Paper Money Men

Anthony, David

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“What’s that you mutter to yourself, Matthew Maule? . . . And what for do you look so black at me?”
“No matter, darkey! . . . Do you think nobody is to look black but yourself?”

—Exchange between Young Matthew Maule and Scipio, slave of Gervayse Pyncheon, in Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables

CHAPTER FIVE

“SUCCESS” AND RACE IN THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES

What role does race play in the compensatory fictions of the sensational public sphere? As my discussion of the capitalist Jew in chapter 2 suggests, the sensationalism produced in the wake of the 1837 Panic frequently seeks to redress masculine crises of self-possession by recourse to figures of racial alterity. By way of continuing this analysis, I want to turn in this final chapter to narratives in which masculine anxieties about the paper economy were managed by enlisting parallel anxieties about the distinction between the racial categories of whiteness and blackness. Michael O’Malley refers to the relationship between political economy and racial economy as that existing in nineteenth-century America between “specie and species.” As he explains, “[I]f many seemingly solid things melted into air, other more nebulous ideas grew more certain as capitalism advanced. . . . The shared language of race and money suggests that the freer market society became, the farther its promises extended, the more it demanded racial categories that resisted exchange or negotiation” (“Specie” 373). For O’Malley, in other words, the putative racial purity of whiteness was offered as a kind of compensatory “gold standard” in antebellum America, such that narratives about race and racial purity act as a kind of fantasy bribe, whereby anxieties about the period’s radically unstable economy can be displaced onto similar
concerns about racial instability—the latter of which are often represented as far more manageable than those associated with the period’s panic-prone economy.

Here in this chapter I want to build on and complicate O’Malley’s important discussion, in particular by exploring more fully the way in which the sensational public sphere puts race into service as a means of negotiating fiscal insecurity and masculine dispossession. For, much as with the capitalist Jew, the category of blackness—especially as embodied in the sensational black male—acts as a crucial and quite fungible fantasy space for the paper money male, one that is accessed again and again as a means of negotiating both white identity and, more specifically, white manhood during this period. But in ways that O’Malley doesn’t quite account for, the relationship between whiteness and blackness is during this period extremely volatile and fluid, a fact that makes whiteness far less able to “resist[] exchange or negotiation” than he suggests. Indeed, the sensational black body of this period proves even more labile than the fiscal Jew, especially in the material produced in and around 1850—the period in which the Fugitive Slave Law was enacted, and the period in which legal definitions of selfhood and self-sovereignty were increasingly affected by legal definitions of both race and money. With respect to the former, the Fugitive Slave Law transformed the entire country into a territory hostile to black people, as both escaped slaves and those suspected or accused of being runaways could be sold into the Southern slave system. As Frederick Douglass famously put it, “Under this law the oaths of any two villains (the capturer and the claimant) are sufficient to confine a free man to slavery for life” (Life and Times 200). With respect to the latter, bankruptcy and debt were coming more and more to feel like a form of servitude, so much so that those seeking legislation for debt relief and a change in bankruptcy laws invoked the language of race to make their case. Sandage puts it thus: “White slaves, wage slaves, debt slaves: specters of dependent manhood proliferated after 1820. Trade unionists co-opted the slavery metaphor from their employers, the debtor classes of manufacturers and merchants” (Losers 194). And as David Roediger makes clear, this was not an effort to establish a shared bond between white men and black slaves. “[A] term like white slavery,” he explains, “was not an act of solidarity with the slave but rather a call to arms to end the inappropriate oppression of whites” (Wages 73). The cover of an 1840 pamphlet titled White Slavery!! Or Selling White Men for Debt! provides powerful visual confirmation of the heightened racial rhetoric that accompanied the plight of the debtor male (figure 19). Depicting a small group of ragged and nervous-looking debtors standing huddled together while an auctioneer takes bids for their purchase, the image makes aggressively clear the linkage between the black slave and
Figure 19  Cover of White Slavery!! Or Selling White Men for Debt! 1840. Reproduced from The Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.
the white debtor. For each group—black slaves and white debtors—self-possession had become alienable, a fact that suggested an implicit shift in identity itself. The white men depicted in White Slavery!! had, it seemed, slipped into an economic zone in which their very sense of whiteness had begun to fade into the alternative racial category of blackness. And to be sure, this was a concern that directly addressed the professional male, something we see in an 1864 quote such as the following from the antislavery Independent: “one hundred thousand good business men—mostly white men—are now in bondage, praying, at the doors of Congress, that their chains may be broken. They love freedom [as much as] black men” (“Bankrupt,” Independent 4-7-1864; quoted in Sandage, Losers 199).

The twin concerns about race and money in the negotiation of professional manhood find especially resonant expression in a variety of sensational urban novels from the early 1850s. My main text here will be Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables (1851), which I will argue provides one of the period’s most complex—and most uneasy—examinations of the fraught boundary between masculine whiteness and masculine blackness. Indeed, I want to suggest that The House of the Seven Gables is valuable as an object of study precisely because it stages this racial boundary directly in the context of the period’s emergent market economy. Before turning to Hawthorne’s novel, however, I want to look at a text that is in many ways less complicated, if more aggressively ideological. This is J. B Jones’s The City Merchant; or, the Mysterious Failure (1851). As I mention in chapter 3, Jones’s text is one of many sensational “Wall Street” novels from mid-century that revolve around the lives of professional men, and that thematize crises of debt and fiscal panic. Here, though, what we see is a fascinating display of the linked thematics of financial and racial panic—concerns that pass, seemingly inevitably, through the endlessly nervous category of professional manhood.

