here, as Warren's own autobiographical account describes one of Barnum's agents seeking her out at her

Massachusetts home (Magri 48). However, the need to take novelistic liberties in order to flesh out the subjectivity of this freak show performer seems to be part of Benjamin's point. While Warren, unlike many freak show performers, did have enough cultural capital that she expected that her autobiographical manuscript would be published, Saxon points out that her text does not give us as much insight into her psyche as we might like, given that she (fascinatingly) lifted passages wholesale from Barnum's autobiographies and promotional materials (Saxon's introduction in Magri 13).

<sup>165</sup> The official blurb for the book that appears on the *Goodreads* website makes apparent the novel's particular linkage of gender with disability: "In her national bestseller Alice I Have Been, Melanie Benjamin imagined the life of the woman who inspired Alice in Wonderland. Now, in this jubilant new novel, Benjamin shines a dazzling spotlight on another fascinating female figure whose story has never fully been told: a woman who became a nineteenth century icon and inspiration--and whose most daunting limitation became her greatest strength...She was only two-foot eight-inches tall, but her legend reaches out to us more than a century later." (For a critique of the common narrative trope of "overcoming" disability, see Linton 228.) A commenter on the Goodreads page also notes, "It gave me real pleasure to be the first person to 'Like' Lavinia Warren on Facebook. Vinnie would have been posting like mad and collecting friends like a fiend because her sense of self promotion was sure and timely." The ability to display one's fanhood of Warren herself (not the novel about her, or its author) on Facebook seems an uncanny twenty-first century echo of the popular nineteenth-century trend of collecting and displaying one's *carte de visites* of the Strattons.

<sup>166</sup> The question of whether to use "Mark Twain" or "Samuel Clemens" in this paragraph is not necessarily a straightforward one. The *Times* piece uses Twain in the title but switches back and forth between the two names in the body of the article. While the event was a private dinner party, I use "Twain" here to reflect the sense one gets from the article that we are in the presence of a Clemens fully absorbed in the performative possibilities of his authorial persona. As Susan Gillman has written of Clemens' final years, "[T]hough he may have run toward fragments in his writing and toward an impasse in his doubt about identity, he was at the same time emerging as the very strongest identity in his person. He was becoming a myth even as he entertained the chaotic possibilities and dubieties of identity" (181). Henceforth in this chapter, I aim to use "Clemens" when describing the man in biographical terms and "Twain" when describing his public persona as author and icon, though the very impossibility of fully disentangling the two identities is, of course, part of what makes Twain's work such a fruitful site of inquiry into questions of performance, subjectivity, and difference.

<sup>167</sup> The accomplice, according to a letter Twain wrote the following day to his daughter, was someone named Brynner. See http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/wilson/mtastwin.html.
<sup>168</sup> I take the term "hypercanonical" from Jonathan Arac's *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target*.

<sup>169</sup> In a historical coincidence of note here, February 1863 featured both the Tom Thumb wedding and the first instance of Clemens signing his name "Mark Twain." The latter took place on a February 3, 1863 dispatch written from Carson City for the Virginia City, Nevada *Territorial Enterprise*.

<sup>170</sup> As Gerald Graff and James Phelan have put it, "Twain is the American writer with the greatest name recognition (eclipsing even Ernest Hemingway, the twentieth century's contender), the one who has most deeply entered into the American cultural imagination, the one whose image and influence have been most widely disseminated across high and popular culture" (19).

<sup>171</sup> The phrase "the Lincoln of our literature" comes from Howells' *My Mark Twain* (101). I take the term "disability drag" from Tobin Siebers' "Disability as Masquerade." In that context, Siebers is describing nondisabled actors playing disabled characters on television or the silver screen. Siebers argues that these performances are "usually as bombastic as a drag performance," with the result that "disability appears as a façade overlaying able-bodiedness" (114-115).

<sup>172</sup> It was these elements of Southwestern humor, after all, which made Charles Farrar Browne's decision to cast his literary persona, Artemus Ward, as a showman particularly fitting. Ward is responsible for ushering Twain's story "Jim Smiley and his Jumping Frog," into print. The 1865 story, featuring the hallmarks of Southwestern humor, would first bring Twain national attention.

