



PROJECT MUSE®

Textual Scholarship and Diversity: Which Needs Affirmative
Action More?

George Bornstein

Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation, Volume 3, Number
1, Spring 2008, pp. 65-76 (Article)

Published by Society for Textual Scholarship

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2979/tex.2008.3.1.65>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/240797>

Textual Scholarship and Diversity

Which Needs Affirmative Action More?

Presidential Address

The Society for Textual Scholarship

March 16, 2007

George Bornstein

ABSTRACT

Minority studies and textual scholarship have much to offer each other. Minority literature can offer textual scholarship both wonderful opportunities for editing and situations that deepen or extend our ability to historicize texts. Conversely, textual scholarship can call attention to the importance of versions and of material features of minority texts, can highlight their relation to social issues in a new way, and can contribute to their migration to electronic forms. This address explores those questions through examination of Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*, W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro* and new edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

MY REACTION UPON BEING INVITED TO GIVE THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS OF this year's Society for Textual Scholarship conference resembles that of Jon Stewart when asked to host the Academy Awards two years ago. He confessed, "As a longtime supporter of this institution, I was somewhat disappointed at the choice of speaker this year". But perhaps my topic can make up for that. My subject is what Wordsworth would have called a "theme little heard of among men", the relation of textual scholarship to minority texts. I am not sure which needs the other more, but do know that for the Society for Textual Scholarship to flourish, it must expand to include the minority textuality that provides so much of the pedagogic and cultural content of today's academy and, indeed, broader society. We need to modify Peter Shillingsburg's observation in his prize-winning book *From Gutenberg to Google* that

“scholars of Aristotle, Goethe, Cervantes or Shakespeare never have to explain why they are interested in their texts or even tell you the first name of their author, whereas scholars of the works of Manilius, Paul de Kock, Thomas Love Peacock, or William Gilmore Simms have frequently to explain who these authors are and why one should be interested in their works” (2006, 29-30). That was certainly true back when Peter and I were in graduate school or even when we were assistant professors. But in today’s era when race and gender have expanded the canon so that undergraduate and graduate students more often read and are taught Hurston than Hemingway or *The Souls of Black Folk* than *The Waste Land*, we need to explain who *any* of our authors are and *why* one should be interested in their works.

We also need to explain what we can offer to minority scholarship and, equally important, what it can offer to us. Textual scholarship can obviously make major contributions to a field that is still recuperating many of its texts in multiple genres. It can also point to the importance of versions and of material features of the text, and so open new avenues of interpretation and understanding. And it can contribute to both the migration and the exploration of electronic textuality for minority works. Reciprocally, textual scholarship cannot only find in minority literatures wonderful new texts and even entire fields of them to work on, but can also learn more about the implications of recent textual scholarship’s historicizing of the text. Such avenues fit well with the socially constructive aspects of textuality that to one degree or another have informed nearly all editorial developments for the past two decades. Yet bringing together the two fields remains at an early stage, with perhaps George Hutchinson’s *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995) as the best book for general background, and John Young’s recent *Black Writers, White Publishers* (2006) as the most advanced work yet to appear on the subject.¹ I should like here to explore the subject by looking quickly at four texts as examples—Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky*, W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk*, Alain Locke’s landmark anthology *The New Negro*, and (if we can call it a minority text) Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Our first example is *The Rise of David Levinsky*, perhaps the finest Jewish immigrant novel of its generation, which I want to look at in terms of its material incarnations. Abraham Cahan was an unlikely protégé of William Dean Howells, whose famous *The Rise of Silas Lapham* Cahan echoed in his very title. I want to look particularly at the way in which material textuality can yield insights into the novel, and to focus particularly on its original in-

1. The first issue of the 2007 volume of *Textual Cultures* (2.1), guest edited by Martha Nell Smith, is devoted to the topic of diversity in editing. For additional bibliography, see Winston Napier’s review of Young 2006 in *Textual Cultures* 2.1.

carnation as a magazine serial before book publication. The novel grew from an invitation by the then-famous *McClure's Magazine*, which often featured work by both major authors and muckrakers. *McClure's* invited Cahan to compose a serialized sketch of the rise of a Jewish "type". The July 1913 issue exemplifies the complex current of both curiosity and prejudice that mark the journal and, indeed, the times. That number included the illustration Plate 1, which carried as caption a statement from the text, "Many a time, when I see a well dressed American woman in the street, I follow her for blocks" (CAHAN 1913, 117). The engraving features a stereotypical Jewish male following after (should we say even ogling?) a stylish gentile woman.



