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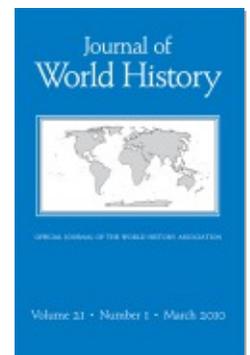
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## **Coloring Universal History: Robert Benjamin Lewis's Light and Truth (1843) and William Wells Brown's The Black Man (1863)**

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Coloring Universal History:  
Robert Benjamin Lewis's *Light and  
Truth* (1843) and William Wells Brown's  
*The Black Man* (1863)\*

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UNIVERSAL history is the oldest and most persistent form of world history making, yet it is conventionally associated with a small number of modern European writers such as Bishop Bossuet, Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Leopold von Ranke, and Karl Marx. Their names and writings are commonly used to support the view that universal history writing reached either a high or low point with philosophies of history in the nineteenth century, and then was superseded by more professional world and national history writing.<sup>1</sup> This prevailing view, in turn, confirms the judgment of—among others—postcolonial, post-

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\* I acknowledge with thanks the generous assistance of Patrick Manning in discussing the two central texts in this paper, and the anonymous reviewer, for his or her helpful comments, although any errors are my own responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> M. Hughes-Warrington, "World Histories," and "Shapes," in *Palgrave Advances in World Histories*, ed. M. Hughes-Warrington (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1–16, 112–134. See for example A. Megill, "Universal History," and C. Lockard, "World History," in *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, ed. K. Boyd (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 2:1079 and 1330; J. Bentley, *Shapes of World History in Twentieth-Century Scholarship* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1996); W. H. McNeill, "The Changing Shape of World History," *History and Theory* 34, no. 2 (1995): 14–26; P. Manning, *Navigating World History* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and M. Middell, "Universalsgeschichte, Weltgeschichte, Globalgeschichte, Geschichte der Globalisierung—ein Streit um Worte?" in *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte*, ed. M. Grantner, D. Rothermund, and Wolfgang Schwentker (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2005), pp. 64–66.

modern, and feminist scholars that universal history writing is a modern, masculinist, imperial, Enlightenment project designed to depersonalize those believed to be outside the West.

In Jürgen Osterhammel's view, for instance, the Enlightenment produced a historiography that aspired toward universalism and made some attempt to bring within history phenomena beyond Europe and North America. But Enlightenment ideals, he regrets, became entangled with imperialist designs, and the dominant form of historiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—universal history—was therefore deeply flawed in its treatment of colonized peoples as being outside of history, as objects, and unable to speak for themselves. Universal history sustained racism, an example of which Osterhammel finds in Hegel's argument that "the character of the Negro . . . is capable of no development of education. They have always been as we see them today."<sup>2</sup> Patrick O'Brien too laments the interweaving of Enlightenment historiography—characterized as the secular and reflexive repositioning of Europe in a history of the world—with Western imperial triumphalism after the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1789–1815). He writes: "Those who looked beyond Europe either wrote imperial histories, or displayed versions of cultural arrogance exemplified by the views of Hegel. . . . Hegelian presumptions that Europe maturing into the West represented the model for modernity and progress became present in the writings of most historians, who implicitly, and often explicitly, derived that assumption from a succession of canonical social scientists, including Malthus, Hegel, Tocqueville, Saint Simon, Comte, Mill, Spencer, Marx and Weber."<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Lamprecht and Weber, O'Brien's estimate is that only "a handful of isolated and now forgotten European scholars" worked against the Hegelian pattern established.<sup>4</sup> Sankar Muthu presents a different estimation, arguing that Enlightenment thought worked against imperialism in the well-known works of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder. He detects in Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784, *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Mankind*) and Kant's "*Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*" (1784, *Idea for a Uni-*

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<sup>2</sup> J. Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft Jenseits des Nationalstaats: Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2001), p. 101. See also Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> P. O'Brien, "Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 1 (2006): 3–39, 11–12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

versal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View), for example, the recognition of all humans as deserving of at least a modicum of “moral and political respect” due to their “cultural agency” and membership of societies that cannot be judged according to European or any other culturally specific standards.<sup>5</sup>

Osterhammel, O’Brien, and Muthu hold that the problem lay not with Enlightenment ideals themselves, but with their entanglement with imperialistic hubris. Jerry Bentley, on the other hand, implicates the Enlightenment itself, arguing that it is only right that “Eurocentric grand narratives of the Enlightenment, scientific, national, liberal, democratic, capitalist, industrial, Marxist, modernization, technology, and other varieties” have been condemned because they misrepresent peoples outside of Europe.<sup>6</sup> This is because for him, the Enlightenment ideals of “reason, progress, prosperity, freedom, liberation, equality, or justice” are at base Eurocentric molds that do not fit, and indeed prevent us from understanding, the experiences of peoples beyond Europe. He also, however, cautions against the use of inversions of “Enlightenment-derived” narratives, because their focus on imperialism, colonialism, racism, sexism, subjection, domination, self-interest, exploitation, and resistance amounts to no more than a “derivative reaction” that cannot escape the Enlightenment’s “gravitational field.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Dietmar Rothermund and Uday Mehta characterize universal histories as products of the Enlightenment that served nationalism and imperialism par excellence.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Genevieve Lloyd questions Enlightenment ideals from another angle, arguing that the association of reason with a particular understanding of masculinity led to many women and men being without philosophy and history.<sup>9</sup>

Across these arguments, universal history is implicated as a modern historiography of subjugation and taken as exemplified in Hegel’s divi-

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<sup>5</sup> S. Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 268.

<sup>6</sup> J. Bentley, “World History and Grand Narrative,” in *Writing World History 1800–2000*, ed. B. Stuchtey and E. Fuchs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> D. Rothermund, “Globalgeschichte und Geschichte der Globalisierung,” in *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte*, ed. M. Grantner, D. Rothermund, and W. Schwentker (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2005), pp. 13–14; and U. S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> G. Lloyd, “Maleness, Metaphor and the Crisis of Reason,” in *A Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. L. M. Antony and C. Witt (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 69–83; and Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

sion between those “with” and “without” history. O’Brien does draw our attention to the pre-Enlightenment traditions of writing universal history in Greco-Roman, Chinese, Japanese, and Islamic contexts, noting that they are in some cases just as “centric” as European works. In addition, he notes that from the nineteenth century onward, “Non-Western” cultures produced histories that rejected, embraced, or assimilated Western historiography.<sup>10</sup> He then passes on, however, without elaborating on his point or providing examples. When O’Brien talks of histories made outside of Europe, what kinds of histories does he mean? Might universal histories have been produced outside of Europe and against imperial designs? Sanajit Subramanyam’s historical research on world histories gives us cause to believe that world history making took place in numerous locations around the world. His focus to date, though, on pre-Enlightenment historiography means that we are unable to test his, or other arguments above that universal history was the “complicit handmaiden of the Enlightenment” or “modernity.”<sup>11</sup>

Further, the arguments of postcolonial scholars such as Ashis Nandy, Ranajit Guha, Gyan Prakash, and Steven Feierman against the production of “totalizing,” “nationalist,” and universal historiographies and in favor of “contingent” and “non-foundational” micronarratives and mythologies have served to direct attention away from universal histories as potential sites of social and political resistance.<sup>12</sup> The subaltern, it has been assumed, write microhistory, or do not write history at all. As a consequence past production of universal histories by the colonized has been obscured from view. As Kerwin Lee Klein wryly observes, the nineteenth-century antinomy between the peoples with and without history survives; the only difference is that metanarratives and micronarratives have swapped places and the former is now held to be “without” history.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> O’Brien, “Restoration of Global History,” p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>12</sup> A. Nandy, “History’s Forgotten Doubles,” *History and Theory* 34, no. 2 (1995): 45–47; G. Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (1990): 383–408; S. Feierman, “Africa in History: The End of Universal Narratives,” in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. G. Prakash (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 40–65; and R. Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> K. L. Klein, “In Search of Narrative Mastery: Postmodernism and the People without History,” *History and Theory* 34, no. 4 (1997): 297.