The novel opens in the months preceding the 1837 Panic, and focuses on the cautious fiscal practices of a merchant named Edgar Saxon. Specifically, we learn that on the eve of the 1837 Panic, Saxon makes the unexpected and quite unorthodox announcement that his wholesale supply house will conduct business on a specie-only basis. This decision, we learn, is sparked by the advice left by his father in a series of journal entries about his catastrophic financial failure in the 1819 Panic, a calamity that eventually took his life. In times of fiscal uncertainty, the journal says, “lose no time [in the] conversion of your means into gold and silver, or other equally secure and imperishable substance” (30; emphasis in original). Saxon follows this advice to the letter: refusing to either receive or extend credit of any kind, he demands instead that his agents convert all outstanding accounts into
actual gold or silver specie, regardless of any short-term loss that might be incurred. So insistent is Saxon on this hard money or “bullionist” approach to his finances that he even refuses the entreaties of U.S. Bank president Nicholas Biddle to buy back the large number of shares in the Bank that he has sold—even at a large discount (Biddle is concerned that word of Saxon’s lack of confidence in the U.S. Bank will spread, thus creating a panicky run on the nation’s central specie supply). As Saxon puts it in a private conversation with Biddle, “Van Buren will be elected, and Jackson’s policy will be adhered to. . . . They can and will break you down; and in doing so they will destroy the credit of the country, and a loss of confidence will involve the destruction of fortunes depending always so much upon its maintenance” (76). Soon Saxon is proved correct: while his overextended competitors fail in the Panic, he acquires “immense amounts of gold and silver” and is eventually referred to as a “one of the FIRST MERCHANTS in the country” (214). In this sense Saxon is the exception that proves the rule: his ability to retain a rational, bullionist posture as a merchant in 1830s America is almost radically unusual, to the point where the broader message seems to be that a more normative selfhood is one that falls prey to the temptations and passions of the marketplace.

But Saxon’s fiscal and affective restraint is in fact maintained and bolstered in large part by virtue of the psychic work performed by the novel’s various figures of racial alterity. On the one hand this is staged in the figure of a “cunning Jew” named Abraham Ulmar (66). Circulating in a section of Philadelphia “where the Jews were as thick as blackberries, and almost as dark,” Ulmar is one of “four or five of the most opulent Jews of the city” (91), a status he has achieved by placing himself at the center of the local paper economy. Buying up and selling notes held against merchants such as Saxon at discounted rates, Ulmar is a sort of commodities trader, seeking to make a profit by speculating on the rise and fall of the reputations of the city’s businessmen. But though Ulmar has been able to profit off of most of the city’s merchants, he finds that the merchant Saxon is seemingly impervious to the excessive desires of the paper economy. Working in league with a broker named Grittz (who is “really a Jew,” but who “affect[s] to be a Christian, and attended the Christian churches” [235]), Ulmar attempts to capitalize on Saxon’s rumored vulnerability by selling a note he holds against Saxon at a thirty-three percent discount. But when “the discomfited Jew” (97) finds out that Saxon has in fact received a letter of praise from Bank president Biddle—a strong indication of Saxon’s financial strength—Ulmar realizes he has been had. Worse, he finds that, because Saxon has paid off all of his debts and refused to circulate any new notes of credit, there is no leverage to be had against the savvy merchant. “Curse tem all!” Ulmar
says, a comment echoed by the other Jewish traders, who “join[] him in bitter denunciation[,] . . . of Mr. Saxon, and all Christians in general” (97–98). Further efforts by Ulmar to undermine Saxon’s fiscal security—and thus his manhood—are similarly unavailing.2

Here then we see a narrative in which fiscal desire as embodied in the Jew, though able to permeate Saxon’s world, is ultimately held in check; Saxon’s internal registers of integrity make the Shylock figure less threatening than he often is in the period’s sensational fiction. But we might understand Saxon’s position as fairly anxious nevertheless. For while Saxon stays one step ahead of both Ulmar and Andrew Jackson in their respective efforts to undermine his financial status, he is also plagued by a different and more urgent threat. This is the specter of racial amalgamation, a threat that eventually leads to a city-wide race riot at novel’s end. And what we see is that, for Saxon, the two concerns are intimately related, so much so that we are being asked to understand that financial panic is being negotiated by—and displaced onto—various forms of racial difference.

Anxieties about amalgamation begin about halfway through the novel, when Saxon’s two young nieces, Alice and Edna Sandys, are approached by a pair of men whom Jones describes as “fashionable . . . mulatto exquisites, [who] had the effrontery to step forward and offer their arms” to the women. Saxon’s nieces indignantly refuse the offer—when the men persist Alice tells them, “you’ll be horsewhipped for this!” (131). But it is only when the men are brutally beaten by a working-class (and stereotypically Irish) family friend named Paddy Cork that the two sisters are able to make their way home unimpeded. According to Jones’s narrator, the incident is one of many taking place on the streets of Philadelphia in 1836 and 1837. “For several days the abolitionists had been engaged in an unwonted jubilation in the city,” we are told. “They had been addressed by Mr. Thompson, the British emissary—not the emissary of the government, but of a class of English and Scottish fanatico-philanthropists” (128). The result of this abolitionist rhetoric, the narrator continues, has been to promulgate notions of racial equality among the city’s black population— notions that extend to sexual interaction between whites and blacks. Voicing concern about the provocative sight of “Lucretia Mott walking by the side of Frederick Douglas [sic]” (131), the narrator explains as follows: “The negroes themselves, both the free and the fugitive, credulous by nature, and utterly incapable of restraint when their passions are roused, believed a day was coming, nay, that it was at hand, when they would be on an equality in every respect with the white people of the north. And for several days great strapping negro fellows were seen promenading the streets in social attitudes and familiar converse with white women, while white men walked the pavements with sooty-faced
African women hanging on their arms!” (130). The description echoes and reinforces anxieties over racial mixing displayed with increasingly regularity in Philadelphia and other northeastern cities during the late 1830s. For example, in one of a series of seven lithographs produced by Edward Clay in 1839 titled *Practical Amalgamation*, we see two mixed-race couples in various stages of amorous relations (figure 20). As with each of the lithographs in this series, the image depicts precisely the concerns over miscegenation Jones taps into in his retrospective narrative (indeed, one suspects that the white and black dogs to the left of the image are intended as a comic mirror of the couples, and thus act as a reminder that interracial sex is understood as base and animalistic).  

