On December 6, 1856, the *Provincial Freeman and Weekly Advertiser* ran James Monroe Whitfield’s “Prospectus of the Afric-American Quarterly” advertising a future periodical that he hoped would “enter the arena of public literature, to exhibit the intellectual capacities of the negro race, and vindicate them before the world.” In the wake of his attendance at the National Emigration Convention of the Colored People of North America in 1854 and 1856, Whitfield circulated an advertisement announcing that the convention delegates had authorized the publication of a “Quarterly Periodical devoted to the general interest of the colored people.” Enumerating the various domains in which the interests of African Americans had been compromised such as the “wicked legislation,” “the American government,” and the “Word of God,” Whitfield maintained that “any class of community that fails to wield” the potent power of the press will “always be depreciated and undervalued in the public imagination.” Conceptualized as a “preeminent Literary work, for circulation both at home and abroad,” the *Afric-American Quarterly Repository* was intended to contain between 160 and 200 octavo pages and be embellished with fine steel engravings of “distinguished negro[es].” Featuring both U.S. and Haitian authors, it would have articles written in English and French. Whitfield himself would act as senior editor, joined by eight corresponding editors—among them Martin R. Delany, James Theodore Holly, William C. Monroe, Mary Ann Shadd (Cary), and Mary E. Bibb.

But Whitfield’s wished-for journal was a nonstarter, and the fate of the journal reveals the dilemmas and difficulties of publishing—including
printing, editing, and subscriptions—that made black periodicals such a tenuous venture in the nineteenth century. Although he was an important figure in the debates regarding emigrationism, Whitfield’s principal engagement with the world of publishing consisted of his experience as a poet, in venues such as Frederick Douglass’s newspapers and with James S. Leavitt, a small Unitarian outfit that brought out his only volume of poetry in 1853. If Whitfield’s call for a dual-language periodical seemed grandly ambitious for someone with little apparent editorial experience, then the aspirations of Thomas Hamilton to start a magazine might seem to have a greater chance of succeeding. Hamilton, who had spent the greater part of his professional life in publishing, had similar wishes to start a magazine that specifically focused on the historical condition and artistic contributions of U.S. blacks.

While recent work by Todd Vogel has reexamined the black press, and Elizabeth McHenry has analyzed black reading communities, the historical and theoretical meanings of African American editorial practices have remained relatively understudied. By focusing on the specific periodical type of the magazine I use Hamilton’s *Anglo-African Magazine* to stage an analysis of the genealogies of African American editorial practices. In the first part of the essay, I take up Hamilton’s history editing and publishing contemporary writers. In the second part, I focus on three figures centrally associated with the *Anglo-African Magazine*—Delany, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and James McCune Smith—to unveil some of the lines of critical inquiry that have undergirded the textual scholarship of recent editorial endeavors specifically involved with reprinting projects. In what follows, I examine the publishing initiatives of Hamilton less to formulate a theory of African American editorial practices per se than to interrogate what some of the contemporary practices related to the “archival turn” might mean to current theories of African American studies.

“The requisite editorial matter”: The Emergence of the *Anglo-African Magazine*

While topics such as temperance, religion, and appearance were frequent mainstays, slavery and black equality were the central focus of nearly every antebellum African American periodical. When Douglass launched *The North Star* (1847–51), he introduced the paper with a prospectus an-
nouncing his objective: “The object of The North Star will be to attack slavery in all its forms and aspects; advocate Universal Emancipation; exact the standard of public morality; promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the colored people; and to hasten the day of freedom to our three million enslaved fellow countrymen.”

Willis A. Hodges’s *The Ram’s Horn*, an abolitionist paper out of Williamsburgh, New York, ran for three years between 1847 and 1850, reaching a peak circulation of 2,500. While every paper advocated the abolition of slavery, there was a wide divergence on whether African Americans should leave the United States altogether, remain isolated in segregated communities, or strive for integration. The *Aliened American* (1853–54), based in Cleveland, Ohio, and Mary Ann Shadd’s *Provincial Freeman* (1853–57), published in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, championed integration. In contrast, Henry Bibb argued for keeping black communities protected and isolated from whites in his paper, *Voice of the Fugitive*, while John B. Russwurm, in wrestling control of *Freedom’s Journal* from Samuel Cornish, turned the angle of the paper to one that decidedly advocated that blacks should leave the United States for Africa.