<sup>173</sup> For more on this dynamic, see my discussion of Neil Harris's phrase, "the operational aesthetic," in the Introduction.

<sup>174</sup> See Wu for more on Twain's use of the twins in this sketch, including the ways in which the twins are whitened in order to stand in for the Anglo-American national body (40-41). For an instance in which the language of conjoinment lurks behind one of Twain's reminiscences, see the following quote from his Autobiography: "All the negroes were friends of ours, and with those of our own age we were in effect comrades.

I say in effect, using the phrase as a modification. We were comrades, and yet not comrades; color and condition interposed a subtle line which both parties were conscious of, and which *rendered complete fusion impossible*" ("Early Days" 313).

<sup>175</sup> Twain, of course, inflated these divisions throughout much of his career. As he says in an 1881 speech, "I am a border-ruffian from the State of Missouri. I am a Connecticut Yankee by adoption. In me, you have Missouri morals, Connecticut culture; this, gentlemen, is the combination which makes the perfect man" ("Plymouth Rock"). <sup>176</sup> Gillman writes that "[t]he Barnum showman, with his art of deception, is the paradigmatic figure of Twain's creativity, both in literature and in business" (188). <sup>177</sup> Twain draws on freakery here as a metaphor for authorial production, as he had before and would continue to do. In a December 1874 letter to William Dean Howells, Twain writes, "It isn't the Atlantic audience that distresses me; for it is the only audience that I sit down before in perfect serenity (for the simple reason that it don't require a 'humorist' to paint himself striped & stand on his head every fifteen minutes)," figuring literary performance as a sort of degraded sideshow display (Clemens, "Letter"). He referred, similarly, to lecture tours, such as the one he proposed to William Dean Howells and Joel Chandler Harris in 1882, as a "circus or menagerie" (Lott Love and Theft 31). On the other end of the spectrum is the statement that forms my second epigraph, in which Twain proudly pegs himself and Halley's comet as "unaccountable freaks," drawing on the freakish singularity Twain sought in his authorial persona late in life. <sup>178</sup> In an ironic twist that one imagines Twain himself would have appreciated, John Wallace, one of the novel's most vocal antagonists, served as an administrator at none

other than the Mark Twain Intermediate School in Fairfax County, Virginia (Kaplan 378).

<sup>179</sup> In addition to being inspired by Krentz's disability studies approach to *Huck*. I am building here, as in the dissertation throughout, upon the recent body of work aiming to bridge the study of disability and race in American culture. Susan Schweik's article on the disability politics of Stephen Crane's novella The Monster and the subordination of these politics to issues of race has been particularly helpful here ("Disability Politics"). <sup>180</sup> We would do well here to remember Stuart Hall's conception of popular culture as a site of struggle, for the freak show is a cultural form whose premise is so obviously problematic from a contemporary standpoint that we risk missing its unpredictable ideological resonances. As Hall says, "The danger arises because we tend to think of cultural forms as whole and coherent: either wholly corrupt or wholly authentic. Whereas, they are deeply contradictory; they play on contradictions, especially when they function in the domain of the 'popular'" (233). When elements of the freak show are transported into imaginative literature, of course, the possibilities for them to take on multiple valences only expand. I am also indebted here to Daphne Brooks' Bodies in *Dissent*, which analyzes the way that various performances by African American subjects, including by African American characters in fiction, provide "counternarrative[s] to that of minstrelsy's master script" (2).

<sup>181</sup> In "Corn-Pone Opinions," (1901), Twain also uses the term "wonder" to describe the slave Jerry: "He was a gay and impudent and satirical and delightful young black man--a slave--who daily preached sermons from the top of his master's woodpile, with me for sole audience. He imitated the pulpit style of the several clergymen of the village, and did

it well, and with fine passion and energy. *To me he was a wonder*. I believed he was the greatest orator in the United States, and would some day be heard from" (282, my emphasis).