In *The City Merchant*, the middle-class parlor trappings offered in “Practical Amalgamation” are abandoned, as Jones’s narrative eventually realizes the fears that black men are incapable of restraining their sexual passions. Late in the text, Alice and Edna are kidnapped by the same two “mulatto exquisites” who accosted them in the street, and whisked off to a predominantly black section of the city, where, presumably, they will be raped. “That part of the city at that time was inhabited chiefly by the colored people,” we are told ominously, “who, in moments of excitement and passion, could be roused with great unanimity to the commission of terrible deeds” (188). Fortunately for the girls, however, they are soon rescued by a young (and white) medical student named Edmund Scarboro, who then locks himself and the girls into the top floor of an abandoned building. In an image provided within the text, we see Scarboro literally holding the door shut as the black would-be rapists seek to break into the room, and the two girls huddle together in the room’s far corner—the symbolics of heroic and manly white resistance to racial assault are quite clear. Perhaps not surprisingly, Scarboro buys just enough time to save them all; in a violent confrontation that eventually turns into a race riot, Scarboro and the girls are rescued by the police and various groups of white vigilantes who have tracked them to the black portion of the city. As Jones’s narrator puts it, “it was literally carrying the war into Africa, but not exactly as Scipio did. There was no Hannibal to contend against” (192). Accordingly, after a lengthy battle that lasts long into the night, the “sooty rabble” (189) is eventually routed, and a large portion of the city’s black population flees to nearby New Jersey.

What we therefore see is the intersection of the narratives of race and money. For just as Saxon’s fiscal integrity is threatened by the irrational passions of the paper economy, so too is his family’s sexual and racial integrity threatened by the similarly irrational passions of the rapacious black male. We might say that financial panic and racial panic are virtually synonymous in this novel. And here, we see that the language of racial purity (something
Figure 20  Practical Amalgamation. 1839 by Edward Clay. Lithograph, hand-colored; 24 x 32 cm. Reproduced with permission of the Library Company of Philadelphia.
referred to, of course, by Edgar Saxon’s very name) works to stave off anxieties about the perceived movement away from a specie-based gold standard, as well as the various forms of masculine failure and emasculation attendant upon the new economy. Indeed, the novel, which goes on to narrate the marriage of Saxon’s niece Alice to the young, white Edmund Scarboro, offers a sensational literary form we might think of as a “bank romance.” Here in this conservative subgenre, the hard facts of political economy are transferred to the removed realm of white upper-class domestic enclosure; simultaneously, the disquieting threat of racial amalgamation drops away once it has done the hard work of absorbing the looming threat of fiscal panic.

In this compensatory fiction, then, it is the racial category of whiteness that is the fantasy trade-off for fiscal anxiety. But it’s worth wondering whether the very project of displacing the fiscal onto the racial doesn’t bespeak the very anxiety by which such a move is motivated. For if racial affect is asked to absorb fiscal affect in order to instantiate a stable form of white professional manhood, we might therefore understand the passionate, rapacious bodies of the “mulatto exquisites” who abduct Saxon’s nieces as serving a function quite similar to that performed by Abraham Ulmar and the other capitalist Jews circulating “as thick as blackberries” on the edges of Philadelphia. In each case, racial difference might well act as a displaced figure of Saxon’s own market-driven passions and desires, themselves repressed in answer to the stern dictates of the journal entries written by his financially failed father. Certainly these passions are received here in this very racist text as monstrous. Indeed, the “mulatto exquisites” are very much related to figures of “theft” we have seen throughout this study. Living on the outskirts of Philadelphia—imagined so sensationally as a kind of “Africa”—these men are the projected figures of stolen white enjoyment. Accordingly, in rescuing the two girls from this space of Otherness, Saxon and his white allies stage a kind of retrieval. This may not be the fantasy of recuperation we see in the Gentile theft of Jessica from her Shylock daughter, but it performs a kind of compensatory satisfaction nevertheless. It is as though some precious part of a paper money manhood has been retrieved, an act that is directly paralleled by Saxon’s ability to beat the market panic and accumulate vast stores of gold bullion. But the continued efforts of the abolitionist project—bringing with them troubling assumptions about equality and, by extension, racial mixing—suggests *inter alia* that these passions might return. And this, in turn, is another way of saying that fiscal panic and masculine failure are ever-present threats. Saxon, that is to say, must be ever-wary and ever-anxious: in paper money America, apparently, success has its price.
Another text from 1851 that negotiates the twin masculine concerns of fiscal and racial decline is Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*. Indeed, Hawthorne’s novel is in many ways a roadmap for the various trajectories of manhood available during this period. From the working-class Maules, to the upwardly mobile Holgrave, to the declining Pyncheon aristocracy, we see a fraught drama that revolves in many ways around the following question: what do masculine “success” and “failure” look like in mid-century America? We might begin to answer this question by positing that, at least for Hawthorne, each of these categories is linked to the dream of locating treasure. For, much as with the search for gold in texts such as Irving’s “The Golden Dreams of Wolfert Webber” and Poe’s “The Gold-Bug” (both of which I discuss in the introduction), Hawthorne’s narrative revolves in large part around the search for the missing deed to the territory of Waldo County in Maine. As Hawthorne’s narrator explains, the deed was signed over to the Pyncheons by the “several Indian sagamores, and convey[ed] the Colonel Pyncheon and his heirs, forever, a vast extent of territory at the easterward” (316). The document, we are told, will return the Pyncheon family to aristocratic status; Holgrave’s magazine story claims that the land “would be worth an earldom” (199). Thus, much like Captain Kidd’s missing treasure, the deed also promises to provide the Pyncheons the more abstract benefit of allowing them to return, if in imagined or symbolic form, to the earlier “stage of commerce” described by Jameson. And, as I also suggest in the introduction, what such a return provides is the fantasy ability to transcend the modern world of capital, in which success and failure are internalized states that produce the kind of anxious male subjectivity we see (however differently) in characters such as Jaffery Pyncheon, Clifford Pyncheon, and Holgrave, the last surviving descendant of the Maule family.