While African Americans could be found within the pages of white-edited periodicals, black periodicals pressed the call for self-representation as an urgent if not necessary responsibility. “We wish to plead our own cause,” reads the editorial statement of *Freedom’s Journal*—“Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly . . . .” After *Freedom’s Journal* and *The Rights of All*, Samuel Cornish became editor of the short-lived *The Weekly Advocate* (1837–1837), where he stated in the first issue to his black readership that the paper was “their paper, in every sense of the word . . . devoted particularly to our own interests—conducted by ourselves, devoted to our moral, mental and political improvement.” And Thomas Hamilton pronounced a similar mandate when he maintained in the inaugural issue of the *Anglo-African Magazine* that African Americans should “speak for themselves; no outside tongue, however gifted with eloquence, can tell their story; no outside eye, however penetrating, can see their wants; no outside organization, however benevolently intended, nor however cunningly contrived, can develop the energies and aspirations which make up their mission.”

After years in the publishing industry, Hamilton would take up this mission again when he began laying the groundwork for his magazine.

Sometime in 1858, Hamilton began distributing copies of his “Pro-
spectus of the Anglo-African Magazine” to promote the new publication that he would edit. The prospectus was a 19 cm × 14 cm single-sheet flyer, small enough that it could have been an insert in nearly any publication. He enumerated eight primary objectives of the magazine, among them providing a forum “for the rapidly rising talent of colored men in their special and general literature,” and announced that the first issue of an octavo magazine of thirty-two large pages would appear in January 1859 and feature a portrait of Alexander Dumas. When we recall that Whitfield had hoped his “Afric-American Quarterly Repository” would be something on the range of 160 to 200 pages, we begin to see the almost impossible ambition of his proposal. In an order of scale, the material costs of Whitfield’s Afric-American Quarterly Repository would have been at least five times as much as Hamilton’s Anglo-African Magazine. Yet, whereas Whitfield hoped to price his quarterly at seventy-five cents, Hamilton sought one dollar for twelve issues.

Hamilton’s prospectus itself is a compelling document for what it reveals about the black publishing industry in New York. The flyer was printed by John J. Zuille, whose business was located at 396 Canal Street in New York City. Zuille was active in black politics throughout the century from the antebellum period (founding the New York stop of the Underground Railroad, for example) and served as a delegate at the State Labor Convention for blacks during Reconstruction. While scholars have a relatively broad picture of the numerous antebellum African American newspapers that existed and, to a lesser extent, corresponding information about their editors and publishers, we still have comparatively little information about African American printers and binders. Zuille was early engaged in African American publishing, having been the printer for the Colored American, a four- to six-page weekly newspaper edited by Samuel Cornish, Phillip A. Bell, and Charles Bennett Ray. In his brief sketch of Zuille in The Rising Son: or, The Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race (1873), William Wells Brown described Zuille as a “practical printer” who “showed mechanical skill that placed him at once amongst the ablest of the craft.” Zuille’s printing house was in the vicinity of Hamilton’s own editorial office at 48 Beekman Street, which also served as the Office of the American Abolition Society, located in an area that was then known as Printing House Square. The same year that Zuille printed the prospectus for Hamilton’s Anglo-African Magazine, he also printed a short four-page document, probably originally intended as a pamphlet, that consisted of a preamble and constitution for the Af-
rican Civilization Society, of which Henry Highland Garnet served as president. In this respect, it was important for Hamilton not only to have black authors writing for the magazine but to have an African American printer as well, especially one who had experience working with African American political and civic groups.

In a burgeoning world of African American newspapers, broadsides, and pamphlets, Hamilton intended the *Anglo-African Magazine* to be different with its attention to matters cultural as well political. In his early years, Hamilton worked in various capacities for newspapers such as the *Colored American* (1837–42), the *Evangelist* (1845–48), and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (1840–70), giving him valuable experience in the work of publishing periodicals. Still, the idea of an African American magazine was unprecedented. Later in the same year Hamilton followed with the *Weekly Anglo-African*, which was meant to serve as a companion to the magazine with shorter articles and news coverage. As Deborah Jackson notes, Hamilton’s operating costs were quite extensive, and he underwrote his endeavors publishing the magazine and newspaper by working as a bookbinder. Jackson also notes that he supplemented his income with a sideline business selling books, offering a wide selection by both white and black authors.16

It seems that Hamilton sought to advertise his magazine in areas of the country that had discernible free black populations that already had a subscription base with local or regional black newspapers. Such was the case in Ohio, a veritable bastion of black activism. Only a month after the first issue of the *Anglo-African Magazine* appeared, Oberlin College’s *Student Monthly* reviewed it in the “Literary Notices” section, praising its “excellent literary matter” and concluding with the hope that “it could be put in the possession of every negrophobia-monger in the land.”17 Notwithstanding the format, the *Anglo-African Magazine* was seemingly comparable to other black periodicals that focused on the condition of African Americans. Perhaps the closest equivalent was *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, which featured editorials, essays, poetry, and excerpted fiction in its pages. However, while most newspapers are meant to be disposable, it is evident that Hamilton intended the *Anglo-African Magazine* to have a degree of permanence. At the end of 1859, all twelve issues of the first year were bound and made available in book form.