<sup>182</sup> David Smith raises the important issue of the position in which this episode places the other unnamed slaves. He writes, "Jim's triumph may appear to be dependent upon the gullibility of other 'superstitious' Negroes, but since we have no direct encounter with them, we cannot know whether they are unwitting victims of Jim's ruse or not. A willing audience need not be a totally credulous one," a point that Barnum's repeated successes with 19<sup>th</sup>-century audiences proved again and again (109).

<sup>183</sup> In considering blueness in *Huck*, I also have in mind Jean Toomer's concept of "the racially indeterminate 'blue' race" in his poem "The Blue Meridian" (1936). Toomer conceives of blueness as a synthesis of African, Anglo-Saxon, and American Indian races, creating a transracial category that provides "an alternative to the racial typecasting of which he felt himself and other racial types to be the victims" (Hawkins 150).
<sup>184</sup> Race thus appears to have some potential in this novel to be disguised or deconstructed away, in contrast, for example, to masculinity, as in the cross-dressing scene in which Huck's attempt to pass for a girl is so easily uncovered. Myra Jehlen has suggested that the episode with Mrs. Loftus reveals gender to be a product of nurture rather than nature, arguing that Judith Loftus "can detail femininity because she sees it as a role, which must mean that masculinity is also a role" (502-3). I'm more persuaded, however, that the take-away of the episode is that, "[d]ressed as a girl, Huckleberry Finn

simply cannot help but expose his masculinity" (Knoper 109).

<sup>185</sup> Hsuan Hsu has pointed to vagrancy and other laws that regulated black and white travelers in the postbellum period in order to contextualize Jim's limited mobility in *Huck*: "Jim's travels occur in hiding under the guise of captivity; his spatial progress (or regress) down the river paradoxically requires that he remain immobile, concealed in a cave, secluded in a swamp, posing as a captured runaway tied up in the wigwam on the raft, *or painted blue and disguised as a 'Sick Arab''*" (79-80, my italics). I am arguing, however, that the Sick Arab episode should be distinguished from these others, not despite but rather *because of* the destabilizing freak show echoes in the scene.

<sup>186</sup> The material history of prostheses suggests that many prosthetic legs, especially those patented during and after the Civil War, would have actually reinforced racial distinctions. As Stephen Mihm has shown, costlier prostheses were often colored to approximate skin-tone. "A Limb Which Shall Be Presentable in Polite Society':
Prosthetic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century," *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics,* eds. Katherine Ott, David Serlin, and Stephen Mihm (2002). The wooden leg referenced in *Huck,* however, seems more likely to have been imagined as the old-fashioned peg-leg variety, pointing to a gap between material and figurative iterations of the disabled body.

<sup>187</sup> Keith Opdahl has made the interesting observation that the reader is given relatively little written description of Huck's physical appearance: "Huck comes to life for us not as a physical being, since his appearance is barely described in the book (we know only that he dresses in 'rags' and fidgets at the dinner table) but as a voice" (quoted in Fishkin 153 fn 8). It is all the more notable, then, that one of the few ways Huck's body is indexed is through a prosthetic limb joke that depends upon his ability.

<sup>188</sup> The manuscript's title for this skit, "The Burning Shame," suggests that it was modeled on an "indecent entertainment" involving a naked man and a lit candle that Twain seems to have found particularly amusing (Fischer and Salamo 438-39). As Victor Fischer and Lin Salamo suggest, the "camelopard," sometimes written "cameleopard," in the title also suggests some indebtedness to Edgar Allan Poe's sketch "Four Beasts in One; The Homo-Cameleopard," as well as to the "ill-fated" giraffe presented to King George IV of England by the pasha of Egypt in 1827, the skeleton of which continued to be exhibited in London after it died (439).

<sup>189</sup> Barnum biographer A.H. Saxon has suggested in a brief footnote that "one might plausibly argue" that the Nonesuch episode is linked to one of Barnum's most famous racial displays: the so-called "What Is It?" (395 n56). He does not address the matter further. I had the good fortune to rediscover this footnote after beginning work on this chapter.