## DEFINING UNIVERSAL HISTORY

The tradition of universal history making, as Arnaldo Momigliano, Raoul Mortley, José Miguel Alonso-Núñez, and Kathryn Clarke have argued, stretches far beyond the nineteenth century and back to Hellenistic Greece.<sup>14</sup> Mortley has argued for the connection of universal history making in that context with Aristotelian philosophy, and defined it as: “(i) an interest in universal figures, and in the truths which belong to the whole world; (ii) an interest in moral aspects of biographical facts since moral ideas were of the generalisable kind sought by post-Aristotelian historians; (iii) an interest in acts (*praxeis*) as that which provides the best guide to the inner moral man, the ‘signs of the soul’; (iv) the interest in tradition whether mythical or factual, since true tradition is held to contain truth.”<sup>15</sup> But the survival of less than 5 percent of Hellenistic literature makes the testing of his definition difficult. José Miguel Alonso-Núñez has therefore argued for a broader description of universal historians as “those who deal with the history of mankind from the earliest times, and in all parts of the world known to them.”<sup>16</sup> But even his definition does not readily accommodate the efforts of those who composed works like biographical catalogues in both antiquity and the modern world, which were universal not so much in historical and geographical scope, but in the selective identification of biographies underpinned by principles thought to be crucial in the shaping and ordering of the known or meaningful world. The use of a far-ranging narrative to highlight or track the realization of supposedly universal human principles in Christian and later in philosophical and conjectural universal histories in various global localities is also a significant component of the tradition of universal history making. Further, any account of universal-history making needs to accommo-

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<sup>14</sup> A. Momigliano, “Greek Historiography,” *History and Theory* 17, no. 1 (1978): 1–28; R. Mortley, *The Idea of Universal History from Hellenistic Philosophy to Early Christian Historiography* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1996); J. M. Alonso-Núñez, *The Idea of Universal History in Greece: From Herodotus to the Age of Augustus* (Amsterdam: JC Gieben, 2001); and K. Clarke, *Between Geography and History: Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Mortley, *Idea of Universal History*, p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> J. M. Alonso-Núñez, “The Emergence of Universal Historiography from the 4th to the 2nd Centuries BC,” in *Purposes of History in Greek Historiography from the Fourth to the Second Centuries BC*, ed. H. Verdin, G. Schepens, and E. de Keyser (Leuven, Belgium: Orientaliste, 1990), p. 197. See also Alonso-Núñez, *Idea of Universal History in Greece*.

date the contribution of Islamic writers who, like al-Tabari in *Tarikh al-rusul wa-I-Muluk* (The History of the Prophets and Kings) saw it as characterized by *isnads*: unbroken chains of transmission, and much later, H. G. Wells's insistence on the core idea of a "unity of presentation attainable only when the whole subject has been passed through one single mind."<sup>17</sup>

There is no single definition of universal history, characterized by a definitive set of necessary and sufficient properties, conditions, or criteria. Rather, it presents a compound of meanings from different times and places, a constellation of at least four usages that may be singularly or co-present in any work so labelled by an author or historiographer. First, the term may denote a comprehensive and perhaps also unified history of the known world or universe; second, a history that illuminates truths, ideals, or principles that are thought to belong to the whole world; third, a history of the world unified by the workings of a single mind; and fourth, a history of the world that has passed down through an unbroken line of transmission. With this expanded definition in mind, we should expect a corresponding expansion in the range of works considered in any history of universal history.

An expanded definition of universal history promises an expanded corpus of works for historiographical study. And this expanded corpus of works will take in authors that we may not expect to be there because of their social standing or lack of what we might now call academic qualifications. Reflecting on this point, it is fair to say that we have only just begun to chart the contours of universal history production from the nineteenth century onward. This is because works conventionally cited in surveys of the genre represent only a tiny fraction of total production. Even the most cursory inspection of library holdings reveals that hundreds of universal histories were produced and distributed in English-language contexts from the eighteenth century onward. It is not easy to assess the impact of these universal histories, but it is worth noting that some, like Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Elements of General History* (1801)—which ran to ten editions and was continued after his death—probably enjoyed wider distribution and a larger print run than the now better-known works of Hegel and Marx.<sup>18</sup> The neglect of texts such as Tytler's reflects the wider neglect in scholar-

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<sup>17</sup> H. G. Wells, *Outline of History* (London: G. Stevens, 1920), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> A. F. Tytler, *Elements of General History, Ancient and Modern; to Which are Added a Table of Chronology, and a Comparative View of Ancient and Modern Geography*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Brockett, 1801).

ship of forms of education outside of state-regulated institutions with accredited teachers. As Rosemary Mitchell has argued, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts were most often “read within an educational environment which appears to our eyes to be amateurish and informal: they were read in home schoolrooms and small private schools under the supervision of relatives, governesses, and other *ad hoc* tutors, at a time when history was still part of the *belle-lettres* and was expected to exhibit the narrative techniques of literature.”<sup>19</sup> Further, Tytler’s work reminds us not to expect that the authors of universal histories will be philosophers working within universities. Drawing texts produced outside of educational institutions into an account of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century world history making promises to expand or even to destabilize conventional accounts that focus in on the rise and demise of philosophical and conjectural universal histories. Universal history in the eighteenth- or nineteenth-centuries may not simply correspond to a philosophical or sociological account of the progressive unfolding of freedom or civilization. Given the sheer number of texts available for appraisal, however, any re-visioning of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century universal histories needs time and collective effort. A far more humble project is undertaken in this paper. On offer is a case study of two histories produced by African American writers outside of the colonial metropole of England: Robert Benjamin Lewis’s *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History; Containing the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Races from the Creation of the World to the Present Time* (1843) and William Wells Brown’s *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863). While a limited sample, it will be argued that it is highly instructive, for in combination they suggest a more complex history of universal-history making in the nineteenth century than has hitherto been offered. More specifically, it will be shown that the works of these two writers are neither straightforward affirmations nor derivative reactions against the Enlightenment and imperialism. Rather they are complex constellations of views that serve to undercut the certainty that “universality” suggests. Further, it will be suggested that the efforts of these two writers are understood best not through comparison with texts produced in institutions, but with those composed for other educative spaces such as voluntary associations.

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<sup>19</sup> R. Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image 1830–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 57.

## AFRICAN AMERICANS WRITE THE WORLD

At and even before the time Hegel gave the lectures that were to become his *Philosophy of History*, African American historians wrote histories that canvassed events across the world and in many ages.<sup>20</sup> An extensive analysis of these world histories is yet to be done, although it might be expected to include the works of, among others, James W. C. Pennington (*A Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored People*, 1841), Henry Garnet (*The Past and Present Condition, and the Destiny, of the Colored Race*, 1848), Henry MacNeal Turner (*The Negro in All Ages*, 1873), Joseph T. Wilson (*Emancipation*, 1882), J. F. Dyson (*A New and Simple Explanation of the Unity of the Human Race*, 1886), Joseph E. Hayne (*The Black Man, or, A Natural History of the Hamitic Race*, 1893), W. H. Crogman and H. F. Kletzing (*The Progress of a Race*, 1897), Pauline E. Hopkins (*A Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by its Descendents*, 1905), and Daniel Murray (“Murray’s Historical and Biographical Encyclopedia of the Colored Race Throughout the World,” c. 1895–1930).<sup>21</sup> To see how these works might destabilize conventional understandings of nineteenth-century universal history, a case study of

<sup>20</sup> In this article, my interchangeable usage of the terms “African American,” “black,” and “Negro” reflects the usage of these terms by Robert Benjamin Lewis and William Wells Brown. For a survey of African American historiography prior to Hegel’s lectures, see for example A. Potkay and S. Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> James W. C. Pennington, *A Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored People* (1841; Detroit: Negro History Press, 1969); Henry Highland Garnet, *The Past and the Present Condition, and the Destiny, of the Colored Race: A Discourse Delivered at the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Female Benevolent Society of Troy* (Troy, N.Y.: Steam Press of J. C. Kneeland and Co., 1848); Henry MacNeal Turner, *The Negro in All Ages: A Lecture Delivered in the Second Baptist Church of Savannah* (Savannah, Ga.: D. G. Patton, Steam Printer, 1873); Joseph T. Wilson, *Emancipation: Its Course and Progress, from 1491 BC to AD 1875, with a Review of President Lincoln’s Proclamations, the XIII Amendment, and the Progress of the Freed People since Emancipation, with a History of the Emancipation Movement* (Hampton, Va.: Hampton Press, 1882); J. F. Dyson, *A New and Simple Explanation of the Unity of the Human Race and the Origin of Color* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1886); Joseph E. Hayne, *The Black Man, or, A Natural History of the Hamitic Race* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1893); W. H. Crogman and H. F. Kletzing, *The Progress of a Race* (Atlanta, Ga.: J. L. Nichols, 1897); Pauline E. Hopkins, *A Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by its Descendents . . . Compiled and Arranged from the Works of the Best Known Ethnologists and Historians* (Cambridge, Mass.: P. E. Hopkins and Co., 1905); and D. Murray, “Murray’s Historical and Biographical Encyclopedia of the Colored Race Throughout the World” (unpublished ms., c. 1895–1930, Ms. Murray, reels 1–9, Wisconsin Historical Society).

two works—Robert Benjamin Lewis’s *Light and Truth* (1843) and William Wells Brown’s *The Black Man* (1863)—will be undertaken.