In his preface to the novel, Hawthorne famously writes that he would “feel it a singular gratification, if this Romance might effectually convince mankind (or, indeed, any one man) of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity” (2). This might seem like a posture that renounces the notion of treasure. But—and as I will demonstrate—Hawthorne’s warning refers to money as it might exist once in circulation. At novel’s end, of course, the deed is actually located, but it has no value for the Pyncheons. “It is what the Pyncheons sought in vain, while it was valuable,” Holgrave says, “and now that they find the treasure, it has long been worthless” (316; emphasis mine). The message here seems clear: in the absence of found treasure (or gold bullion of the sort
stored away by Edgar Saxton in *The City Merchant*), both the Pyncheons and the Maules must continue to negotiate the modern “stage of capital.”

Another way to put this is to say that the various characters in this novel—the male characters in particular—must come to terms with the psychologies of “success” and “failure” as meted out by the unstable paper money world of antebellum America. And, much as in *The City Merchant*, one of the more subtle ways in which this is negotiated is via the related category of whiteness. But as I will suggest, even this is elusive; in the sensational urban world that Hawthorne depicts in his quirky gothic novel, all that is solid has indeed melted into air, even the putative securities of race and racial difference. Indeed, specifically because of its engagement with various racial (and racist) tropes available within mass culture—from the wide-eyed black servant and the dancing figure of Jim Crow, to the enfeebled “Anglo-Saxon” aristocrat and the white virgin heroine whose “unsullied purity” is violated (203)—the novel offers a telling example of how the period’s sensationalism (of which Hawthorne’s is an important if more “highbrow” version) was tapping into the malleable and frequently unsettling energies and fantasies of race, both “black” and “white,” developing during this period as a means of managing anxieties over manhood and fiscal insecurity.

The result is that we need to complicate our understanding of the way in which race operates within the sensational public sphere. Recent scholarship on the politics of whiteness has done much to help us recognize the ways in which, as Toni Morrison so eloquently argues, “Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence” (*Playing* 17). And certainly this is what we see in a novel such as *The City Merchant*, in which figures of blackness provide the fantasy pathway to bolstered white manhood. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, however, the “Africanist presence” Morrison describes is unstable. Indeed, rather than act in the enabling way Morrison suggests—“thoroughly serviceable” and “companionsably ego-reinforcing” to white self-presence (8)—the Africanist presence imagined by Hawthorne in *The House of the Seven Gables*, lifted as it is from the protean world of white racial fantasy, repeatedly ends up destabilizing the very distinctions of sensibility and culture it seems to have been deployed to bolster. Hawthorne’s gothic romance thus represents a “racial gothic,” in which the ghosts inhabiting the House of the Seven Gables are the uncanny figures of race and racial passion, returning to capitalist America to disrupt the very categories of gender and whiteness from which they were cast off and repressed.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the ambivalent racial negotiations I am describing take place in *The House of the Seven Gables* at moments when
categories of class seem most unstable. The first such example comes in the pivotal scene in which Hepzibah Pyncheon makes her initial sale from the cent shop she has established on the side of the House of the Seven Gables. As Gillian Brown argues, the scene enforces Hepzibah’s corporeal “enslavement” to the forces of the financial market with which she is finally forced to make actual physical contact (Domestic 81–86). But it’s important to note that the vicissitudes of market embodiment reflected here are both facilitated by and routed through the figure of Jim Crow, who enters the narrative in the form of the Jim Crow gingerbread cookies Hepzibah offers for sale in her newly opened shop. Described as “Impish figure[s]” who can be seen “executing [their] world-renowned dance” in the cent shop window, the cookies advertise Hepzibah’s entrance into the world of retail exchange, but they also act as the first goods exchanged between the Pyncheons and the working classes (51; 36).

Tellingly, the first customer they entice into the shop is Ned Higgins, a working-class boy whose repeated requests for the cookies eventually force Hepzibah to charge him money for the goods. Here is how Hawthorne depicts Hepzibah’s first sale: “The new shopkeeper dropped the first solid result of her commercial enterprise into the till. It was done! The sordid stain of that copper coin could never be washed away from her palm. The little schoolboy, aided by the impish figure of the Negro dancer, had wrought an irreparable ruin. The structure of ancient aristocracy had been demolished by him” (51). Described in specifically working-class terms as “dressed rather shabbily . . . in a blue apron, very wide and short trousers, shoes somewhat out at the toes, and a chip-hat” (Gables 49–50), Ned Higgins is a caricature of the working-class corporeality Hepzibah finds so threatening. Indeed, when, a short time after the young boy leaves the shop, Hepzibah waits on a “man in a blue cotton frock” who is “much soiled” and smells of alcohol, it seems clear that we are seeing a grown-up version of the boy as Hawthorne envisions him in future years. Imagined by Hepzibah to be the husband of a “care-wrinkled woman” she has seen earlier, one whom “you at once recognize as worn to death by a brute,” the man terrifies Hepzibah both because of his “brutal” nature, and because she imagines he is the overly fertile father of “at least nine children”—all of whom will no doubt turn out like himself (and thus like Ned Higgins), and all of whom will threaten to overrun the degenerated and barren Pyncheon family line (53).