"MANY A TIME, WHEN I SEE A WELL DRESSED AMERICAN WOMAN IN THE STREET,
I FOLLOW HER FOR BLOCKS"

Plate 1: from CAHAN 1913, 117 (*McClure's Magazine* 40.3).

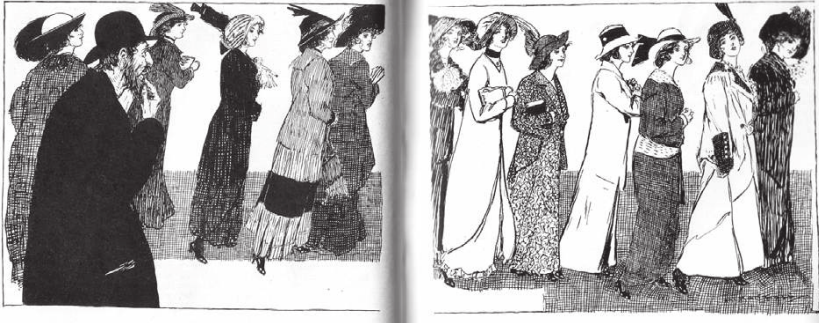


Plate 2: Levinsky Studies Procession of Well Dressed Women; from CAHAN 1913, 118-19 (*McClure's Magazine* 40.3).

Yet the passage in question does not involve a Jewish voyeur leering at genteel women but rather a businessman studying the latest fashion. The full passage reads: "We make it our business to know how the American woman wants to look, what sort of lines she would like her figure to have. Many a time, when I see a well dressed American woman in the street, I follow her for blocks, scanning the make-up of her cloak, jacket, or suit. I never weary of studying the trend of the American woman's taste" (CAHAN 1913, 118). The text sketches the rise of a Jewish-American businessman in the clothing industry where so many Jews worked, whereas the illustration reframes that into a sketch of an erotic Jewish threat to Christian women. The illustration on the following page makes that even clearer (Plate 2), where Levinsky has regressed into full East European *shtetl* regalia as he contemplates a procession of a full dozen chicly dressed women, only one of whom (second from the right) may notice him at all.

We would expect no less from a journal whose issue immediately before serialization began had featured an article by the bigoted Burton J. Hendrick that in its very title suggested its hostile attitude towards its subject—"The Jewish Invasion of America". That animus continued in subheads insinuating military or economic conspiracies, such as "The Conquest of the Clothing Trades", "Jews the Greatest Owners of Land", "Protestant and Catholic Children Now Taught by Jewesses", "Jewish Control of the Theaters", "Jews in Control of the Big Department Stores", "Jews Control the Whisky Business", "Jews Control the Trade in Leaf Tobacco", and "Jews a Great Power in American Railroads". Those subheads read almost like a trial run for Henry Ford's invective in his newspaper *The Dearborn Independent* a decade later. In this case, study of the various textual incarnations of *The Rise of David Levinsky* reveals a complicated and insidious racial and religious politics of

production and reception that we would miss if we studied only the novel itself in its final form without the illustrations.

The use of textual scholarship to reveal the presence of group prejudice and to help us struggle against it in the present informs my second example. W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* merits being called the foundational text of African-American studies today and is taught on hundreds if not thousands of campuses around the country and, indeed, the world. *Books in Print* lists fifty-six editions currently available in either print or electronic form. Yet not until the two exemplary editions by Henry Louis Gates did readers know that the text existed in two distinct main versions, one deriving from the original 1903 edition and the other deriving from the 1953 Jubilee edition with revisions by Du Bois himself. Unfortunately, few of the teachers who teach or students who study that important book even recognize the variants, let alone incorporate them into their work.

What difference does it make? As I argued in "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Jews" in *Textual Cultures* 1.1 (2006), which version one reads determines what view of Jews the text projects. An unfortunate anti-Semitism taints eight different passages in *The Souls of Black Folk*. All follow the same pattern. For example, the 1903 text states:

The Jew is the heir of the slave-baron in Dougherty [. . .]