<sup>190</sup> For more on the "What Is It?," see James W. Cook Jr.'s *Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (2001).

<sup>191</sup> As Sacvan Bercovitch and others have pointed out, Tom's tricks at the Phelpses seem to have amused late nineteenth-century audiences (346). Twain wrote his wife, Livy, of reading the evasion section before a live audience: "It is the biggest card I've got in my whole repertoire. I always thought so. It went abooming" (quoted in Woodard and MacCann 146).

<sup>192</sup> As Leo Marx puts it, Jim is, at the end of *Huck*, "a creature who bleeds ink and feels no pain" (295). Huck says, "[E]very time a rat bit Jim he would get up and write a little in his journal, whilst the ink was fresh" (*HF* 331).

<sup>193</sup> See e.g. Nilon's "The Ending of *Huckleberry Finn*," which argues that the ending is a satire on the post-Reconstruction policies that essentially re-enslaved black Americans, such as rollbacks on political recognition, sharecropping, the convict lease system, and the extra-legal violence of lynching (Nilon 62). This is a tempting interpretation, but it seems to me to downplay the giddiness of the final chapters.

<sup>194</sup> James Cox, further, has pointed out, "For if Tom is rather contemptibly setting a free slave free, what after all is the reader doing, who begins the book after the fact of the Civil War?" (quoted in Robinson 13). As Robinson has explicated, the joke here is on the complacent white liberal reader. Huck, of course, is as thoroughly invested in questions of confidence and deceit as Twain's early journalistic sketches: from the "Warning" at the beginning of the text; to the numerous depictions of credulous townspeople; to the deadpan narration of Huck; to the novel's embattled status as a "realist" work. <sup>195</sup> Serving as a joint between these New Critical responses--which concerned themselves with explaining Huck's displacement by Tom at the end of the novel without considering the racial implications of this move-- and the responses to *Huck* which arose in concert with a burgeoning Civil Rights movement was Leo Marx's famous 1953 essay "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn." Marx argued that both Trilling and Eliot's responses failed to recognize that problems of form are inseparable from those of "moral insight" (291). Marx argues that the ending, by making "the most serious motive in the novel, Jim's yearning for freedom,...the object of nonsense," reveals a "failure of nerve" in Samuel Clemens himself (294, 304 cited in Graff and Phelan). As for challenges to *Huck's* appearance on classroom syllabi, these began in 1957, when the New York City Board of Education removed the book from its list of approved texts. Since then, schools

in Philadelphia, Miami, and Chicago, among others, have followed suit, banning or attempting to ban the use of *Huck* in the classroom, or replacing the text with an adapted version for high school curricula (Henry 26-7; Kaplan 376).

<sup>196</sup> In support of his argument, Wallace also cites the 1963 statement of John Fisher, then president of Columbia Teachers College, who states, "Every black child is the victim of the history of his race in this country. On the day he enters kindergarten, he carries a burden *no white child* can ever know, no matter what other handicaps or disabilities he may suffer" (Wallace 22, original italics). While I have no quarrel with Fisher's suggestion of the serious racial disparities that make their way into the classroom, I am interested in the metaphor of disability to describe these circumstances.

<sup>197</sup> Justin Kaplan's account of Twain's antics while entertaining guests one evening in his Hartford home is to the point here. After changing into white cowskin moccasins, singing slave spirituals, and imbibing not a small amount of whiskey, Twain, as Kaplan put it, "twisted his body into the likeness of a crippled uncle or a negro at a hoedown and danced strange dances for them" (quoted in Fisher Fishkin 174). There is a curious slippage here between disability and race, as the "crippled uncle" becomes--is rendered equivalent to--the nondisabled "negro" given over to dance.

<sup>198</sup> See Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (1997) and David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001) for more on how late nineteenth-century culture enacted (white) sectional reconciliation.
<sup>199</sup> For an expansive catalogue of the large number of war-era articles, photographs, and illustrations depicting "Negro Troops," see Sidney Kaplan, "The Black Soldier of the Civil War Literature and Art," *American Studies in Black and White: Selected Essays*,

*1949-1989*, ed. Allan D. Austin (1991). As Kaplan points out, by the end of the century the visual depiction of African Americans during the Civil War would shift from brave soldier to grateful, kneeling slave. On this point as it plays out in statuary, see also Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997).