But Hawthorne’s description of Hepzibah’s first sale is also telling because “the impish figure of the Negro dancer” mediates her contact with the working-class embodiment represented by customers such as Ned Higgins. This is true on a literal level, in that Jim Crow is the commodity that passes between the classes and who thus “aid[s]” in forcing the Pyncheon
family into the material world of retail exchange. But this is also true in the more figural sense that Jim Crow introduces race as a factor in the relations between the two classes. Here, this is especially evident in that Hepzibah is actually marked by her commodity exchange with “the lower classes,” the surest sign of which is of course the “sordid stain” she receives from Ned Higgins’s coin—a mark which those lucky enough to remain free of such contact are able to avoid (55). For example, a few moments after Hepzibah experiences her Eden-like “fall” into commerce, she sees a female member of “the idle aristocracy” walking with “ethereal lightness” down the street, and poses the following question to herself: “Must the whole world toil, that the palms of her hands may be kept white and delicate?” (55). The answer of course is “Yes,” but what is especially telling here is how issues of class and labor are figured in terms very much like racial markings, and how the unwashable “stain” of Ned Higgins’s working-class money separates Hepzibah from the “white and delicate” sphere of aristocratic racial purity. Class, in other words, is being made by Hawthorne into a racial issue, a fact that makes blackness a crucial third term in the effort to imagine a distinct difference between working-class whiteness, and whiteness of the kind inhabited by the “idle aristocracy.” But, and just as interestingly, money is itself being made here into a racialized topic. Indeed, it seems that contact with actual money leaves one with markings very much like a racial taint. Here, then, we see a modification of the scenario depicted in The City Merchant. Whereas in that text (and in visual images such as the cover of White Slavery!!) it is the absence of money that threatens one’s relationship to whiteness, here it is contact with what Hepzibah might term “filthy lucre” that has racial implications. This, perhaps, is why Hawthorne can in his preface speak with confidence about the problems associated with “an avalanche of ill-gotten gold”—from the rarified perspective of this novel, anything that circulates, even gold bullion, is tainted. This is also the reason that, in a text such as Uncle Tom’s Cabin, we are told that the slave trader Haley carries the papers for his slave transactions in a “greasy pocket-book” (236): this is literally money tainted by contact with the marketplace, and money that, by extension, taints those who make contact with it.

But whether it is the absence of money or actual contact with it, what we see is that economic decline figures the threat of racial decline. Indeed, from the perspective of the Pyncheons—and especially, perhaps, of Hepzibah—only the discovery of treasure (such as the missing map of Waldo County) will now retrieve the family’s lost whiteness. Hence, of course, the irony inherent in the fact that she continues even in her now impoverished state to maintain a “hereditary reverence” (59) for the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon that hangs on the wall of the House of the Seven Gables. For what
we find at novel’s end is that the portrait is quite literally backed by the now-worthless deed of Waldo County. Again, the logic of this novel suggests that whiteness not backed by treasure (which is to say the fantasy of money—of fiscal security—that is located outside actual circulation) is vulnerable to market intrusion and, *inter alia*, to racial tainting.

The unsettling conflation of race and money for the Pyncheons is furthered later in the novel. This comes as Clifford Pyncheon (recently released from prison after serving thirty years for the alleged murder of old Jaffrey Pyncheon) watches from a balcony window of the House of the Seven Gables as a young Italian organ grinder performs on the street in front of the Pyncheon home. Clifford, who is variously described in terms of his “pale” and “yellowing” skin, “lack of vigor,” “filmy eyes,” and his tendency to “burst into a woman’s passion of tears” (112; 113), is in many ways a hyperbolic extension of the enfeebled, degenerated male imagined by reformers such as Catherine Beecher and Horace Greeley. Indeed, the descriptions Hawthorne provides of Clifford’s fragile physical and mental condition also echo warnings by antebellum reformers such as John Todd against the evils of masturbation, the ultimate effect of which was thought to be impotence. Advising against the “habit of reverie” as the pathway to “evils which want a name, to convey any conception of their enormity,” Todd describes states ranging from nervousness to melancholia and poor memory, all of which speak to Clifford’s enfeebled status after his release from jail (*Student’s Manual* 88, 146–47).

But Clifford is also, and perhaps more obviously, a figure for the male who has proved incapable of achieving the much-discussed “go-ahead” attitude of the early 1850s. A term used to connote the energy and drive of the successful businessman, “go-aheadism” captured the capitalist ethos of the paper money man. As Sandage explains, “Supposedly open to any white man who did not ‘lack energy,’ this fraternity hooted and hollered about ‘our go-ahead spirit’ and ‘American go-aheadism.’ Even the staid *Scientific American*, founded in 1846, warned of ‘the fearful blot of a wasted life’ and beat the drum for ‘Yankee go-ahead-attiveness.’ . . . In competitive markets, to lack the ‘go ahead spirit’ (in reality or allegedly) counted as a fatal flaw. In 1851, a credit-rating agency blacklisted a New Yorker, noting ‘R. is not a 1st rate business man, has not enough energy to be a business man’” (*Losers* 84). The language used to depict the go-ahead male is clearly antithetical to that we see in descriptions of Clifford as “lacking in vigor,” or when, terrified at the notion of a confrontation with his aggressively masculine cousin Jaffrey Pyncheon, he cries out to Hepzibah, “[G]o down on your knees to him! Kiss his feet! Entreat him not to come in! Oh, let him have mercy on me! Mercy!—mercy!” (129). At one point in the novel Clifford is
“startled into manhood and intellectual vigor” when he and Hepzibah leave the House of the Seven Gables and, taking a trip on a railroad car, discover an exciting world of technological advance (258). But this new and invigorated manhood quickly fades, and we see that, “with a torpid and reluctant utterance” (266), Clifford asks Hepzibah to lead him home. Again, Clifford is profoundly unsuited for the modern world of capitalist competition, and the forms of manhood that seem necessarily to accompany it. Instead, he is a figure of the aesthete, whose removal from actual market production Hawthorne seems to find absurdly impractical. Indeed, characterized by qualities of aesthetic appreciation “so refined” they seem to provide him a form of “spiritual” disembodiment (108), Clifford represents an old-world aesthetic sensibility Hawthorne clearly seeks to mark as incompatible with the modern world of industrialization and mass culture looming close by outside the House of the Seven Gables.