In 1953 Du Bois revised that to:

Immigrants are heirs of the slave baron in Dougherty [. . .]

In the remaining seven cases he again changed "Jew" to "immigrant", "foreigner", or in one case "peasants", a wording which removes the anti-Semitism but sounds odd in our time of national debate over immigration and the foreign-born. Du Bois knew well what he was doing in his revisions. He told his editor Herbert Aptheker, himself a Jew, that:

As I re-read these words today, I see that harm might come if they were allowed to stand as they are. First of all, I am not at all sure that the foreign exploiters to whom I referred in my study of the Black Belt, were in fact Jews. I took the word of my informants, and I am now wondering if in fact Russian Jews in any number were in Georgia at the time. But even if they were, what I was condemning was the exploitation and not the race nor religion. And I did not, when writing, realize that by stressing the name of the group instead of what some members of the group

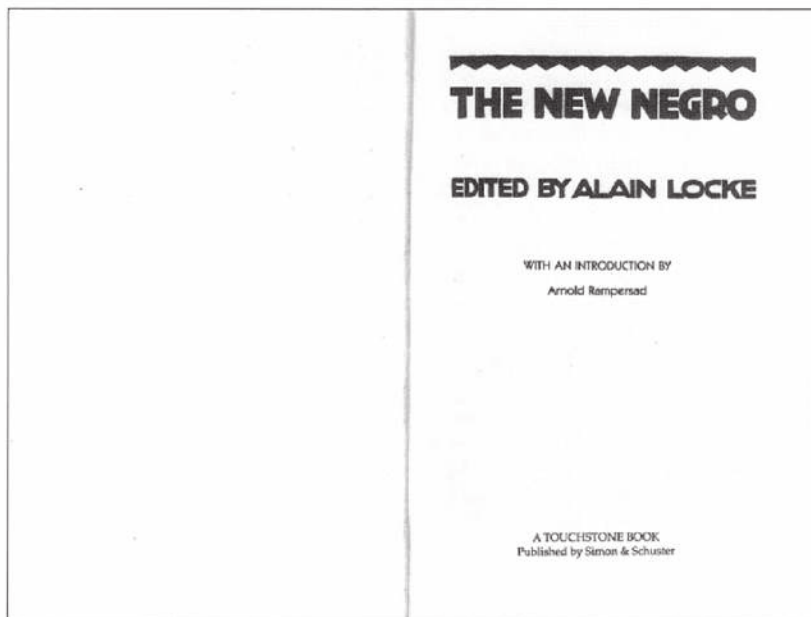
may have done, I was unjustly maligning a people in exactly the same way my folk were then and are now falsely accused.

(APTHEKER 1978, 3: 343)

At a time like our own, with its sometimes strained relations between formerly allied groups like African-Americans and Jews, textual scholarship can help determine whether the foundational text of a field promulgates the incidental bigotry of its original version or whether instead it trumpets the greater tolerance of the revised version. That happens especially if the edition selected from the fifty-six available has a decent textual apparatus explaining that Du Bois *revised* the eight passages in question. Such editions not only teach greater tolerance, but through Du Bois's own courageous example they model how we can all overcome our own prejudices. Regrettably, only two editions in print meet those criteria—those edited by Henry Louis Gates first for Bantam and then the Norton Critical Editions series—and I hope that those are the ones that you will all use.

You will not have that choice if you ever teach the landmark anthology of the Harlem Renaissance in its own time, Alain Locke's 1925 compilation *The*

Plate 3: *The New Negro*, title page (no facing frontispiece), reprint edition (LOCKE 1997 [Touchstone Books]). Reprinted with the kind permission of Simon & Schuster.