With its especially keen focus on the literary arts, Hamilton most likely conceived of his magazine as suitable for the libraries of the nation’s small but growing free black middle class. Indeed, when he writes of the
need for an independent voice in the “fourth estate,” it seems that he is referring as much to black newspapers as he is to the white publishing industry. A magazine may have seemed an unnecessary extravagance, perhaps even a waste of precious resources, given the demographics of African Americans who could afford such a luxury at midcentury, but it is clear that Hamilton wanted his magazine to be the black equivalent to those white-edited magazines that were proliferating in the publishing centers of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.

In a short story written for the inaugural volume of the *Anglo-African Magazine*, William J. Wilson describes a number of paintings that his protagonist Ethiop views related to the history of African American editorial practices. Among the paintings that Ethiop views is a portrait of the editor of the *Anglo-African Magazine* itself who is portrayed surrounded by “piles of all the journals edited by colored men from the commencement [of African American publishing] up till the present,” including *Freedom's Journal*, *Colored American*, *People's Press*, *North Star*, and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Significantly, hovering in the background unknownst to Hamilton is Samuel Cornish, the former editor of *Freedom's Journal*, which ran from 1827 to 1829. The story’s painting approximates a claim articulated by James McCune Smith, notwithstanding his sardonic tone, that “next to the pulpit, and behind the chairs, no place has greater charms for colored Americans than a seat in the chair editorial.”

In describing Ethiop's encounter with the painting, Wilson deliberately links *Freedom's Journal* to the *Anglo-African Magazine* as part of the same continuum. This continuum is underscored, however, less by the political orientation, format, or even style of the periodical than by the fact that each was under the editorship of an African American. In the painting, Hamilton is depicted sitting with *Freedom's Journal*, “the first journal ever edited by, and devoted to the cause of the colored man in America, held in one hand and outspread before him, while the other, as though expressive of his resolve, is firmly clenched.” In representing Cornish as the “First Editor” and Hamilton as the “Last Editor,” Wilson essentially imagines them as a kind of alpha and omega of black publishing.

There would, of course, be numerous black editors to come after Hamilton, but Wilson’s use of Ethiop’s fascination with a periodical “edited by, and devoted to the cause of the colored man” prefigures larger questions about race and editorial practices in the antebellum United States. In the most immediate sense, Wilson intimates the difference between periodicals like William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator*, which were devoted to
the abolitionist cause foremost, and those more specifically concerned with the condition of both enslaved and free African Americans. In a different sense, Wilson uses the painting’s description to implicitly ask whether black authors could hope their writings would remain more or less unadulterated by white editors. Would black authors be able to freely and fully express themselves in publications primarily intended for white readers? In a metacritical sense, the spectral presence of Cornish in *The First and the Last Colored Editor* painting foreshadows the ways in which editorial concerns themselves have been recessed within the field of African American literary studies. When such concerns do arise in discussions of African American literature before the Civil War, for example, it is almost always in the context of the relationship between black writers and white editors such as Garrison, Lydia Maria Child, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.\(^{22}\)

One of the fundamental characteristics of the *Anglo-African Magazine* that distinguishes it in significant degrees from its black and white literary counterparts was its emphasis on the condition of free as well as enslaved blacks. While the magazine strongly championed the abolition of slavery—and indeed nearly all its writers were activists in one way or another—Hamilton was also interested in publishing material that was not expressly related to the peculiar institution. Hence the decision to publish pieces as seemingly disparate as sheet music and articles about astronomy. This distinction was as much latent as it was ideological and was one that Hamilton registered in terms of temporality—in addition to serving as an “exposé of the condition of blacks,” by which he means their past and present, the magazine “will have the aim to uphold and encourage the now depressed hopes of thinking black men, in the United States,” by which he means their future.\(^{23}\)

Indeed, Wilson’s short story “Afric-American Picture Gallery” allegorizes the very dilemmas that Hamilton confronted as a black editor attempting to negotiate the ostensible bourgeois protocols of magazine publishing and racial representation. At one point Ethiop engages in a tête-à-tête with a white patron to the gallery: “I was about to remark,” he said, “that if your men had capacity they might write for our anti-slavery journals and other ably conducted magazines in the country, such as Harpers’ or the Atlantic Monthly. It would be more creditable. You don’t want a separate magazine and pen up your thoughts there.”\(^{24}\) The fictional encounter between Ethiop and the white visitor illuminates
a number of concerns about black periodicals and editorial practices. On the one hand, the patron’s comments contain a subsumed critique of value, by which, had they any “capacity,” black writers might write for “more creditable” journals. On the other hand, his comments are decidedly political: black writers should not want to publish their ideas in “separate” magazines. But Ethiop counters that having “colored men” in the position of editors allows for a wider range of perspectives to be circulated by providing forums where black writers could more freely express their ideas.