This contrast is perhaps best exemplified by Clifford’s practice of blowing soap bubbles from the second-story window, miniature creations Hawthorne describes in terms that highlight the fleeting nature of the aesthetic Clifford represents. “Little impalpable worlds were those soap-bubbles,” Hawthorne explains, “with the big world depicted, in hues as bright as imagination, on the nothing of their surface” (171). Composed of an interior logic that the outer world is unable to penetrate without ruining it altogether (in such instances Hawthorne describes the bubble as having “vanished as if it had never been” [171]), the soap bubbles suggest an antimarket aesthetic resistant to reproduction and circulation of the kind taking place in Hepzibah’s cent shop. And it is precisely this fragile aestheticism that is at issue when Clifford views the Italian organ-grinder who circulates in the neighborhoods surrounding the House of the Seven Gables. At first it appears that the boy will provide Clifford a picturesque image of life on the streets, in particular because the boy’s barrel organ contains a number of miniature mechanical figures that perform the very kind of utopia Clifford longs for, a kind of mercantilist Gemeinschaft in which community and labor-value coincide. “In all their variety of occupation—the cobbler, the blacksmith, the soldier, the lady with her fan, the toper with his bottle, the milk-maid sitting by her cow—this fortunate little society might truly be said to enjoy a harmonious existence, and to make life literally a dance” (163). But while the boy’s barrel organ appeals to Clifford’s sensibilities, the other attraction he offers does not. This is the monkey that accompanies him, a creature Hawthorne marks by tellingly anthropomorphic signs of race, gender, and even sexuality. Described as having a “strangely man-like expression” on his face, “perform[ing] a bow and scrape” for passing pedestrians, and “holding out his small black palm” for money (164), the monkey is an only
thinly veiled caricature of a performative but also fairly aggressive black masculinity, one Hawthorne seems to have expected his readers to recognize. While he does not explicitly “jump Jim Crow,” his theatrical “bow and scrape,” coupled with his “man-like expression” and his overtly “black” skin, make it clear that Hawthorne is again tapping into the charged images of the performing black male body so ubiquitous throughout antebellum mass culture, in particular within minstrel shows. The connections between the monkey and the bawdy tropes of minstrelsy are even stronger when one realizes that the monkey is marked by an overdetermined sexuality that his Highland pant suit is literally unable to conceal. Characterized three times in two paragraphs for the “enormous tail” protruding beneath his suit pants (Hawthorne describes it as a “preposterous prolixity . . . too enormous to be decently concealed under his gabardine” [164]), the monkey offers the sort of excessive caricature of black male sexuality that, as Eric Lott and others have shown, was so common within the period’s minstrel performances. The effect of all of this on Clifford is dramatic: having taken a “childish delight” in the Italian boy, he becomes “so shocked” by the “horrible ugliness” of the monkey that he “actually beg[ins] to shed tears” (164).

What is it that Clifford weeps over, exactly? Hawthorne’s narrator tells us that his tears represent “a weakness which men of merely delicate endowments—and destitute of the fiercer, deeper, and more tragic power of laughter—can hardly avoid, when the worst and meanest aspect of life happens to be presented to them” (164–65). My sense is that this “weakness” (and the tears it produces) is being contrasted with the forms of aggressivity associated with the figure of black manhood we see in the Italian boy’s monkey—an aggressivity that is here understood as “the worst and meanest aspect of life.” On the one hand, of course, this has to do with the seeming sexual potency the monkey represents. But Clifford’s unease is also related to the image of the monkey’s “small black palm” held outward in expectation of monetary reward: this is the figure of insistent monetary desire, one made all the more troubling because of its very link to blackness and to black sexuality.7 Late in the novel, the Italian boy and his monkey return to the House of the Seven Gables, only to find that Clifford and Hepzibah have departed (though as it turns out, this is only temporary). But again we see the monkey “bow[] and scrape[] to the bystanders, most obsequiously, with ever an observant eye to pick up a stray cent” (293). Much as with Hepzibah in her cent shop exchange with Ned Higgins, Clifford is confronted in his interaction with the Italian boy’s monkey the hard facts of economic exchange. And—again as with the cent shop scene—this exchange is routed through the stereotyped figure of the performing black male. Apparently, market relations are for Hawthorne negatively associated with race.
Here then we are in the confusing terrain inhabited by the infamous Black Guinea in Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* (1857). A “grotesque negro cripple” aboard the riverboat Fidèle, Black Guinea appeals to potential donors by performing the shocking trick of catching pennies in his mouth (15). “Hailing each expertly-caught copper with a cracked bravura from his tambourine,” we are told, “he grinned, and only once or twice did he wince, which was when certain coins, tossed by more playful almoners, came inconveniently nigh to his teeth” (17). Like the Italian boy’s monkey, Black Guinea is a “grotesque” figure of economic appetency, one who negatively reflects the market world of desire back to his white observers. And indeed, the fact that Black Guinea, like the Italian boy’s monkey, seems to emerge out of the performative aesthetics of blackface minstrelsy only underscores his role in this regard (as one cynical observer comments, “He’s some white operato r, betwisted and painted up for a decoy” [20]). For the link to minstrelsy reminds us that the form of blackness we see in such characters is simply a nervous fantasy, one that assigns and deploys racial stereotypes specifically as a means of assuaging white anxieties. And in this case, these anxieties revolve around the uneasy status of manhood in the go-ahead period of economic development. Sandage suggests that a minstrel songster image such as the 1834 *Zip Coon on the Go-Ahead Principle* (figure 21) reflects the felt “absurdity” (and hence the putative humor) of a professionally ambitious black male (*Losers* 85). But, and especially for one such as Clifford, a black dandy character such as Zip Coon also bespeaks a certain anxiety about the attenuated nature of white manhood, especially in the face of the go-ahead demands of the emerging market economy. Perhaps, the songster seems to be saying, one must lose one’s whiteness in order to succeed in the economic marketplace (hence, perhaps, Zip’s anti-Biddle lyrics).