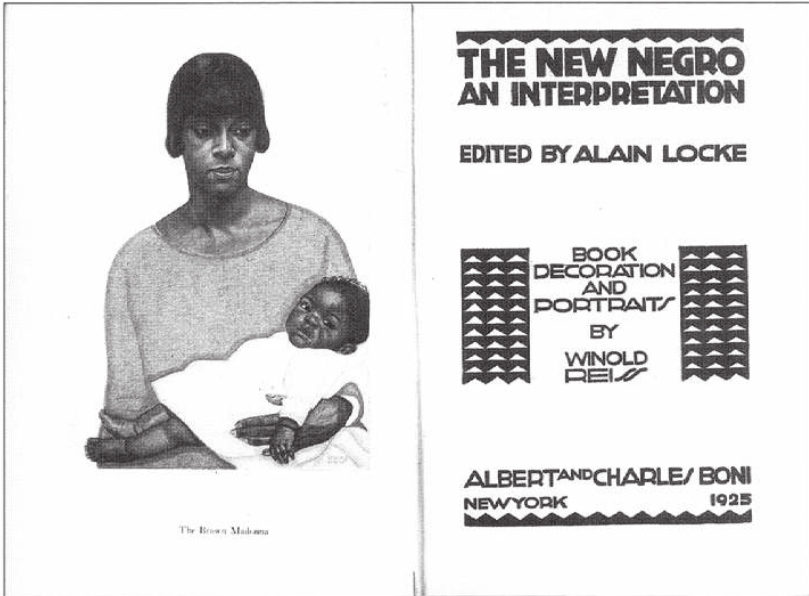


Plate 4: *The New Negro*, frontispiece and title page, original edition: LOCKE 1925, published by Albert & Charles Boni. Reproduced with permission.

New Negro. That is because the *only* paperback text currently available distorts the inclusive and integrationist politics of the original volume with a more exclusive and separatist one befitting the paperback reissue during the Black Power days of the 1960s. We can see that best by looking at the respective title pages. Plate 3 reproduces the title page of the current edition. This is the version regularly taught and read across the United States by readers supposing that they are reading a reprint of the original 1925 text. But that is not the case. Note that the current paperback version does use the same title but lacks the original subtitle, and that it lists only the light-skinned African-American Alain Locke as editor, along with a reference to the contemporary African-American scholar Arnold Rampersad as author of the introduction. Now compare that to Plate 4, which reproduces the original title page from the 1925 version. Note first the subtitle, “An Interpretation”, whose presence renders the volume more tentative and provisional, and whose absence makes it seem more authoritative. More importantly for the argument here, note that in 1925 the book decoration and seventeen portraits by the artist Winold Reiss receive almost equal billing with the title and editor, a billing wholly absent from the “reprint”. The significance of this for racial politics is that Winold Reiss was white, a German immigrant artist celebrated for his portraits of ethnic types throughout his adopted country, including Native Americans of

the Northwest and Asian Americans of California. His presence on the title page signals the biracial nature of the volume from the start, a biracialism created by the presence of the volume's most striking material features, its color portraits of African Americans by Reiss as well as by the contributions by white authors and the continual linkages to other groups like Irish or Jews made by both Black and white authors in essays and stories throughout *The New Negro*. Locke himself, for example, likened the Irish and Harlem Renaissances in his introduction, while Jean Toomer's story "Fern" (excerpted from his 1923 book *Cane*) invoked the analogy of a Jewish cantor three separate times in its six pages.

The original title page provides one more linkage obscured in the "reprint", namely the interracial infrastructure that brought such books to the public at all. Unlike the old line firm of Scribner with its largely white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant authors, Albert and Charles Boni was an upstart firm run by Jews who had run into glass ceilings in the publishing business then dominated by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. As a result, Jews founded their own firms, and then had to find their own writers as well—often modernist writers and frequently African-American, Jewish, or Irish. For example, Boni and its precursor firm, Boni and Liveright, published W. B. Yeats's *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* as well as Jean Toomer and *The New Negro*; Alfred Knopf published Langston Hughes and Nella Larson as well as European Jews like Franz Kafka; B. W. Huebsch provided the main conduit for the works of James Joyce first under his own imprint and then that of Viking (who continue to publish Joyce to this day, along with James Weldon and Rosamond Johnson's *Book of American Negro Spirituals* and his *God's Trombones*). Even the non-Jewish firm of Harcourt Brace, advised by the Jewish professor and social activist Joel Spingarn, who also served as chairman of the board of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), published W. E. B. Du Bois and Claude McKay as well as Sandburg and Eliot. The omission of the original publisher on the title page, like the omission of Reiss's portraits facing it and throughout the volume, repositions *The New Negro* as a more separatist venture than it really was.