<sup>200</sup> For more on this cartoon, see Schweik's "Disability Politics and American Literary History," and Brian Matthew Jordan, "'Living Monuments: Union Veteran Amputees and the Embodied Memory of the Civil War" (June 2011).

<sup>201</sup> On the large number of amputations during the Civil War, and the booming prosthetics industry that it created, see Laurann Figg and Jane Farrell-Beck, "Amputation in the Civil War: Physical and Social Dimensions," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* (1993). Conservative estimates place the number of amputations at 60,000 (Figg and Farrell-Beck 454). Black soldiers were particularly susceptible to bodily injury and disease during Civil War service. One in five black soldiers died of disease, versus one in twelve white soldiers (Long 218).

<sup>202</sup> Saidiya Hartman has written eloquently on the criminal sanctions meant to "safeguard slave life," so that "'person' signified little more than a pained body" (94). A rich body of work has also taken up the problematic of voyeurism as it relates to the display of wounded slave bodies in slave narratives and on the abolitionist stage. See e.g. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997) and Karen Haltunnen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture" (Spring 1995). For more on how freakery intersects with these dynamics, see Chapter One.

<sup>203</sup> A Thomas Nast cartoon from August 1865 makes an even more direct equation between the black veteran's disability and his concomitant claim on civil rights. The image depicts a glum Lady Columbia looking down on a throng of former Confederate officials who are prostrating themselves at her feet. "Shall I Trust These Men," the caption asks, "And Not This Man?" On the adjacent page, Columbia stands with a black veteran whose right leg has been amputated above the knee. A star-spangled carpet leads downwards towards the word "FRANCHISE." This disabled veteran is something like the opposite of "Misto Bradish's" "one-laigged nigger," Twain's enslaved confidence man whose disability naturalizes his depiction as a cunning darky. The veteran's disability, by contrast, is what marks him as "trust"-worthy, deserving of incorporation into the nation as a fully enfranchised citizen. As with "A Man Knows a Man," however, the overtly progressive attitude of the cartoon carries with it the disturbing implication that black men must purchase their claim on personhood through disablement. <sup>204</sup> While there were widespread arguments in the 1850s that "race mixing" would lead to an unnatural type, unable to procreate beyond two or three generations, the final decades of the nineteenth-century witnessed unparalleled arguments for innate black inferiority, as the science of heredity held out the possibility of sharply demarcating between racial groups (Gillman 83, 86). On such racist medical accounts, see Douglas Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History" (2001), and Lisa Long, Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the American Civil War (2004). Shelley Fisher Fishkin's Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices. New York: Oxford UP (1993), provides an additional memorable example of the work done by statistician Frederick L. Hoffman. In Race Traits and Tendencies of the

*American Negro* (1896), Hoffman wrote of the "inferior organisms and constitutional weaknesses" as among the most *pronounced race characteristics* " of blacks in the United States (121). Hoffman's use of the phrase "constitutional" carries a telling, if unintended, double meaning here: recasting black disability as an indicator of natural inferiority, such proto-eugenicist medical treatises naturalized African Americans' exclusion from the privileges and rights afforded under the Constitution itself.

<sup>205</sup> Sidney Kaplan, "The Black Soldier of the Civil War Literature and Art," *American Studies in Black and White: Selected Essays, 1949-1989*, ed. Allan D. Austin (1991); Lisa Long, *Rehabilitating Bodies: Health, History, and the American Civil War* (2004); Brian Matthew Jordan, "'Living Monuments: Union Veteran Amputees and the Embodied Memory of the Civil War" (June 2011).