And in this we might understand such images as doing psychic work quite similar to that performed by the “mulatto exquisites” in *The City Merchant*. For surely such figures of sensational blackness, linked as they are to both sexuality and money, represent the perceived theft of enjoyment that is, we might say, at the root of the psychological and emotional crisis facing the Pyncheon family (and with it, of course, white America itself). Again, then, we see the sensational public sphere staging figures of sensational Otherness—here the black male—as a means of negotiating anxieties over an imperiled form of manhood. Here, though, unlike a narrative such as *The City Merchant*, retrieving stolen enjoyment is far less straightforward than staging a race riot. Indeed, we might ask, is there a compensatory fantasy available to readers of *The House of the Seven Gables*? Clearly, and as I have been suggesting, the novel understands race in relation to money. But in the absence of both secure racial boundaries and reliable sources of economic security, the answer to this question is both uncertain and anxious.
Figure 21 Zip Coon on the Go-Ahead Principle. 1834, sold by Leonard Deming. Sheet music; 1 page; 22.9 x 15.6 cm. Reproduced with permission of the American Antiquarian Society.
Racial Vampirism?

I would suggest that the fate of both whiteness and professional manhood in this novel hinges on the actions of the character Holgrave. For despite his working-class roots (as a Maule), Holgrave is perhaps better understood as a version of the upwardly mobile male of the professional classes. Indeed, Holgrave is in many ways a version of the go-ahead male of the early 1850s. Daguerreotypist, short-story writer, mesmerist, and sometime political activist (Hepzibah has “read a paragraph in a penny paper . . . accusing him of making a speech full of wild, disorganizing matter, at a meeting of his banditti-like associates” [84]), he is both entrepreneurial and, it seems, intensely canny about his role as a male subject under advancing forms of capitalism. We might even think of him as an updated version of the New York Herald's James Gordon Bennett Jr., who as I discuss in chapter 4 was instrumental in carving out the very form of sensationalism that Holgrave manipulates in his role as writer of pulpy gothic fiction. Holgrave, that is to say, occupies the far end of the sensational fraternity of professional men I have been outlining over the course of this study. As such, I want to understand him as a key point of reference in detailing how masculinity was being organized under the paper economy. For again, Hawthorne's novel suggests that the masculine sensibility of the emergent professional classes was intertwined in complicated and often vexed ways with the sensational sensibilities and passions of blackness. And with Holgrave what we see is a character who seems to understand this relationship, and who is, I will argue, willing to manipulate it.

Holgrave thus represents an important addition to the outline of paper money manhood I have been describing. For he seems to understand that, in the confusing and uncertain world of antebellum America, successful manhood requires an incredible amount of dexterity at the levels of both class and race. Indeed, the tropes of racial appropriation that accompany the references to Jim Crow and blackface minstrelsy in the above-described scenes might also help us understand the way in which Holgrave negotiates the various registers of class, race, and manhood that are at stake in this novel. In the world according to Holgrave, that is to say, the smug fiscal and racial certainties of characters such as Edgar Saxon and (as we will see) Jaffrey Pyncheon are simply not realistic. Holgrave wants to “go ahead,” but—like a kind of confidence man—he will do what is necessary in order to get there.

Much of what we learn about Holgrave comes from the sensational-gothic short story that he writes, and which Hawthorne inserts into the pages of his novel in the form of a reading Holgrave gives to Phoebe. As
Holgrave explains upon learning that Phoebe has not read any of the fiction he has published, “Well, such is literary fame! Yes, Miss Phoebe Pyncheon, among the multitude of my marvellous gifts I have that of writing stories; and my name has figured, I can assure you, on the covers of Graham and Godey, making as respectable an appearance, for aught I could see, as any of the canonized bead-roll with which it is associated. In the humorous line, I am thought to have a very pretty way with me; and as for pathos, I am as provocative of tears as an onion” (186). Very much in the manner of a tabloid such as the Herald or a novel such as The Quaker City, Holgrave seeks to use the pulpy discourse of gothic sensationalism in order to stage masculine class conflict within antebellum culture. He is, that is to say, a contributor to the very sensational public sphere that, via Hawthorne, he inhabits as a character. Here, his goal is to provide background to the feud between the Maules, who have been dispossessed of their land, and the Pyncheons, who engineered this displacement by accusing Matthew Maule of witchcraft. We might say that the story provides a rationale for the continued sense of failure that his family—and especially its men—have suffered for some two hundred years. “They were generally poverty-stricken,” we are told early on of the Maules, “always plebian and obscure . . . living here and there about the town, in hired tenements, and coming finally to the alms house, as the natural home of their old age” (25). This is the burden that Holgrave carries with him, and one thus suspects that Holgrave’s fiction acts as a kind of projected space in which to work out the very notions of success and failure that are so central to his culture—but also to his very sense of selfhood—at mid-century.

The story is set some forty years after the execution of the founding Maule, and dramatizes the meeting between Young Matthew Maule, Holgrave’s grandfather many times removed, and Gervayse Pyncheon, Phoebe’s equally distant uncle. Tellingly, however, the story also provides significant commentary about the role of race in sensational constructions of antebellum manhood. In particular I am interested in the encounter Holgrave narrates between Maule and “black Scipio,” whom Holgrave describes as one of the black slaves whose “shining, sable face[s]” can be seen “bustling across” the “cheery” windows of the Pyncheon home (191). The brief exchange between the two men is significant: “What’s that you mutter to yourself, Matthew Maule?” Scipio asks after delivering a message to Maule to come see Gervayse Pyncheon, the owner of the House of the Seven Gables. “And what for do you look so black at me?” But Maule’s response—“No matter, darkey! . . . Do you think nobody is to look black but yourself?”—has a meaning beyond the straightforward notion of looking angrily at someone (188). For Maule is also implying that to “look black” is to bear the
burden of class inferiority and of service in a way that is racially marked, something about which he is reminded by the basic—and to Maule highly insulting—fact that Scipio is even willing to address him in such a manner. Maule, in other words, is claiming a position analogical to racial victimage, one intended to highlight his felt sense of class oppression as he receives a summons to the House of the Seven Gables.