If it can even be called a minority text, the recent high-profile edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (GATES and ROBBINS 2007) cries aloud for the merging of textual scholarship and minority textuality. Few books have affected race relations in our country more profoundly. When Stowe first met President Lincoln during the Civil War, he reportedly exclaimed, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!" (GATES and ROBBINS 2007, xliii). Despite the painful condescension of that phrase "little woman" to modern ears, Lincoln's comment testi-

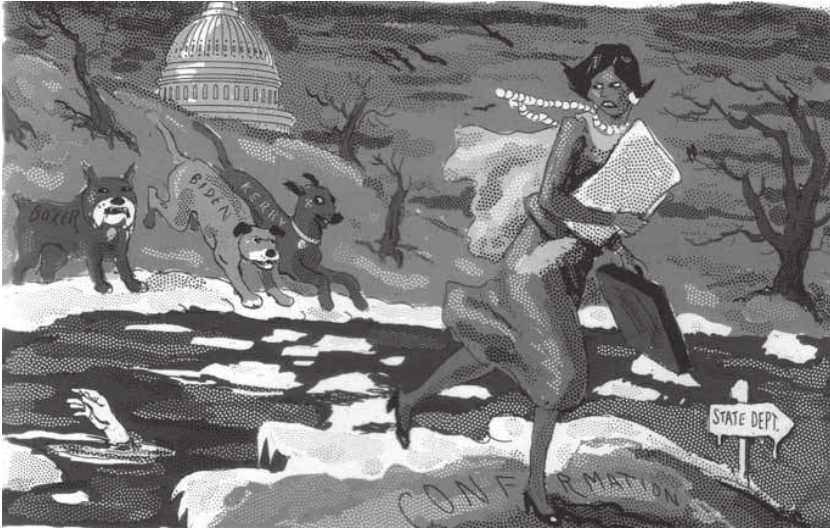


Plate 5: United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as Eliza, originally by Elliott Banfield, *New York Sun* (21 January 2005), as reproduced in *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* (GATES and ROBBINS 2007). Reprinted by permission.

fies to the astonishing impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its own time, when it rallied the North to the anti-Slavery cause and infuriated the South. It has remained controversial ever since, whether because its illustrations of slaves learning to read or blacks and whites together caused alarm in the Jim Crow South at the turn of the century, or because its biracial sympathies appealed to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, or because of its problematic place in African-American studies courses today, where it appears less often than in mainstream classes on American literature. Its very title engendered one of the strongest terms of black on black racial critique, where labeling someone an Uncle Tom questions his or her racial allegiance.

With over six hundred editions published worldwide, the recent appearance of *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*, edited by the biracial team Henry Louis Gates and Hollis Robbins in the popular Norton Annotated Editions series (2007), has attracted widespread media attention from the *New York Times*, *TLS*, and many others (see, for example, ROTHSTEIN 2006 and BORNSTEIN 2007). The edition does some things well, including providing introductions that situate the novel historically in both its time and our own, and providing historically helpful annotation. It also offers a selection of visual materials ranging from the derivative “Tom shows” of minstrel days through illustrations, films, and memorabilia. My own favorites illustrate one of the novel's most famous scenes, when the light-skinned slave Eliza desperately flees to freedom with her child by jumping cross the ice floes of the wintry

Ohio River. Along with various engravings from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the editors provide us with a delicious cartoon from 2005 of Condoleezza Rice as Eliza leaping across an ice-choked river to the safety of her Senate confirmation as Secretary of State (Plate 5). Gates's introduction merits particular interest as an effort to rehabilitate the novel within the African-American community itself, where the negative stigma of attacks by James Baldwin and others still lingers (BALDWIN 1955).