The son of a Frenchman, Thomas Louis, and an unnamed Native American woman, Robert Benjamin Lewis was born at Pittston (now Gardiner), Maine, in 1802. Little is known about his childhood or education, apart from his having seen service in the war of 1812. In 1834 he married Mary F. Heuston and moved to Bath, Maine, where they raised twelve children. Making ends meet was not easy, as Daniel Murray explains in a biographical note written around 1901, “In his struggle for bread for himself and large family, he whitewashed, kalsomined, painted and papered houses, covered and mended umbrellas, cleaned carpets, while his wife and such of the children as were old enough, assisted in making baskets and caning chairs.” Murray also describes the family home as “roving,” and put this down to the “nomadic characteristics of his Indian ancestors reinforced with the mercurial blood of the French.” In the evenings, Lewis worked on what would become *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History; Containing the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Races from the Creation of the World to the Present Time*. *Light and Truth* was published first as four one hundred–page pamphlets retailing at twenty-five cents each, and every year Lewis toured around New England to sell them. In 1836, the four parts were joined and released as a book, and expanded editions were published and promoted by a “committee of colored gentlemen” in 1843, 1844, and 1851. When this arrangement failed to deliver the expanded sales that Lewis expected, he took over the task of promotion himself, and in the 13 May 1853 edition of *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* he appealed for aid to publish a newly completed work of around 1600 pages which would “remove the prejudices from whites against the Colored and Indian people in the United States.” His general aim was to empower his readers with knowledge, for without it, he writes, “we should be an ignorant, superstitious and degraded race. . . . The most learned men of all nations have obtained their information, skill and science from books and historical works. . . . Reader, remember that knowledge is power, and if you have more knowledge you are wiser than your neighbour, and have power over him which he cannot resist.”<sup>22</sup> It is unknown how much funding Lewis raised through his appeal, but the work never appeared in print. In 1857 he travelled to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to investigate the possibility of emigration with

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<sup>22</sup> R. B. Lewis, “A New History,” *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 13 May 1853, p. 1.

his family. Before he was able to return, however, he contracted yellow fever and died. He was buried in Haiti in February 1858.<sup>23</sup>

William Wells Brown's life is in many ways quite different from that of Lewis. The son of a slave, Elizabeth, and George Higgins, the cousin of his owner, Brown was born in Lexington, Kentucky, around 1814. In 1834 he escaped from slavery, and up to 1836 he worked a steamboat on Lake Erie that ferried slaves to freedom in Canada. His interest in the antislavery movement intensified, and he organized a black temperance society. Although the first speeches he gave for the movement were not those of a "very good lecturer," he grew in confidence.<sup>24</sup> Over time, his orations became more polished performances, and in 1847 he was hired as a Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society lecture agent. In the same year, he published his first book, *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself*. This was to be the first of over a dozen works of poetry, fiction, memoirs, travel narratives, and history, including the first novel published by an African American, *Clotel; or The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1854). In 1849, he undertook a lecture tour of Britain and represented the American Peace Society—an organization constituted in the main by Congregational, Baptist, and Methodist ministers—at the International Peace Congress in Paris.<sup>25</sup> At the Congress, he delivered a speech and met Victor Hugo and the wife of Alexis de Tocqueville. Brown's tour extended to 1854 as a result of the disintegration of his marriage and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Concerned that the act would make it dangerous for Brown to return to the United States, British abolitionists made his repatriation possible by purchasing his freedom. After his return, he lectured as an agent for the Massachusetts and American Anti-Slavery societies and penned his three major historical works: *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863), *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity* (1867), and *The Rising Son; or, The Antecedents*

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<sup>23</sup> Biographical information provided by D. Murray, "Robert Benjamin Lewis," Ms Murray, Reel 6, Wisconsin Historical Society Microform Collection, 153–159. Murray claims that the biographical note he fashioned was based upon information given to him by Lewis's eldest daughter, Mrs. M. A. L. Johnson (1836–1901).

<sup>24</sup> C. F. Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, ed. B. Stephenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 111; see also W. E. Farrison, *William Wells Brown: Author and Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> M. E. Curtis, *The American Peace Crusade, 1815–1860* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1929).

and *Advancement of the Colored Race* (1873). He died in Boston on 6 November 1884.<sup>26</sup>

At first sight the selection of Lewis and Brown for a study of universal history making may seem puzzling, for while Lewis labels his work a universal history, Brown does not. Brown does not even classify his work using cognate terms such as “general history,” “conjectural history,” or “philosophy of history.” Nor do these works present progressive narratives of freedom or civilization like those to be found in more familiar philosophical or conjectural universal histories. Lewis’s *Light and Truth* has long been judged incoherent, beginning with Martin Delany’s assessment in 1852 that it was “nothing more than a compilation of selected portions of Rollins’s, Goldsmith’s, Ferguson’s, Hume’s, and other ancient histories; added to which, is a tissue of historical absurdities and literary blunders, shamefully palpable, for which the author or authors should mantle their faces.”<sup>27</sup> Eighty years later, Vernon Loggins was even more forthright, declaring the work to be “a chaotic mass of pseudo-historical facts” where “the phrasing is as wild as the arrangement of the contents” and “little more than emotional outpouring.”<sup>28</sup> More recently, Mia Bay has judged Lewis to have provided an example of “how easily African American efforts to rebut white racial doctrine could shade into a black chauvinism that mirrored the very racist logic it opposed.” Finally, John Ernest has affirmed Delany’s judgment, explaining: “it is frankly difficult to find fault with Delany’s evaluation, for what Lewis presents indeed seems like little more than a compilation (and is, in fact, identified as such), haphazardly organized at best. While one can admire Lewis’s attempt to construct an Afrocentric vision of history, one can only regret that he includes in that vision seemingly wild and unsupported interpretations of the Bible and of history. . . . one wonders why the author did not spend more time arranging his materials in a more readable form.”<sup>29</sup> Brown has fared little better, with Loggins declaring that he was a “propagandist”

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<sup>26</sup> P. Jefferson, introduction to *The Travels of William Wells Brown*, by W. W. Brown (New York: Marcus Wiener, 1991), p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> M. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (1852; New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1968), p. 128.

<sup>28</sup> V. Loggins, *The Negro Author: His Development in America to 1900* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1931), pp. 93, 179.

<sup>29</sup> J. Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Historians Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 105.

who made use of “too many press clippings” and taxed the credulity of his readers.<sup>30</sup> The problem stems, as Ernest has demonstrated, from Brown’s repeated use of the same materials for different purposes in different genres. He explains: “Stories from his autobiographies turn up in his fiction; stories in the autobiographies themselves change; novels are reshaped; episodes from his autobiographies become episodes in his plays . . . stories from his fiction turn up in his histories; and materials from earlier historical works reappears in later historical works, in different contexts, serving different historical contexts.”<sup>31</sup> Against these criticisms, I want to argue that complexity should not be mistaken for chaos, and that such complexity arose necessarily from the marginal situation that African Americans wrote from.