Wilson’s sketches themselves are exactly the type of writing that might not readily find a place in periodicals edited by white Americans and are therefore an illustration of the need for expressly African American forums. In Wilson’s “Afric-American Picture Gallery,” for example, Ethiop encounters an old black man who has captured his former white slave master and now holds him captive chained in a cave. Later in February 1860, he would publish “What Shall We Do with the White People?,” an essay that seems almost inconceivable in any of the white-edited periodicals of the day. The same might be said of Martin R. Delany’s novel _Blake; or, the Huts of America_ (1859, 1861–62), which was initially serialized in the Anglo-African Magazine. Delany’s vivid tale of black insurrection in the American hemisphere would hardly be palatable to antebellum white reading audiences, let alone have gained the initial approval of most white editors. By comparison, one of the closest examples to the kind of visceral account of black physical resistance one finds in Delany occurs in Douglass’s short story “The Heroic Slave” (1853). But there, Douglass refuses to graphically depict such acts of black insurrection—an absence that was due as much to Douglass’s own politics as it was Julia Griffith’s position as editor of the gift book _Autographs for Freedom_ (1853).

By approaching the Anglo-African Magazine archaeologically, we can gain a better sense of the decisions that constituted the basis of Hamilton’s editorial practices of putting a group of writers of seemingly disparate ideological and political positions into the same orbit. If the Anglo-African Magazine was receptive to openly black militant thought, it was also receptive to a number of different political positions. On the one hand, authors like James Theodore Holly and Delany offered work that insisted blacks should leave the United States. On the other hand, authors like J. W. C. Pennington and J. Holland Townsend offered essays that maintained African Americans needed to stake their claim in
the United States. Hamilton himself seems to have sympathized more closely with the latter position, writing in the first issue of the magazine that U.S. blacks ought not to be tempted by the allure of founding “an empire in Yoruba.”

While the magazine did feature pieces from a number of different authors, it was nonetheless sustained by multiple contributions from a handful of regular authors. It ran at least three poems by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper as well as early examples of her fiction writing in “Two Offers” and nonfiction in “Our Greatest Want.” Along with the education reformer Townsend and the Presbyterian pastor Pennington, the writings of both the emigration proponent Holly and essayist Smith were featured extensively throughout the first year. The majority of fiction that was published in the magazine came from three sources, all of which appeared over several issues: installments of Delany’s novel *Blake*; Wilson’s short story “Afric-American Picture Gallery”; and Jane Rustic’s series “Fancy Sketches.”

The sheer number of submissions from a relatively small number of writers reveals their dedication to support Hamilton’s vision, but it also intimates the precariousness of any African American endeavor—less from the editorial perspective than from a publishing one—to produce a magazine during this period. The country’s most well-known black public figure, Douglass edited a monthly that ran from 1858 to 1863, but it was essentially a compendium of selections from his *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* and was principally intended as a companion for foreign distribution. More established magazines like *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper’s (Bazaar, Weekly, and Monthly)* all enjoyed larger pools of readers from which to draw subscribers, and, furthermore, many were owned by book publishers that used them as vehicles to promote their books and cultivate authors. One example, in this regard, would be Edgar Allan Poe’s relationship with the *Southern Literary Messenger*. By contrast, without the financial wherewithal of major publishing houses, the writers for Hamilton’s *Anglo-African Magazine* did not generally benefit from such cross-ventures.

Black periodicals had had a continuous, if sporadic, presence in the world of newspapers from the late 1820s on, but more ambitious and elaborate publications like magazines were both expensive and complicated ventures. Hamilton himself acknowledged as much when he wrote that the very appearance of the *Anglo-African Magazine* was “almost unparalleled in American Magazine literature.” The utter exceptionalism
of a publication of this type was acknowledged by readers of the Anglo-African Magazine itself. In the November 1859 issue, Hamilton published a note from an “unknown friend” of the magazine who wanted to see it in public libraries.