<sup>206</sup> The "evasion" section is, of course, one of the most hotly debated aspects of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A number of critics have suggested that the section is Twain's knowing commentary on the postbellum practices that kept former slaves in a position of continued subjection. With the text given over wholly to burlesque, however, Tom's idea to saw Jim's leg off certainly reads as ludicrous, and yet does not necessarily seem calculated to inspire real outrage on behalf of Jim. Tom's ludicrousness itself is the point--it *is* the show--and Jim must be sacrificed to serve these ends. Twain's working notes for the novel, which show that he considered having Huck ride out of the text on an elephant, further index the circus-like atmosphere of the final chapters (Carlyon 21).
<sup>207</sup> These models of subjectivity continue to hold sway today, as can be seen in the backlash against Affirmative Action policies and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

<sup>208</sup> Howells' very use of the term "the Lincoln of our Literature" demonstrates this paradox. In Howells' account, Twain is allowed a certain freakish combination of individuality and universality: "Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes," he writes, "I knew them all and all the rest of our sages, poets, seers, critics, humorists; they were like one another and like other literary men; but Clemens was *sole, incomparable, the Lincoln of our literature*" (101, my italics). This statement simultaneously makes Twain the representative figure of American democracy, linking him with the president credited with maintaining the very existence of the United States, *and* asserts his singularity. If this fate was unavailable to Twain's Jim, it was also largely unavailable to a black writers and public figures such as Frederick Douglass. As Benjamin Reiss has suggested, and as I discuss in Chapter One, Douglass was "viewed as a freakish exception to the rule of racial inferiority rather than as a representative of his race's potential--akin to a learned pig or dancing bear" (85).

<sup>209</sup> Sporadic examples of the freak show continue into our own time, as well. Rachel Adams details the lawsuit brought in the 1980s by Otis Jordan, a man who challenged Florida's state law banning freak shows, asserting that his self-exhibition as "The Frog Man" was his chosen means of livelihood (1).

<sup>210</sup> For more on these dynamics, see Dennis Tyler's dissertation *Disability of Color: Figuring the Black Body in American Law, Literature, and Culture* (2010). Our understanding of the moment of racial uplift might be further enriched by considering the "Exhibit of American Negroes" organized by W.E.B. Du Bois at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris. Meant to display the achievements and propriety of African Americans, and constituting largely of photographs--as well as a statue of Frederick Douglass--the Paris

Exhibit may be considered an intended anti-dote to the freak show display of black Americans.

<sup>211</sup> Such "bodiless heads" did exist in the freak show, the most famous freak performer who might fit this description being "the limbless Prince Randian, also known as the Human Caterpillar" (Adams 1).

<sup>212</sup> While the freak show reference in *Invisible Man* thus seems to set the stage for the novel's investment in spectatorship and specularity, developed memorably in the Battle Royale scene, Ellison's later, unfinished novel Juneteenth features an actual visit to a circus sideshow at the level of plot. The text follows a character named Bliss, a likely multiracial child and child preacher who later turns his back on his black stepfather, the Reverend Alonzo Hickman, to become a race-baiting senator. In Chapter Twelve of the version of Juneteenth edited by John Callahan, Bliss and Hickman go to the circus, where they see a "dwarf" clown whom Bliss takes to be black (250). Outside the circus tent, Bliss visits a freak show: "Out in front of another tent a man was saying something real fast through a megaphone and pointing to a picture of a two-headed man, and a lot of folks were listening to him" (252). Bliss narrates, "Then two big white guys came up and pinched me," disallowing him from having the sort of disembodied experience of spectatorship that the freak show is supposed to afford (252). Afterwards, Bliss sees the dwarf clown, and they get into a fistfight, which reveals that his "blackness" was, in fact, blackface: "I hit him real quick and it glanced off his cheek and I could see the blackness smear away and the white coming through and then I hit him again, hard and solid this time and he yelled, Git outta here, y'little bastard! What's the matter with you, kid? You nuts? Trying to push me away and I hit and hit, trying to make all the blackness go away"

(253). The scene thus suggests that Bliss's fully embodied spectatorship at the freak show had the potential to lead to certain racial truths, an interesting counterpoint to the freakery trope in *Invisible Man*.