### LIGHT AND TRUTH

*Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History, Containing the Universal History of the Colored and the Indian Race, from the Creation of the World to the Present Time* consists of fourteen chapters of varying length. Chronologically, it covers God’s creation of the world to the establishment of Haiti after the Slaves’ Rebellion of 1791. But it also includes hundreds of digressions, ranging from single lines and timelines of events to detailed ethnographic and biographical expositions. Chapters 1–6, for instance, narrate history from creation to the destruction of Jerusalem, but they are also punctuated by comments on health lotions, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the supposed references of ancient thinkers to America in their writings.<sup>32</sup> So while one part of the text diachronically relates ancient and modern history and is tied together chronologically and sometimes even causally, the other synchronically relates geography, customary activities, and individual virtues and vices. These digressions are generally regarded as evidence of hasty composition. In many cases, however, Lewis’s digressions serve two aims that run through his work: first, to color events, places, and persons; and second, to argue that blacks can construct an “empire of the mind.” Color is for Lewis something that can be diffused and acquired both through physical proximity or contact and through the juxtaposition

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<sup>30</sup> Loggins, *Negro Author*, pp. 170, 159, 161.

<sup>31</sup> Ernest, *Liberation Historiography*, p. 334.

<sup>32</sup> R. B. Lewis, *Light and Truth: Collected from the Bible and Ancient and Modern History; Containing the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Races from the Creation of the World to the Present Time* (1843), pp. 124–125.

of statements in a historical narrative. Historical and historiographical diffusion are suggested, for example, in the opening statement from the brief chapter “Antiquity of America”: “America, was first settled by the Israelites-Indians who came out from Egypt. (The View of the Hebrews, by Ethan Smith.) America was discovered by Columbus in 1492, and was peopled by Colonies in AD 1620, from Europe. The first settlement in New England was made at Plymouth, in the midst of a fertile country.—The Egyptians were an Ethiopian people. (Herodotus).”<sup>33</sup> In this excerpt, Columbus and European colonization are ancillary to the statement that Native Americans are Israelites and, because Israelites are Ethiopians, Native Americans are Ethiopians. Mormon belief in Native Americans being a lost tribe of Israel and Herodotus’s observation that both Colchians and Egyptians have “black skins and woolly hair”<sup>34</sup> are connected by Lewis because “the Ethiopians once bore sway, not only in all of Africa, but over almost all Asia.” Native Americans are colored because Ethiopians colored Egyptians and Israelites by contact. Lewis does not specify what “contact” entails, but his writings imply that it may simply mean trade and political connections. States as well as individuals can be colored by contact; so, for example, Rome and other Mediterranean states are a part of Lewis’s history of color by virtue of their contact with “Ethiopians” in Africa, the Middle East, and India. Historiographical diffusion is also suggested in statements that pair individuals with groups; for example, he writes of Jesus: “Our common enemies in America call *frizzle* or *curly hair*, on the head of an African, *wool*. A description of Christ: ‘His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and as black as a raven’ [Solomon’s Song, v. 11].”<sup>35</sup> In this example, Lewis connects African Americans to Jesus on both a physiological and historiographical level. Through the juxtaposition of two statements on physiology, Lewis suggests the diffusion of Jesus’s personal qualities to African Americans. Lewis also uses the strategy of juxtaposition to color Arabians, including Mohammed. They are, he argues, echoing the Song of Solomon again, “black as the tents of Kedar,” and later he slips seamlessly from a discussion of Moors to Negroes.<sup>36</sup> Much of the world is colored by Lewis via the suggestion of historical and historiographical diffusion. But its coloring

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>34</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. de Selincourt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), §2.104.2.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis, *Light and Truth*, p. 343. Juxtaposition is also used to imply that Eden was in Africa. See p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 336, 340.

is incomplete, for some cultures are excluded—for example the Chinese—and others are not fully colored. Color can be transmitted, but that transmission is incomplete in cases where an individual or people do not take up colored forms of action. Lewis holds that Islamic people are incompletely colored, for example, because of their embrace of acts of violence and domination. Mohammed, he claims, “never laid down his arms from the time he captured Mecca, till he subdued all Arabia, and a part of Syria; impressing his religion wherever he extended his conquests.” Muslims are learned, but in their use of force, their learning is incomplete.<sup>37</sup> The coloring and thus drawing in of Jews to universal history is incomplete for a similar reason. The destruction of Jerusalem, he argues, was judgment against the “persecutors and murderers” of Jesus.<sup>38</sup>

By contrast, the Ethiopian and Egyptians of the ancient world achieved fullness of color through rational and learned acts. The Ethiopians established property rights and the mechanical arts, and wherever they traveled, “they were rewarded for their wisdom.”<sup>39</sup> It was the Egyptians, though, who first realized an “empire of the mind” in antiquity:

The Egyptians extended their reputation by other means than conquest. Egypt loved peace because Egypt loved justice; and maintained soldiers only for its security. She became known by her sending colonies into all parts of the world, and with them laws and civilisation. She triumphed by the wisdom of her councils, and the superiority of her knowledge; and this empire of the mind appeared more noble and glorious to them than that which is achieved by arms and conquest. . . . The Egyptians were celebrated legislators and able politicians, magistrates born for government, men that have excelled in all arts and sciences, philosophers who carried their inquiries as far as was possible in those early ages, and have left us such maxims of morality as many Christians ought to blush at.

It is with this connection of color with an “empire of the mind” in mind that we should approach the final chapters of *Light and Truth*, for they invert the standard contemporary nomination of particular European nations as the epitome of a free and enlightened community and propose instead the culmination of color in Haiti. Lewis’s final chapter

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

on Haiti appears after a series of chapters titled “The Arts and Sciences,” “Modern Eminent Gentlemen,” “The Great Historical Ages,” “The Ancient Arabians,” “History of the Prophets,” and “Periods, &c.” In these chapters Lewis again uses juxtaposition to color people and events and to render European events ancillary. “Periods, &c.” offers a condensed chronological table of Europe-centered historical events from 826 to 1791 that ends with “Insurrection in Saint Domingo.” This list, like Lewis’s earlier note about Columbus’s arrival in the Americas sits sandwiched between an extensive and overpowering biographical survey of ancient and modern people of learning who were black physiologically or by connection. So it is, for instance, that we learn that Strabo, Julius Caesar, and Plato were African, and read of the achievements of African American historians and poets such as Hosea Easton, Job Ben Solomon, and Phyllis Wheatley. The placement of these biographical chapters suggests proximity with the rational and political unity achieved in Haiti.

After a historical, economic, and geographical introduction to Haiti, Lewis offers a rather selective history of events after the slaves’ revolt. He first reprints a letter by John Chandler from the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* in which the “comparatively peaceful character” of the rebellion of President Boyer “reflects much credit on the often calumniated people of that land.”<sup>40</sup> The Haitians “are resolved to exert themselves, and to cultivate the arts of peace; they believe themselves to be on the way to surmount all their difficulties; they write and speak like men who have learned a great deal; they have full reliance on their qualifications for self-government. We trust that the experiment about to be made of forming a new constitution, and of framing laws suited to the present and future exigencies of society, may be entered upon with prudence, and carried through with wisdom.”<sup>41</sup> This is followed by an antecedent letter by Abbé Grégoire to the “citizens” of the West Indies, which concludes with an appeal to be “Strictly obedient to the laws, teach your children to respect them. By a careful education, instruct them in all the duties of morality; so shall you be prepared for the succeeding generation, virtuous citizens, honourable men, enlightened patriots, and defenders of their country!”<sup>42</sup> The gap between these letters—1791 to 1843—was a period of violent upheaval, one that does not fit well with a reasoned empire of the mind. The full achievement

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

of color entails peaceful and rational action, and leadership in a world that needs to be colored. Lewis then appears to end his work rather abruptly with a “scale of complexion”:

Between Black and White is a Mulatto:  
 Between Mulatto and White is a Quadroon.  
 Between Quadroon and White is a Mestizo. (After this the color becomes imperceptible to us.)  
 Between Mulatto and Black is a Sambo.  
 Between a Sambo and a Black is a Mangroon.  
 Between a Mangroon and a Black the white hue is lost.  
 The white complexion of the Indian tribes:—Reddish, Copper, Brown, Black, and a white mixed hue.<sup>43</sup>

This is, though, a rather clever reworking of color classifications that were used in many cases to discriminate against individuals in the United States and elsewhere. Through his use of the phrases “After thus the color becomes imperceptible to us,” “hue is lost,” and “a white mixed hue,” Lewis renders the boundaries between classifications permeable. Color can be imperceptible, and a group may be made up of a mixture of colors. I may be colored, but not appear to be so. Judgment about whether I am colored therefore needs another marker, which for Lewis is rational and learned action. We all have the potential to be colored, but may need the leadership of people in ancient Egypt and Haiti to show us the way.