Believing that the publication of your invaluable magazine is doing more to do away with the wicked prejudice existing against the black man, and to elevate him socially and politically, than by any other effort being made; and feeling that great good would result from placing it within the reach of the masses, I will give ten dollars towards creating a fund for placing a copy in every public library in this country.\(^{25}\)

Hamilton closed the column with a list of pledges amounting to $48.50 from a group of donors including Benjamin Coates, William T. Mercer, and Gerrit Smith. At the close of the magazine’s first year, however, Hamilton had to concede that he had “not yet been able to pay” his writers.\(^{26}\) He lessened this admission slightly by using the word *yet*, as he remained hopeful that the magazine would increase its remittance rates for the following year. His operation’s costs were somewhat absorbed by the generosity of his writers, who essentially contributed their works on contingency. But his publishing costs were exacerbated by his inability to rely upon or anticipate a consistent revenue stream through subscriptions. Based on the last (incomplete) extant issue of the magazine, Hamilton had to give up the venture in March 1860. The Anglo-African Magazine survived in a different guise when Hamilton started the Weekly Anglo-African newspaper the following year. Beyond this, he remained active in the industry at least until 1863 when he acted as one of the publishers of William Wells Brown’s *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*.


The Anglo-African Magazine did not reappear again until 1968 when it was reprinted as part of the series *The American Negro: His History and Literature*, published by Arno Press and the New York Times. Edited by William Loren Katz, the series would eventually total 141 books. Its many
titles included William and Ellen Craft’s *A Hundred Miles and Running* (1860), William J. Simmons’s *Men of Mark* (1887), and *Negro Caravan* (1941), edited by Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses G. Lee. As the reviewer in *Commentary* noted, “the recent explosion of interest in Negro history” has prompted publishers to reissue “virtually everything,” adding that “the several valuable series of reprints, the most ambitious, extensive and useful” was *The American Negro: His History and Literature.* It is important to emphasize that this “explosion of interest in Negro history” was one of the products of the Civil Rights movement and those activists—both within academia and outside of it—who were reassessing if not challenging the meanings and sources of an ostensibly uniform national history. The Arno Press/New York Times initiative is a reminder of how social movements can influence editorial and publishing practices.

The *Anglo-African Magazine* remains an important artifact for any discussion of the history of nineteenth-century African American editorial practices as a document unto itself but also because of its significance to the practice of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century textual scholarship. No complete volume with all of the magazine’s issues has been republished. The Arno/New York Times volume reprinted the entire first year of its run, but the last three known issues of the magazine from January through March 1860 remain incomplete and only available at archives such as the Special Collections Library at the University of Michigan. While the *Anglo-African Magazine* has not been edited per se with a comprehensive introduction, research annotations, and footnote documentation, the works of several authors from it have been edited; examining the modern reprint history of these authors promises to illuminate some of the dominant currents in African American studies over the last four decades.

It is appropriate that the author who contributed the most pieces to the *Anglo-African Magazine*, Martin R. Delany, would also most likely be responsible for inspiring the current ongoing editorial return to the magazine. While Katz did in fact furnish an introduction for the magazine in his capacity as general editor for *The American Negro: His History and Literature*, it was relatively brief, at just one page. In this respect, Katz more or less merely reprinted the *Anglo-African Magazine*. One of the most vociferous calls of the late 1960s/early 1970s interest in African American history was for the recovery of texts that documented, or were written by, black militants in the vein of David Walker, Denmark Vesey,
Gabriel Prosser, Henry Highland Garnet, and Nat Turner. Although his novel was fiction, Delany’s protagonist Blake was one such figure. When Floyd J. Miller began preparing the first book edition of *Blake*, he had to return again and again to the *Anglo-African Magazine* and the *Weekly Anglo-African*. In returning to these periodicals, Miller discovered that six chapters of the novel are missing. He also determined that many of the songs and poems voiced by characters in the novel were actually poems by Delany’s friend and colleague James Monroe Whitfield.28

Miller’s footnotes for *Blake* are not overly detailed but they laid the foundation for later, more extensive textual scholarship. This kind of scholarship has come in the form of literary criticism through such works as Eric J. Sundquist’s *To Wake the Nations* (1993) and Robert S. Levine’s *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (1997). But this kind of textual scholarship has also been more explicitly and directly manifested in works like *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (2003), edited by Levine. If Miller’s initial editing of *Blake* was prompted by a latent desire to locate a discernibly radical tradition within the history of black America, then Levine’s investment in textual scholarship on Delany was prompted by a need to recontextualize the field of antebellum African American literary studies that, in canonizing Douglass, had occasionally obfuscated the rich and divergent political positions within midcentury black intellectual thought.