<sup>213</sup> The lyrics read, in part: "You hand in your ticket/ And you go watch the geek/ Who immediately walks up to you/ When he hears you speak/ And says, 'How does it feel To be such a freak?'/And you say, 'Impossible'/As he hands you a bone/ Because something is happening here/ But you don't know what it is/ Do you, Mister Jones?" <sup>214</sup> The career of Thomas Wiggins, or "Blind Tom," itself might spawn interesting further work. His story of continued exhibition after Emancipation is an eerie reflection of the connections between the "exceptional" body of the freak, black Americans' incomplete emancipation over the course of the nineteenth century, and the contradictions in American states of political exception. I am equally interested, however, in Wiggins' continual invocation by and allure for canonical U.S. writers. Appearing in the journalism and fiction of Mark Twain, Rebecca Harding Davis, Willa Cather, and John Steinbeck-as well as in Jeffrey Renard Allen's 2014 Song of the Shank--the strange career of "Blind Tom" indexes the constitutive role of the "freak" in American literary history. <sup>215</sup> By such news reports, I mean interviews such as one that aired on CNN on July 17, 2011, with a woman who goes by the name "Mama Jazz" and who wears exceptionally long nails. The interviewer's questions focused on how she does mundane--and personal--tasks such as cooking, folding tissue, or scratching her ear. Such an interest in the accomplishment of mundane tasks with a differently situated body directly echoes the freak display of exhibits such as "Armless Wonders," who sometimes wrote letters or drank tea with their toes in front of viewers, or Prince Randian, the so-called "Human

Torso," who rolls a cigarette using only his mouth in the film *Freaks*. Extremely long nails were also part of Joice Heth's display, and seemed calculated to add to the claims of her extraordinary old age.

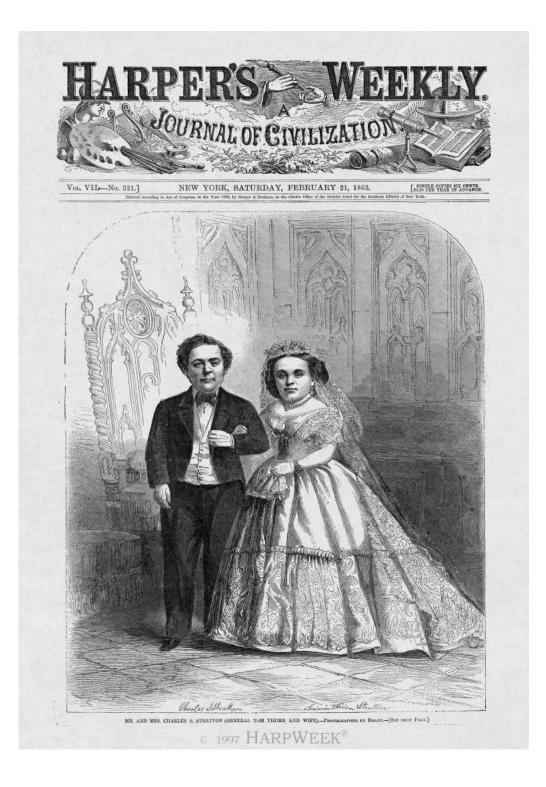


Figure 1. This image of the Strattons in their wedding attire appeared on the cover of the February 21, 1863 *Harper's Weekly*. Note the chair behind them, a prop that emphasizes their short stature.