### THE BLACK MAN

At the beginning of a chapter on William Wells Brown in *Liberation Historiography*, John Ernest notes that it is not obvious how we are to understand his works, or to trust his accounts of historical events. How can we read or trust someone who so blatantly mixes genres of writing and fact and fiction? Ernest, like Robert S. Levine, concludes that Brown is both a “deadly serious moralist” and a “confidence man and trickster.”<sup>44</sup> This two-fold appraisal of Brown is appropriate, for in his historical writings he presents a discomfiting social critique while seeming to imitate the manner of contemporary historians in an

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>44</sup> Ernest, *Liberation Historiography*, pp. 333–334; R. S. Levine, introduction to *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*, by W. W. Brown (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2000), p. 4.

amateurish and even humorous fashion. For nineteenth-century readers like Charlotte Grimké, Brown was “amusing,” for others, he was clearly didactic.<sup>45</sup>

*The Black Man* opens with a “Memoir of the author” in which Brown challenges narratives of white superiority by citing writers such as Thomas Babington Macaulay, David Hume, Caesar, and Cicero to demonstrate that North Americans, and their British antecedents, were the descendents of inferior slaves. He explains: “Caesar, in writing home, said of the Britons, ‘They are the most ignorant people I ever conquered. They cannot be taught music.’ Cicero, writing to his friend Atticus, advised him not to buy slaves from England, ‘because,’ said he, ‘they cannot be taught to read, and are the ugliest and most stupid race I ever saw.’ I am sorry that Mr. Lincoln came from such a low origin; but he is not to blame. I only find fault with him for making mouths at me.”<sup>46</sup> Whites cannot be good masters of slaves, for they did not know themselves how to be good slaves. How can Abraham Lincoln help his actions, Brown argues, if he is descended from such poor stock? Against this backdrop, he unfurls an Afro-American success story, using his biography to demonstrate achievements in poetry and the arts (twelve sketches), writing and historiography (two), medicine (three), public speaking (five), political and military leadership (twelve), preaching (seven), and antislavery agitations (ten). Fifteen of the figures are from outside of the United States, three are women, and there is a sole white that is described as a “friend to the race.” His emphasis on the intellectual achievements arises from his interest in rebutting two classes of “calumniators and traducers of the Negro”:

The first and most relentless are those who have done them the greatest injury, by being instrumental in their enslavement and consequent degradation. They delight to descant upon the “natural inferiority” of the blacks, and claim that we were destined only for a servile condition, entitled neither to liberty nor the legitimate pursuit of happiness. The second class are those who are ignorant of the characteristics of the race, and are the mere echoes of the first. To meet and refute these misrepresentations, and to supply a deficiency, long felt in the community, of a work containing sketches of individuals who, by their own genius, capacity, and intellectual development, have surmounted the many obstacles which slavery and prejudice have thrown in their way,

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<sup>45</sup> Grimké, *Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, p. 330.

<sup>46</sup> W. W. Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (New York: Thomas Hamilton, 1863), p. 34.

and raised themselves to positions of honor and influence, this volume was written. . . . If this work shall aid in vindicating the Negro's character, and show that he is endowed with those intellectual and amiable qualities which adorn and dignify human nature, it will meet the most sanguine hopes of the writer.<sup>47</sup>

Negroes, we are told, possess "natural intelligence," and by their own efforts can render services to science, culture, society, and liberty. Even the murderer Nat Turner possessed "an uncommon share of intelligence, with a mind capable of attaining any thing," but he was set along the wrong path as a result of "early impressions."<sup>48</sup> What those impressions correspond to is not specified, but we might infer that slavery and a lack of intellectual expectation on the part of whites and Negroes alike are the key for Brown.

Superficially, Brown's work appears an amateurish simulation of the popular contemporary genre of collective biography. Originating from ancient catalogue verses, collective biographies have in common the production of a list organized around a single theme, such as kings, warriors, and good wives. They are further characterized by the apparently random order of their entries: for example, presentation in nonchronological or nonalphabetical order. As was argued earlier, many collective biographies range far over space and time, and deserve recognition as universal histories because their authors were evidently interested in drawing together historical events to lay bare universal moral truths. For instance the contemporary female writers Sarah Stickney Ellis (*The Mothers of Great Men*, 1874), Sarah Josepha Hale (*Woman's Record; or, Sketches of All Distinguished Women, from "The Beginning" until AD 1850*, 1853), Mary Hay (*Female Biography, or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of all Ages and Countries*, 1803), Lucy Aikin (*Epistles on Women, Exemplifying their Character and Condition in Various Ages and Nations with Miscellaneous Poems*, 1810), Anna Jameson (*Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*, 1832), Laure Junot (*Memoirs of Celebrated Women*, 1834), and Clara Balfour (*Women Worth Emulating*, 1877) presented variations on the "womanist" argument that women were "the mainspring of human progress toward 'millennial peace'" because they were created last in an ascending scale from matter to man.<sup>49</sup> As

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 5–6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 73. See also pp. 51, 57, 87, 90.

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Josepha Hale, *Woman's Record; or, Sketches of All Distinguished Women, from "The Beginning" until AD 1850 Arranged in Four Eras with Selections from Female Writers of Every Age* (London: Sampson, Low, Son and Co., 1853), p.xxxvi. See also S. S. Ellis, *The*

Mary Spongberg has noted, collective biography offered women the opportunity of writing world history in a way that did not appear to challenge scholarship by men.<sup>50</sup>

Collective biography also provided an entry point to historiography for other marginalized groups, such as African Americans. Seen in this light, Brown's *The Black Man* is an oblique contribution to the historiography of world history, and more particularly universal history, thanks to his holistic account of African American intellectual capabilities that can make, order, and sustain a world. Further, his work is a critical comment on contemporary understandings of historiography itself. Throughout *The Black Man*, Brown willfully cross-fertilizes historical phenomena with fiction. Included in the biographies, for example, are sketches of the English African Joseph Jenkins—which commentators have located “in the shadowland between the real and the imaginary”—and a sketch titled “A Man without a Name.” This sketch is a fictionalized account of Brown's own life, and a repeat play on both the opening memoir and his earlier *Narrative of William W. Brown* (1847). The story appears again in *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (1867), this time concluding with the figure taking on the name of his white benefactor, the Quaker Wells Brown. The variations in the ways that Brown tells this story of himself undercut not only the truthfulness of his histories, but also his autobiography. Working against the grain of historiographical convention, playing with expectations about genre and evidence, Brown undercuts not only himself, but prevailing universal historical accounts of the place of African Americans in history. In so doing, he initiates readers into the considerable intellectual achievements of a black community.

## COLORING UNIVERSAL HISTORY

Lewis's and Brown's works fit the second definition of universal history articulated above—a history that illuminates truths, ideals, or principles that are thought to belong to the whole world—for they

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*Mothers of Great Men* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1874); M. Hay, *Female Biography, or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of all Ages and Countries* (London: Richard Phillips, 1803); L. Aiken, *Epistles on Women* (London: J. Johnson and Co., 1810); A. B. M. Jameson, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (New York: Harper, 1832); L. Junot, *Memoirs of Celebrated Women* (London: E. Churton, 1834); and C. L. Balfour, *Women Worth Emulating* (New York: American Tract Society, 1877).

<sup>50</sup> Mary Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

collect examples of historical phenomena and agents and places from a wide range of times and places to promote the idea of an African American, and ultimately international black community. Sustained by interaction among rational and free agents, that community was to be the basis for self-conscious decisions about the pursuit of the common good. As we have already seen, though, the forms of Lewis's and Brown's contributions to the historiography of universal history differ markedly: the first is a large-scale description of social transformations culminating in Haiti, and the second is a collective biography rendered problematic through the playful mixing of fact and fiction. How are we to explain their choice of objective, but also the differences in their execution of it?