From another angle, the initial publication and subsequent reissue of *Blake* raises a set of questions about contemporary editorial practices and the problem of different versions. Patricia Okker has suggested it is necessary to consider the two serializations of *Blake* as separate texts.29 As is well-known by readers of the novel, the setting of the 1859 version follows Henry throughout the South and Southwest, detailing the escape of his friends to Canada; the action is thus localized in the context of North America. The 1861–62 version (which subsumes and identifies the 1859 version as part 1) follows the protagonist’s transformation from Henry to “Blacus,” as he travels from Cuba to Africa and back to Cuba. The scope of the 1861–62 version thus opens into the greater hemisphere of the Americas as well as the circum-Atlantic. Okker has underscored the historical differences between the two serializations of *Blake* as one of the important distinctions that distinguish them as separate texts.

However, another way to consider the problem of *Blake* as it relates to editorial practices is to contextualize Delany with midcentury contemporaries like Herman Melville and Walt Whitman. The British edition
of Melville’s classic novel (then entitled *The Whale*) mistakenly failed to include the epilogue and consequently refashioned the entire work as if it had been offered from the perspective of a dead Ishmael rather than from one who had actually survived the destruction of the *Pequod*. The original U.S. edition published a month later is the version upon which most twentieth- and twenty-first-century reprints are based. Because the elision of the epilogue damages the narratological underpinnings of the novel by essentially changing the story line, the British edition is rarely consulted. Delany’s *Blake* is similarly analogous. Its serial republication in the *Weekly Anglo-African* maintained the same narrative voice and theme (with Henry/Blacus plotting slave insurrection), but the story line of the second is substantially extended. Can the 1861–62 edition really constitute a separate text insofar as the 1859 edition was effectively interrupted? By Hamilton’s own admission, he intended to publish some eighty chapters of Delany’s novel; thus, in modern reprints, the 1862–62 iteration is commonly understood as the authoritative version. From a different position, one might consider the print history of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* from its original publication in 1855 to the so-called death-bed one of 1891–92. How scholars assess the differences in the constitutional makeup of *Leaves of Grass* bears directly on the distinction between “edition” and “issue.” Whitman himself considered the last edition to be the most complete one; are readers who take up the 1855 edition, then, only partly reading Whitman? Whereas Whitman’s volume grew and grew to comprise nearly 400 poems, readers who only take up the 1859 version of *Blake* (as many readers of Whitman only read the 1855 edition) would necessarily encounter a truncated novel, in both the textual body of the novel and its plot as well. But to take up the 1859 version of *Blake* alone is also concomitantly to take up the *Anglo-African Magazine* because no book version of it exists as such, and any engagement with the first iteration of *Blake* would, as Katy Chiles notes, also necessitate a simultaneous engagement with the particular social history of mid-nineteenth century print and periodical culture.

The print peregrinations of *Blake* make it illustrative of the kind of examination that John L. Bryant calls “fluid textual” analysis (whereby a given work is studied for its authorial, editorial, and cultural alterations) as well as the kind of editorial practices sponsored by the Collegium for African American Research that sponsors the Clotel Project (which presents the four versions of Brown’s novel in an innovative electronic scholarly edition). If Bryant’s call for fluid textual analyses is informed
equally by history-of-the-book criticism as well as New Historicism, the Clotel Project evinces the developments in editorial practices when African American literary scholarship self-consciously shifts to looking for themes and settings beyond the precincts of the United States alone.

While the impulses emanating from the broader Civil Rights movement compelled the publishing industry during the late 1960s/early 1970s to reprint works like *Blake* that were out of print, black feminist scholars were also pointing out the need to unearth the specific contribution of women to the African American literary tradition. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes in his introduction to the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, most scholars of African American studies had not read this literature because it was accessible only in archives of rare books.

For reasons unclear to me even today [in 1988], few of these marvelous renderings of the Afro-American woman’s consciousness were reprinted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when so many other texts of the Afro-American literary tradition were resurrected from the dark and silent graveyard of the out-of-print and were reissued in facsimile editions aimed at the hungry readership for canonical texts in the nascent field of black studies.

Writing over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century in nearly every genre, France Ellen Watkins Harper was one of the central figures that editors sought to recover. Perhaps still known more for her novel *Iola Leroy* (1892) than for her poetry or essays, Watkins Harper spent the early part of her writing career primarily as a poet, publishing in periodicals like *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, the *Liberator*, and the *Anglo-African Magazine*. Among the women published in Hamilton’s magazine—Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Grace Mapps, Sarah M. Douglass, and Jane Rustic—Watkins Harper was by far the most prolific contributor.