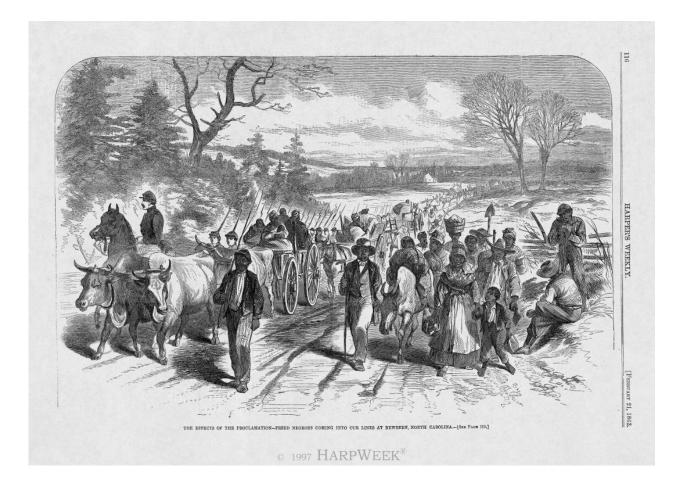


Figure 2. The next image to follow that of the Strattons in the February 21, 1863 *Harper's Weekly* was this depiction of "The Effects of the Proclamation--Freed Negroes Coming Into Our Lines at Newbern, North Carolina." While the Strattons were featured in a carefully posed, well-ordered, indoor scene, this illustration portrays recently freed slaves as a ragtag, disorderly bunch, captured in the liminal space of the road.

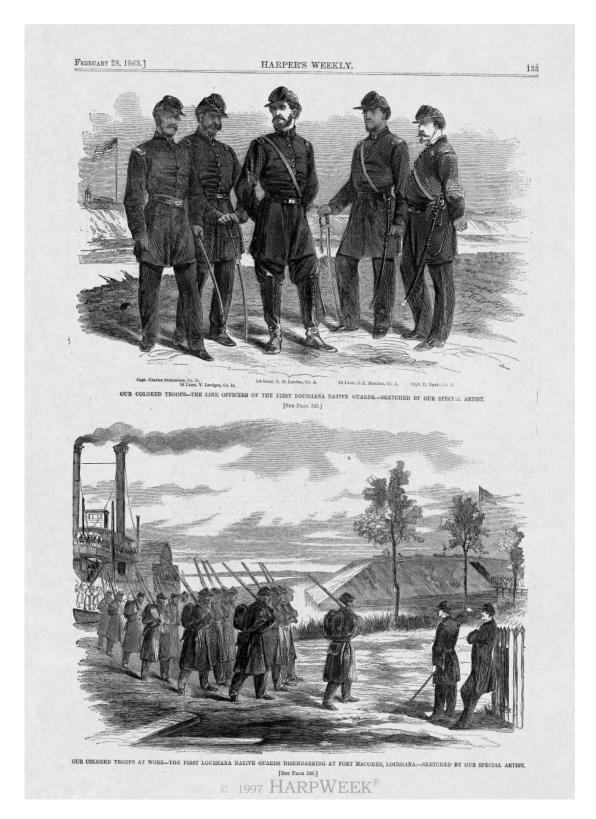


Figure 3. The spread on "Our Colored Troops" in the February 28, 1863 issue of *Harper's Weekly* sets up the officers' "colored" race and light skin as a visual puzzle.

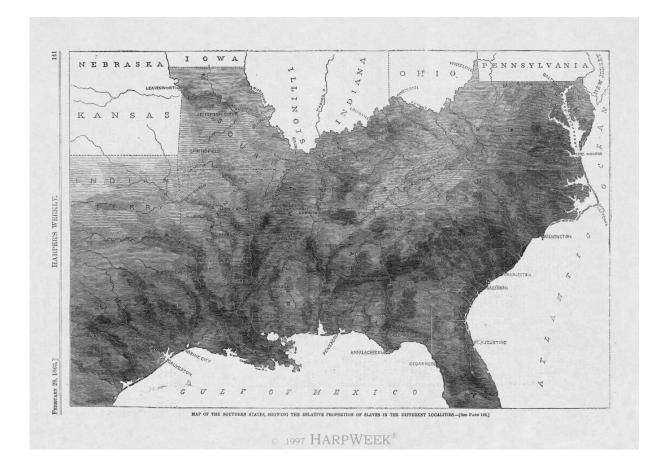


Figure 4. This chart from the February 28, 1863 *Harper's Weekly* uses shading to represent the relative proportion of the enslaved population to the white population. In doing so, it arguably represents the national body as a freakish mélange of color.



Figure 5. This cartoon from the April 22, 1865 issue of *Harper's Weekly* posits waracquired disability as the great equalizer, the identity that can cross the color line.

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