Multiple analytical frames have been employed by historical scholars to explore nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American historiography. Of these, three appear at first sight to be the most promising for explaining the forms and functions of Lewis's and Brown's works. The first characterizes African American historiography as a response and even rebuttal to European universal histories of the philosophical or conjectural variety. Paul Gilroy, Shamooin Zamir, Winfried Siemerling, and Margaret Kohn, for example, have analyzed the writings of W. E. B. DuBois as reworkings and even inversions of Hegel's world-historical vision.<sup>51</sup> Zamir holds that DuBois probably came into contact with Hegel's writings in 1889–1890, when he studied at Harvard under George Santayana. Rather than using Hegel to support nationalism and manifest destiny in North America—as Zamir contends many other contemporaries did—DuBois drew upon the notion of the “unhappy consciousness” from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to support his understanding of “double consciousness.”<sup>52</sup> This he set in a reworked Hegelian teleology in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and the Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this

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<sup>51</sup> In this section, I have considered only scholarship that explores the reception of universal histories among African Americans. Other more general studies of reception include Mark G. Spencer's *David Hume and Eighteenth-Century America* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> S. Zamir, *Dark Voices: W. E. B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888–1903* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 113–115, 248–249 n. 2.

double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.<sup>53</sup>

DuBois's path of progress to self-consciousness diverges from, but also overlaps with, Hegel's *Philosophy of History* and is therefore not, as Gilroy holds, outside of Western historiography.<sup>54</sup> It represents, rather, an act of appropriation and partial reinscription. DuBois, like Hegel, holds that self-consciousness has been progressively realized in world history through a dialectic process. Indeed "America" is invoked at the end of *The Souls of Black Folk* as the agent that will in future "rend the veil." This future will be characterized by the emergence of a "better and truer self": "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world."<sup>55</sup> In the synthesis of the "truer" self, neither Africa nor America will be subsumed, but will be reconciled distinctions.<sup>56</sup> It is unclear how, in DuBois's vision of the scale of forms of freedom and selfhood, how such reconciliation is achieved and how the distinctiveness of synthesized forms is maintained.

DuBois's close interest in Hegel's world-historical writings provides us with an excellent opportunity to see how a writer purportedly "without history" refashioned and even "colored" universal history. In the case of Lewis and Brown, however, we have no evidence of a direct reading of Hegel or even reading via an intermediary such as Frederick Douglass. Lewis and Brown were aware of Douglass's views in print, but as William McFeely points out, Douglass only encountered Hegel

<sup>53</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 8–9.

<sup>54</sup> P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 60.

<sup>55</sup> DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> W. Siemerling, "W. E. B. DuBois, Hegel, and the Staging of Alterity," *Callaloo* 24, no. 1 (2001): 325–333.

via the writings of Feuerbach in 1868, which was after the publication dates of Lewis's and Brown's works.<sup>57</sup> Any expectation that they cited or were deeply familiar with any of the philosophical or conjectural universal histories cited in surveys of the field of world history—like the works of Adam Ferguson, John Millar, David Hume, or Immanuel Kant—also runs up against a lack of evidence. What contact Lewis and Brown did have with philosophical or conjectural histories might have been through a long chain of intermediaries that crossed both cultural and genre barriers, such as the international movement of information and narrative structures back and forth between universal histories and travel writings. As Elizabeth Burstein has noted, nineteenth-century publishing was dominated by “encyclopedic texts characterised by instances of déjà vu, plagiarism and mutual raiding of sources.”<sup>58</sup>

If Lewis's and Brown's texts cannot be explained as knowing reinscriptions of the philosophical universal histories that loom large in the historiography of world history, what other explanatory frame can be utilized? Dickson Bruce and Wilson Moses have suggested reading nineteenth-century African American historiography as a strategy of self-help and solidarity. That strategy reflected what W. E. B. DuBois later called the “double consciousness” of the African American.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, African Americans sought a rhetoric of group solidarity based upon notions of distinctiveness and independent achievement. On the other hand, they also wanted recognition as contributors to American life. They could not reject either an American identity or an African one, and so sought means of bringing both together. History—and more specifically the history of Egypt—was the means by which a double identity could be realized. By asserting that Egypt was a black civilization, and that Greek civilization owed its achievements to borrowings or even “theft” from Egypt, writers were able to present African American heritage as both exceptional in its antiquity and the root of Western civilization. Coloring Egypt black allowed writers to counter assertions of African American inferiority and through the provision of examples of political, social, artistic, and scientific ingenuity. Further, a black Egypt would counter assumptions about a progressive civilization of humanity. The decline of black Egypt and the descent of its descendents into slavery demonstrated that human

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<sup>57</sup> W. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 263.

<sup>58</sup> E. Burstein, “From Good Looks to Good Thoughts: Popular Women's History and the Invention of Modernity, ca. 1830–1870,” *Modern Philology* 97, no. 1 (1999): 46–76.

<sup>59</sup> DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*.

history was not one of inevitable progress, and perhaps even that white civilization would in the future suffer a similar fate.<sup>60</sup>

As Bruce and Moses have demonstrated, Egypt played a major role in numerous African American works, including Lewis's *Light and Truth*. But Lewis's use of Egypt is not an exact match for Bruce and Moses's thesis, because while Egypt appears early in the text, it does not head a narrative of decline. Egypt is left in a state of intellectual vibrancy when Lewis moves on to narrate later events, and those later events are often identified directly or through narrative or geographical proximity as black events. Nor does slavery play a major role in the text. It is not mentioned in association with Egypt and is only mentioned in passing in some of the biographies of African Americans that precede his account of the Slave Revolt. Lewis's interest lies not with narrating the misfortunes of Africans and then African Americans; rather, his work suggests that the "empire of the mind" achieved by the Egyptians is more or less instantiated in the actions of Africans and African Americans across time. Indeed, if anything, his choice of end point in Haiti is suggestive of African achievement rather than decline. Further, our explanation of the two focus works is complicated by Brown's not mentioning Egypt in *The Black Man*.

The two analytical models outlined so far offer a less than perfect fit with the two feature texts. A third option is available in Alfred Hunt's analysis of African American historians as using recent historical events—particularly those in St. Domingue and Haiti—to agitate for political change in the United States. As Hunt has shown, some African American authors used the example of St. Domingue to argue that a violent uprising was the only means by which social and political recognition could be achieved.<sup>61</sup> In a series of lectures on St. Domingue, for instance, Brown expressed his growing impatience at the continuation of slavery: "Hereditary bondsmen! Know ye not who would be free, themselves must strike the blow? . . . The exasperated genius of Africa would arise from the depths of the ocean, and show its threatening form; and war against the tyrants would be the rallying cry."<sup>62</sup> Haiti, on the other hand, demonstrated the fitness of blacks for politi-

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<sup>60</sup> D. D. Bruce, "Ancient Africa and the Early Black American Historians, 1883–1915," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (1984): 684–689; W. J. Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>61</sup> A. N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 150.

<sup>62</sup> W. W. Brown, *St Domingo: Its Revolution and its Patriots* (Boston, 1855), pp. 3, 32.

cal participation. The only non-US subjects in Brown's *The Black Man* were from Haiti, and they, like Henri Christophe, had aims that were "great, and many of them good. He was not only a patron of the arts, but of industry, and it gave him pleasure to see his country recovering the ground lost in the revolution and in the civil wars, and advancing in name and wealth. He promised industry . . . [and] was also the patron of education."<sup>63</sup> Like Brown, Lewis emphasized the political capability of Haitians, not only in biographies, but also in an extended section discussion on the stability and growth of the economy. Consequently, it can be argued that Hunt has gained some measure on our feature texts. Ultimately, though, his analysis takes us only so far in understanding how and why Lewis and Brown wrote. If their aim was to use Haiti as a means to compel whites to acknowledge African American abilities, why did they locate it in world history? Why not package their claims simply in contemporary political discourse, as with David Walker's call for an uprising against slavery in *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*?<sup>64</sup>

Hunt's thesis, like the other two outlined above, aids us in the task of understanding the works of particular authors or aspects of nineteenth-century historiography. Even in combination, though, we seem to lack contextual information on how and why Lewis and Brown wrote universal history. Brown was self-taught, and there is no evidence to suggest that Lewis received any tertiary education. Where did they come into contact with models of world history making, if not in educational institutions? To this writer, a key source—and one almost entirely neglected in current historiography of world history—were the voluntary associations formed by individuals to promote particular moral and social values and activities, and the universal histories that they sponsored.

Recent scholarship has emphasized local variations in the expression of the Enlightenment in English- and non-English-language contexts.<sup>65</sup> Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman, however, has argued that these varying manifestations were united by the idea of what Kant described as

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, *Black Man*, p. 50.