The two collections of Harper’s work make different use of the *Anglo-African Magazine* and illuminate different currents in African American textual scholarship. Edited by Maryemma Graham, the *Complete Poems of Frances E. W. Harper* is a part of the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers series that was published by Oxford University Press in 1988. In her introduction to the Schomburg edition, Graham reveals the difficulties of editing a writer like Watkins Harper. Commenting that Watkins Harper was a frequent contributor to
nearly all of the major black periodicals of the day, Graham also notes that the bulk of her occasional poetry, letters, and speeches remain uncollected. The Schomburg edition of Watkins Harper’s complete poetry, she adds, “comes at an appropriate time in the reassessment of her canon. Its publication alone more than justifies the need to restore Harper to her proper social and literary context in the mid-nineteenth century and to see her development of the genre in which she wrote.”33 In the wake of work by historians who have explored the meanings of racial uplift ideologies and literary critics who have focused on the cultural politics of racial passing, Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy* became an important text for scholars working in African American studies at least as early as the late 1980s.34 Less attention was paid to her antebellum poetry, in part, it must be said, because the 1850s is so heavily identified with Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Restoring Watkins Harper to “her proper social and literary context” would not only necessitate a thematic focus on the mulatta trope, for example, from Eliza Harris to Iola Leroy, but situate Watkins Harper in relation to Whitman, Dickinson, and other midcentury poets.

By circumscribing her volume to Watkins Harper’s poetry, one of the results of Graham’s edition is that it traces the contours of a specific genre over the course of time rather than presenting multiple genres of her work bound together as sections underneath a distinct conceptual rubric or discrete historical period. This latter approach is closer to the one that Frances Smith Foster took to edit her anthology *A Brighter Coming Day*. Because of the wider scope of this project, Foster’s book includes Watkins Harper’s essay “Our Greatest Want” and two pieces of fiction, “The Two Offers” and “The Triumph of Freedom—A Dream,” both originally published in the *Anglo-African Magazine*. Divided into four major parts, *A Brighter Coming Day* has the advantage of allowing its reader to correlate ideas across different forms of writing to limn the governing preoccupations of her thought. The material in Foster’s anthology also is closer in presentation to nineteenth-century publications in which Watkins Harper’s work appeared, featuring, as they did, multiple genres.

While both Graham’s and Foster’s editions are suitable references for research, Foster’s edition has more of a feel for public and not just academic consumption. It was published two years after the Schomburg edition in 1990 by the Feminist Press with support from the City University of New York, after a slew of black feminist scholars, including Hazel Carby, Deborah McDowell, and Mary Helen Washington, among oth-
ers, had gone searching for their mothers’ gardens, to borrow a phrase from Alice Walker. According to its own self-description, the Feminist Press began in 1970 by “rescuing ‘lost’ works by writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Charlotte Gilman.” Ultimately, however, what the Graham and Foster publications reveal is the pressing need for continued archaeological work on Watkins Harper that will increasingly move toward recovering the archive of her entire corpus.

If the initiatives to recover the work of Delany and Watkins Harper were prompted by the radical black and feminist social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the case of James McCune Smith intimates the delicate relationship between the academic work of African American editorial practices and the commercial aspects of the publishing industry that might print such scholarship. Of the three major contributors to Hamilton’s *Anglo-African Magazine*, Smith has until recently remained the most neglected. A commanding intellectual in his own right, Smith is most known for writing the introduction to Douglass’s second autobiographical outing, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). Smith’s introduction was an important moment in the history of African American textual scholarship itself. Rather than repeat the formula of having a white authenticator furnish prefatory comments or claim editorial authority over the text, Douglass chose to have Smith’s voice open *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

As scholars, literary critics in particular, began to move away from the primacy of the earlier *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) to consider the larger panoply of his autobiographical writing, Smith increasingly emerged as a significant figure in relation not only to Douglass’s personal history but to the social history of nineteenth-century African American political thought. Perhaps the scholar most identified with the recent recovery of Smith is John Stauffer, who works at the intersection of history and literary criticism. In *The Black Hearts of Men* (2001), Stauffer offered biographical sketches of John Brown, Douglass, Smith, and Gerrit Smith to illuminate a radical interracial tradition of the abolitionist movement. In conducting the research for his study, Stauffer recovered a number of primary documents related to Smith, some of which became the basis for his edited volume on him.