Unfortunately, the new edition exemplifies the gulf between current textual scholarship and minority studies. To begin with, it lacks any Note on the Text whatsoever, so that the reader has no way of knowing which version of the text he or she is reading, or what if any emendation has been applied to the text. Yet there are important differences between the original periodical text and the first book version, and—if we include the illustrations—substantial differences among subsequent book versions of the last century and a half. The 2007 Gates and Robbins edition also omits all of Stowe's various prefaces to the novel, whether to the first American edition, the first British edition, the first European edition, or the important 1878 edition, all of which are readily available in electronic form at the IATH (Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities) website for Stephen Raillton's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* project (<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/uncletom/utcprefhp.html>). With their various denunciations of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Act, their cosmopolitan vision of human races, and their analogies between Jewish and African-American liberation, those documents form part of the textual record and open important new avenues of interpretation.

So, too, do the illustrations and notes. The 2007 Gates and Robbins edition does well to include a rich sampling of visual materials, but fails to explain its own principles of selection. The editors never tell us why they selected these few examples from thousands of potential materials. Further, they pick different illustrators for different scenes, creating an eclectic material text that never existed historically. And while some notes helpfully illuminate historical or linguistic background,² others seem more intrusive, either providing obvious interpretations of the text or repetitively underlining sexual undercurrents, and beating to death the propensity of Arthur Shelby to put things in his mouth. And some notes are simply wrong, particularly those having to do with religion. In Christian allegory, for example, the Dove is not "a symbol of Christ" but rather of the Holy Spirit (see GATES and ROBBINS 2007, 306). The editors gloss St. Clare's quotation "doing evil that good may come" as coming from Shakespeare's *Henry V*

2. See especially the gloss of the word "calaboose" in Gates and Robbins 2007, 185 and 350.

("There is some soul of goodness in things evil, / Would men observingly distill it out" [GATES and ROBBINS 2007, 325]), whereas it comes directly from Romans 3.8, where St. Paul describes Christians as falsely reputed to "do evil, that good may come". Other quotations go unglossed altogether, such as: "We have no continuing city, but we seek one to come", from Hebrews 13, which also exhorts us to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them" (GATES and ROBBINS 2007, 126).

The result is full of missed opportunities for both textual scholarship and minority studies. More responsible textual policies would have opened whole areas for interpretation or analysis—say the relations of Black slaves to other races and ethnicities in Stowe's cosmopolitan vision, or the way in which changing social conditions affect trends in illustration. Conversely, such a widely circulated and much-trumpeted text offers opportunities for editorial theory to display its relevance to both academic and general readers, and ultimately to affect our notion of textuality itself. Ever since I became involved with the Society for Textual Scholarship twenty years ago we have wanted to build bridges between us and the rest of the profession. To do that today, we need to pay much more attention to minority textuality than we previously have. The two fields need to come together. In effecting that, we might remember the words of the poet Wallace Stevens in his long sequence *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (1968, 403). There his character Canon Aspirin reflects:

He had to choose. But it was not a choice
Between excluding things. It was not a choice
Between, but of. He chose to include the things
That in each other are included, the whole,
The complicate, the amassing harmony.

I urge us to make the same choice.

University of Michigan

Works Cited

- APTHEKER, Herbert, ed. 1978. *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois*. 3 vols. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- BALDWIN, James. 1955. "Everybody's Protest Novel". *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon.
- BORNSTEIN, George. 2007. "Best Bad Book: Black notes and white notes to the tale of Uncle Tom". *Times Literary Supplement* 16 March: 3-4.

- . 2006. "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Jews: Ethics, Editing, and *The Souls of Black Folk*". *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation* 1.1: 64-74.
- CAHAN, Abraham. 1913. "The Autobiography of an American Jew: The Rise of David Levinsky". *McClure's Magazine* 40.3: 117.
- GATES, Jr., Henry Louis, and Hollis ROBBINS, eds. 2007. *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriett Beecher Stowe. New York: Norton.
- HUTCHINSON, George. 1995. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- LOCKE, Alain, ed. 1925. *The New Negro*. New York: Albert and Charles Boni.
- , ed. 1997. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, introduction by Arnold RAMPERSAD (rpt. ed.). New York: Touchstone.
- ROTHSTEIN, Edward. 2006. "Digging through the Literary Anthropology of Stowe's Uncle Tom". *New York Times* 23 October: B1, 9.
- SHILLINGSBURG, Peter. 2006. *From Gutenberg to Google*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- STEVENS, Wallace. 1968. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- YOUNG, John K. 2006. *Black Writers, White Publishers*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.