<sup>64</sup> D. Walker, *David Walker's Appeal: To the Colored Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to those of the United States of America*, ed. J. Turner (Baltimore, Md.: Black Classic Press, 1993).

<sup>65</sup> See for example A. C. Kors, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). For a commentary, see F. Oz-Salberger, "New Approaches Towards a History of the Enlightenment: Can Disparate Perspectives Make a General Picture?" *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 29 (2000): 171–176.

the “unsocial sociability” of people.<sup>66</sup> People, it was assumed, bear a number of tendencies or dispositions or potentialities. It is contrary to reason, Kant argued, to suppose that these potentialities exist but never develop, and we must therefore imagine that “Nature” has some device for ensuring that such potentialities are developed, even if over a long period of time. The dynamic that makes this possible is man’s “unsocial sociability”: people desire isolation and to having everything go according to their wish but need to cooperate with others to develop their moral and intellectual potential. It is because of this “unsocial sociability” that people “take the first true steps from barbarism to culture, which consists in the social worth of man; thence gradually develop all talents, and taste is refined; through continued enlightenment [which] . . . change[s] a society of men driven together by their natural feelings into a moral whole.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the English thinker William Hutton saw the interaction of people as like marble in friction, which “reduces the rough prominence of behavior, and gives a polish to the manners,” and Adam Smith held it up as no less than the key to political virtue and an improved social future.<sup>68</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville saw democracy as supported and nurtured through the voluntary associations he observed in North American clubs and societies. These clubs and societies, like those across Europe, pursued varied religious, moral, and social goals such as the improvement of child welfare, the abolition of slavery or prostitution, the education of the poor, and temperance. Voluntary association, in turn, was supported and nurtured by reading. Reading—alone or in clubs and through books and newspapers—was held to be a powerful stimulus for self and social betterment. In theory, Tocqueville saw association and reading as fostering equality.<sup>69</sup> Fichte, Herder, Kant, and Hegel, however, were not so optimistic, arguing that a sentimental and escapist reading mania—one fed by novels—held the majority of readers back from achieving mental independence.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> S.-L. Hoffman, *Civil Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 25. See the argument for unification also in J. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> I. Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” in *On History*, trans. and ed. L. W. Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 15–16.

<sup>68</sup> As quoted in J. Dwyer, “The Imperative of Sociability: Moral Culture in the Late Scottish Enlightenment,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 13 (1990): 169–184.

<sup>69</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. H. C. Mansfield and D. Winthrop (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).

<sup>70</sup> See for example J. G. Fichte, as quoted in R. Wittmann, “Was There a Reading Revolution at the End of the Eighteenth Century?” in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. G. Cavallo and R. Chartier (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 300; and I. Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in Beck, *On History*, pp. 3–10.

And while many voluntary associations may have offered their members the opportunity for equal participation, that membership was often drawn from a narrow economic demographic. As Michael Roberts has noted, for instance, moral reformers were to be found mostly among the "middling ranks" in England, although the organizations in which they participated built bridges across religious and gender divides.<sup>71</sup> Many associations, however, displayed an ambivalent stance toward those thought to be of the lower orders: they may have worked to ameliorate gaps in educational opportunity, for instance, but it could not be expected that those they worked to help would be members, or at least executive members, of the society.

African Americans, even free ones, were rigidly excluded from most North American associations in the nineteenth century. As was noted by an English traveler in Philadelphia in 1818, for instance, "No respectability, however unquestionable, no property, however large, no character, however unblemished, will gain a man, whose body is (in American estimation) cursed with even a twentieth portion of the blood of his African ancestry, admission into Society."<sup>72</sup> This barrier, Hoffman has argued, led African Americans to "create lodges and associations that would surpass those of the white middle classes in respectability and civic virtue."<sup>73</sup> Those matched and even surpassed virtues, he assumes, were put on display in public activities such as parades. Nancy Fraser offers us a different understanding of these activities, suggesting that there was no single public sphere that excluded groups sought to enter, but multiple spheres that overlapped, coexisted, and clashed. There was a dominant sphere that operated "to the advantage of dominant groups and the disadvantage of subordinates," but there were also "subaltern counterpublics," which, as Dawson explains, comprised "a set of institutions, communication networks and practices which facilitate[d] debate of causes and remedies to the current combination of political setbacks and economic devastation facing major segments of the Black community, and which facilitate[d] the creation of oppositional formations and sites."<sup>74</sup> Dawson has further

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<sup>71</sup> M. J. D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> As quoted in G. B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720–1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 226.

<sup>73</sup> Hoffman, *Civil Society*, p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> N. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. C. Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. 122; and M. Dawson, "A Black Counterpublic? Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 195.

argued that it is difficult to speak of a single African American counter-public sphere because of divisions along class, gender, religious, and educational lines. It is the view of this author that the best explanation is to be found between the fragmentation sought by Dawson and the assumption of a single public sphere by Habermas.<sup>75</sup>

Lewis's and Brown's works were shaped in no small part through voluntary association. Brown's work was nurtured in antislavery and temperance society activities in the United States, Europe, and Britain. In the memoir of his travels in Europe, Brown confirmed his views against alcohol—"wine destroys the intellect, and the man of wit degenerates into a buffoon, and dies a drunkard"—in the company of reformers such as Harriet Martineau.<sup>76</sup> But he also drew from such meetings the impetus to rehearse the arguments against slavery that would form the backbone of *The Black Man*. So it was in Newcastle, for instance, that he distinguished the condition of American slaves with the working class in Britain:

Whatever may be the disadvantages that the British peasant labours under, he is free; and if he is not satisfied with his employer, he can make choice of another. . . . But how it is with the American slave? He has no right to himself; no right to protect his wife, his child, or his own person. He is nothing more than a living tool. Beyond his field or workshop he knows nothing. There is no amount of ignorance he is not capable of. He has not the least idea of the face of this earth, nor the history or constitution of the country in which he dwells. To him the literature, science and art, the progressive history and the accumulated discoveries of by-gone ages, are as if they had never been. The past is to him as yesterday, and the future scarcely more than tomorrow. Ancestral monuments he has none; written documents, fraught with cogitations of other times, he has none; and any instrumentality calculated to awaken and expound the intellectual activity and comprehension of a present or approaching generation, he has none.<sup>77</sup>

And in Oxford, where he explicated a remedy:

A determination to excel is the sure road to greatness, and that is as open to the black man as the white. It is that which has accomplished the mightiest and noblest triumphs in the intellectual and physical

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<sup>75</sup> J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>76</sup> Brown, *Travels of William Wells Brown*, p. 160.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139–140.

world. It is that which has made such rapid strides towards civilisation, and broken the chains of ignorance and superstition which have so long fettered the human intellect. It was determination which raised so many worthy individuals from the humble walks of society, and from poverty, and placed them in positions of trust and renown. . . . A Toussaint once laboured in the sugar-field with a spelling-book in his pocket, amid the combined efforts of a nation to keep him in ignorance. His name is now recorded among the list of statesmen of the past.<sup>78</sup>

*The Black Man*, for Brown, is the equivalent of Toussaint's spelling book. Just as we might work to master conventional spellings of words in order to communicate effectively with others, Brown saw history as a means of identifying moral truths and activities that could be a guide to life. The efficacy of biography as a guide to life was calculated in numerical terms: the more biographies one came into contact with, the more chance that one might emulate or take inspiration from moral acts.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, as with ancient and medieval texts, nineteenth-century collective biographies like *The Black Man* were assumed to be more effective than single biographies. Critical mass allowed one to better identify paths of moral action, but to also diagnose the state of society as a whole.<sup>80</sup> Brown's persistent emphasis on the rational achievements of African Americans, and regret that Nat Brown's abilities were not channeled toward rational ends, for instance, served to highlight the injustice of excluding African Americans from institutional education and from full participation in public life. African American participation was grounded in reason, and Brown's story is thus to some extent an Enlightenment story. However, as Cornel West argues, Enlightenment thought alienated or constituted African Americans as "Other," producing the "fundamental condition of black culture—that of black invisibility and namelessness."<sup>81</sup> Brown's remedy for such invisibility was to argue that white and black alike shared a heritage in slavery, and out of a comparison of their activities in bondage, to suggest that blacks had the potential to create an empire of the mind far more powerful than the political empire of the United Kingdom and the economic

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>79</sup> S. E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>80</sup> A. W. Cafarelli, *Prose in the Age of Poets: Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to DeQuincey* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>81</sup> C. West, "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization," in *The Future of the Race*, by H. L. Gates Jr. and C. West (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 80. See also P. B. Harper, *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 11.

empire of the United States. His work is thus neither a straightforward affirmation of Enlightenment narratives nor a “counter” work, such as is favored by theorists of “radical black subjectivity” such as Henry Louis Gates or bell hooks.<sup>82</sup> It shows us that there was neither a single public sphere nor discrete, parallel, multiple ones. The relationship between African Americans and society was not simply one of opposition, but more like an uneasy dance in which desire for the construction of a community that would be acknowledged by such by non-African Americans chafed uncomfortably against author resourcefulness in modifying and subverting conventional means of community construction.