The very possibility of Stauffer’s edited volume *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* seems as much a result of his own research for *The Black Hearts of Men* as of the current “archival turn” in African American literary studies. This turn includes reassessing
canonical authors for their lesser-studied works and unearthing works by little-known writers outside of the Northeast corridor displayed in critical analyses such as Eric Gardner’s *Unexpected Places* (2009). *The Works of James McCune Smith*, like the other titles in the Oxford Collected Black Writing series, gathers the occasional essays of nineteenth-century public intellectuals. Much of this writing was published in black periodicals, some of which were preserved by archivists to transfer them to microfilm beginning in the 1930s. In his introduction to his Smith volume, Stauffer laments that Smith has remained in relative obscurity and notes three particular issues that may account for the delay in resurrecting him from the “waves of obscurity”: Smith published no book during his lifetime; his genre of choice was the essay; and his papers were never collected. But in the foreword to the series by Henry Louis Gates Jr., it never becomes evident why the Oxford Collected Black Writing series emerges with its first trio of publications in 2006. That is, the series does not have an obvious theme that patently undergirds its titles nor an ostensible social movement prompting its production. It is also noteworthy, however, that of the projects that Gates recalls would form the basis for a “textual legacy” of African American memory—including the Douglass Papers, the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, and *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*—the Oxford Collected Black Writings series was among the last to reach a print platform. Without extrapolating too much from the particular trajectory of Gates’s own editorial initiatives, this series might be said to be a return to the archive for the sake of returning to the archive. In a larger sense, this archival turn also signals a certain state in the institutionalization of African American studies that no longer requires an immediate political concern or social movement to authorize its lines of critical inquiry.

The (W)hole of It

If, as I have tried to show, contemporary editorial engagements with nineteenth-century writing have primarily been author-centered, what might a focus on the periodical mean to how the arc of African American literary criticism is conceptualized? The three writers discussed here have all been reintroduced to modern readers as illustrations of certain kinds of discourse: Delany and radical politics; Watkins Harper and feminism; and Smith as a key example of what Stauffer calls interracial
friendship. My own conclusion is not that contextualizing these writers in any particular discourse is incorrect but rather that it is more advantageous to read these authors together, to be forced to engage the multitudinous and sometimes contradictory ideas of these writers at specific moments. In this sense, I echo Frances Smith Foster’s recent call that we recognize the heterogeneity of early African American periodicals, which constituted, in her words, “a smorgasbord of the practical and pedantic, scholarly and serviceable, informative and diversionary.”

Given its importance to mid-nineteenth century African American thought, the Anglo-African is a precursor to later periodicals like the 1924 special issue of Survey Graphic and the single 1926 issue of Fire!! My implicit call, then, for the Anglo-African to be edited is also an implicit call for scholars to think synchronically as well as diachronically—a critical maneuver that the archival turn opens as both a possibility and a promise.

Notes

1. I am, of course, riffing on Junot Díaz’s novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2008), which itself constitutes a complex textual artifact that marshals a fascinating array of material.


3. Ibid., 194.

4. Ibid., 195.

5. Ibid., 197.


13. For a brief biographical sketch of Zuille, see Brown, Rising Son, 473–74; for more specific details on his political activity, see Wilder, In the Company of Black Men, 268.

14. Brown, Rising Son, 473. Zuille remained active in publishing after the Civil War, printing at least one work, Oration, by James Crosby, a Colored Man, in 1867. His own position as a printer puts into high relief a set of questions about African American textual production in the nineteenth-century United States, especially in the antebellum period: What was the relationship between black writers and white publishers, particularly in the Northeast corridor from Philadelphia to Boston? What happened
if a black editor could not find a printer to publish his or her material? Were there printers who were ambivalent or even antagonistic to the ideas of a black publisher and refused to accept a printing job? Such questions return us to the materiality of textual production, reminding us that printers themselves were important cogs in the machinery of political discourse: black publishers might have had a steady roster of writers and a ready audience to consume their work, but without a printer to put these words to some kind of media (whether newspaper, pamphlet, broadside, magazine, or other) the circulation of their ideas or that of their writers would have much different, if not narrower, circulatory patterns.

15. As Frank Moss wrote about the area in his history of New York City as a metropolis, “The square will ever be famous as the place where The Great American Newspaper has had its development. [Horace] Greeley, [Henry Jarvis] Raymond, [Charles Anderson] Dana, [George] Jones, and many others, hardly less famous, have done their life work here, and have enriched the nation and world by it”  


17. Oberlin Students’ Monthly, 38. It is possible that the notice was furnished by John Langston Mercer, who was a graduate of the college and listed in the table of contents as a contributor.


21. Ibid.


25. Ibid.


36. In Robert S. Stepoto’s language, these prefatory comments functioned as “authenticating documents” that legitimated the veracity of the author’s claims. See Stepto, From Behind the Veil, 6–7.


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