To nineteenth-century writers, collective biography presented an optimal opportunity to diagnose social shortcomings and to sketch out a desired world order. In this view of this author, universal history of the sort constructed by Lewis was embraced for similar reasons. The sheer number of human activities that could be covered in a world history versus a national or regional history made it an attractive means for moral education. Additionally, the sheer length of nineteenth-century universal histories—averaging around three hundred pages—gave readers more to read and thus more of a stimulus for self and social betterment. Some moral reform societies, such as the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge in England, sponsored the production of universal histories. In other cases, authors were members of societies—and ministers of religion figure heavily—or drew upon publications produced by or circulated in societies, such as pamphlets, travel narratives, and missionary reports. Many, like John Adams’s *The Flowers of Modern History* (1789), John Blair’s *The Chronology and History of the World* (1790), William Dodd’s *The Beauties of History* (1795), J. A. L. Montrieu’s *Universal History for Youth* (1786), Lucy Peacock’s *A Chronological Abridgement of Universal History* (1800), and Jane Sinnett’s *A Child’s History of the World* (1853) stress the role of rationality in advancing the interest of various local, religious, and gender identity groups.<sup>83</sup> Further, works like William Hurd’s *A New Universal*

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<sup>82</sup> H. L. Gates, “Canon Formation, Literary History, and the Afro-American Tradition: From the Seen to the Told,” in *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*, ed. H. A. Baker Jr. and P. Redmond (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 29; and bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness,” *Postmodern Culture* 1, no. 1 (1990), <http://muse.ihu.edu/journals/postmodernculture/v001/1.1.hooks.html>.

<sup>83</sup> John Adams, *The Flowers of Modern History* (Dublin: Zacharia Jackson, 1789); John Blair, *The Chronology and History of the World* (London, 1790); William Dodd, *The Beauties of History* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1795); J. A. L. Montrieu, *Universal History for Youth* (London: Maron and Darton, 1786); Lucy Peacock, *A Chronological Abridgement of Universal History* (London: S. Low, 1800); and Jane Sinnett, *A Child’s History of the World* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853).

*History of the Religious Ceremonies, and Rituals of the World* (n.d.) and Edward Ryan's *The History of the Effects of Religion Upon Mankind* (1788) connect Islam with violence in the same manner as Lewis.<sup>84</sup> As with Brown, therefore, I believe that we can go a long way toward explaining Lewis's decision to write universal history by considering a context in which moral reform associations loom large. Lewis, like Brown, argued for the social inclusion of African Americans on the grounds that they were capable of exercising rationality. Further, like Brown, Lewis's production of an Enlightenment narrative was incomplete, for in showcasing the antiquity and persistence of an African American empire of the mind, he wanted to deliver to African Americans power over whites that could not be resisted.<sup>85</sup>

Details about the production of *Light and Truth* are sketchy, but we do know its publication was supported by a "committee of colored gentlemen." The composition, longevity, and aims of such a committee are currently unknown, but the prevalence of Christian sources and themes in *Light and Truth* suggests an interest in Christian education or missionary work. This would provide some support for R. Pitt's tentative claim that Lewis trained as a missionary.<sup>86</sup> It is important to note, though, that *Light and Truth* does not present a straightforward endorsement of Christianity, as comparison with the work of the eighteenth-century African American poet Phyllis Wheatley highlights. Most illustrative is the 1774 letter from Wheatley to the Reverend Samson Occum in which she laments the "exercise of oppressive power" by the "Modern Egyptians" who govern the United States.<sup>87</sup> By appealing to Biblical accounts of Egyptian enslavement, Wheatley turns the Christianizing pronouncements of public figures such as Benjamin Franklin back on themselves.<sup>88</sup> Lewis had, as we have seen, a far more idealized view of Egypt, one that led him to minimize the theme of slavery in his work. Whereas Lewis cites the words "slave" and "slavery" a

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<sup>84</sup> William Hurd, *A New Universal History of the Religious Ceremonies, and Rituals of the World* (London: Alexander Hogg, n.d.); and Edward Ryan, *The History of the Effects of Religion Upon Mankind* (London: Rivington, 1788).

<sup>85</sup> R. B. Lewis, "A New History," *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 13 May 1853, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> R. H. C. Pitts, "Robert Benjamin Lewis," <http://www.visibleblackhistory.com/index.htm>. The Web site suggests a print publication of Pitts's article in 2005, but to date it has not appeared. It is therefore impossible to be certain about this claim, as no evidence is available for perusal.

<sup>87</sup> P. Wheatley, *Complete Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001).

<sup>88</sup> See for example B. Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind [1751]," in *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2, ed. J. Sparks (Boston: Whittemore, Niles and Hall, 1856), pp. 311–321.

total of only 16 times, and only in the final section of his book, Brown cites them 192 and 71 times respectively. It should not, however, be expected that Brown's involvement in antislavery work guarantees a more straightforward Christian endorsement: unlike Olaudah Equiano, for instance, Brown sloughs off his Christian name—becoming in autobiography “the man with no name”—to narrate his tale of rational and social development.<sup>89</sup>

We know that Brown's works were produced and circulated within constellations of antislavery societies in the United States and Britain. In Lewis's case, we might also have a glimpse of the importance of committees and societies in the circulation and longevity of publications. While Brown went on to publish further works of black history until his death in 1884, Lewis, so far as we know, published no other works after *Light and Truth*. Was it his decision to eschew committee support in favor of open public subscription—the equivalent of cold calling in our times—that explains his failure to complete a second edition? And did his strategy of door-to-door sales, rather than sales through committee meetings and circulars mean buoyant sales in the short term in Maine but a failure to convert to longer term and wider scale sales?

At present, we do not have enough archival evidence to address these important questions of production, distribution, and reception. There is enough evidence, though, to suggest that the history of nineteenth-century universal history making is tangled up with that of moral reform movements and societies. From an analysis of two texts by authors who have until this point been outside of the historiography of world history, we now have reason to wonder if, in concentrating our attention almost exclusively on philosophical and conjectural universal histories, we have taken our eyes off other production contexts that perhaps were more prolific and that might have played a major role in shaping social opinion. Further, in Lewis's and Brown's works we have caught a glimpse of complex mixture of arguments, crosscurrents, pressures, and disillusionments that results when socially and historiographically marginalized individuals seek to be heard, as Robert Ferguson puts it, by “exploit[ing] the discourse that denies them.”<sup>90</sup> We have discovered no uniform role for history in their writings, simply the refraction of their immediate and local desires for recognition and

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<sup>89</sup> O. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, ed. R. J. Allison (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> R. A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750–1820* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 164.

the hopes of parallel and sometimes conflicting voluntary social reform organizations. Expanding the number of African American texts considered in a historiographical analysis would in the view of this author probably produce an even more complex picture. That is because "African American" is only one of a number of identities experienced simultaneously, identities that were organized in no small part through the activities of voluntary associations. Acknowledging this may lead us to wonder whether the texts and identities of white male European authors are more complex and contradictory than has been previously acknowledged.

A next step for historiographers of world history must surely be to take a closer and wider look at the relationship between universal history making and moral reform societies and associations, not only in the United States but also in European centers such as England, Scotland, and Germany. Many more African American authors await study, as do the writings of Native Americans, women, and men who did not work in universities. Only then, I believe, will we be in a position to assess whether universal history making was the handmaiden of Enlightened or imperial thought, or whether, as the cases of Lewis and Brown suggest, it was colored and ultimately complicated by local demands and interests.