The ensuing visit that Maule makes to the front door of the Pyncheon home might thus be read as a precursor episode to the pivotal crisis scene that William Faulkner stages in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)—the childhood moment when Thomas Sutpen is “barred” from the front door of the plantation Big House by the “monkey dressed nigger butler” who tells him “never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back” (187; 188). As Hortense Spillers suggests in her reading of this scene, Sutpen’s rejection by the Big House slave forces upon him not only the shocking recognition that he “has” “race” but, more disturbingly, that class and race are inextricably linked to his sense of masculinity (“Who Cuts the Border?” 10–14). In Sutpen’s case, this results in a variety of violations, just as it does in the case of Maule, who, after gaining entrance to the Pyncheon home, mesmerizes Alice Pyncheon in an action that looks very much like a rape motivated by his emasculated class status. Pressing a “slow, ponderous, and invisible weight upon the young maiden,” Maule penetrates the spheres of her “unsullied purity,” and places her “in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand-fold, than that which binds its chains around the body” (204; 203; 208). In what follows, Alice is forced by Maule to perform a variety of demeaning acts for him, including waiting on Maule’s bride the night of his wedding. But the most horrific of these acts is perhaps a stereotypically working-class ethnic dance Maule repeatedly commands her to perform. Described as a “high-paced jig, or hop-skip rigadoon, befitting the brisk lasses at a rustic merry-making” (209), the dance links Alice directly to the sullied nineteenth-century bodies of the Irish Ned Higgins and the vagrant Italian boy (the latter of whom is described by Hawthorne’s narrator in terms of his “dark, alien countenance” [294]). Accordingly, the dance suggests powerfully that the highly charged mesmerization by Maule has left her tainted by the racialized markings of class difference. This point is driven home most dramatically in Alice’s untimely and highly sentimental death by consumption. A fate brought on when, en route to Maule’s wedding, her “gossamer white dress” becomes wet as she “trod[s] the muddy sidewalks” of Maule’s working-class neighborhood (209), Alice’s death seems to be the direct result of the racial tainting she has received from the lower classes. Unlike Alice and Edna Saxon in *The City Merchant*, who are saved from their “mulatto
“Success” and Race in _The House of the Seven Gables_

exquisite[ ]” kidnappers at the last moment, Alice is left alone to suffer her fateful violation and death.

And what this suggests is that, at least in the sensationalism produced by Holgrave, whiteness is not available as compensation for readers seeking fantasy redress from the more general climate of economic anxiety and failure. Instead, projecting his antebellum present backward onto his ancestor’s colonial past, Holgrave seems here to be embracing and manipulating the racial anxieties experienced by citizen-subjects such as the Pyncheons. Indeed, what we see in Maule is in many ways a version of Jacksonian-era masculine class politics projected backward into the colonial American past—politics that involve once again the tropes of minstrelsy and racial performance. Specifically, in referring to himself as “black,” Maule is in effect blacking himself up in ways not unlike the white performers blacking themselves up to appear as stock urban black dandy characters such as Zip Coon or Jim Brown. An 1842 minstrel songster titled _Jim Brown_ is instructive in this regard (figure 22). “I play upon de fife,—I play upon de fiddle / I’m opposed to de Bank and don’t like Biddle,” Jim Brown says, an anti-Whig, anti-Bank posture that, offered as it is in a blackface guise, might be understood as very much related to the political sensibilities that Holgrave, via Maule, seeks to express. But as the violence of his story indicates, Holgrave is also interested in suggesting that he poses a very real threat to the Pyncheons. It is as though he is implying that, by putting on (and thus appropriating) blackness, he is accessing the very forms of passion and desire that are so troubling to characters such as Clifford and Hepzibah Pyncheon (to say nothing of Gervayse Pyncheon and his daughter Alice).

Certainly this is what black dandy minstrel characters such as Jim Brown implied. As we have seen with the Italian boy’s monkey and Melville’s Black Guinea, they embodied a relation to pleasure and enjoyment unavailable to the white audience (and perhaps the performer himself), except in the imaged fantasy space of blackface. “De wenches in de city, dey all run arter me / I lite on dar affections like a possum on a flea,” Jim Brown says in the above-cited songster. “Dey can’t suck in dis child, I don’t know how it be / For nothing less dan white gals will eber come to tea.” Here, the excesses of pleasure are sexual rather than fiscal, but the repeated emphasis in such songsters on political economy (“I’m opposed to de Bank and don’t like Biddle”) suggests again that the two spheres of desire—sexual and economic—intersect. Putting on blackface or watching its performance, that is to say, gives the anti-Bank (or at least anti-aristocratic) white male imagined access to the very spheres of pleasure and enjoyment that men such as Edgar Saxon and Clifford Pyncheon have either renounced or repressed. This
Jim Brown. 1842, sold by Leonard Deming. Sheet music; 1 page; 26 x 22 cm. Reproduced with permission of the American Antiquarian Society.
contradiction is something Lott discusses in his analysis of the ambivalent fascination displayed by working-class audiences of blackface performances. “[T]he repellent elements repressed from white consciousness and projected onto black people were far from securely alienated,” he says. “[T]hey are always ‘inside,’ part of ‘us.’ Hence the threat of this projected material, and the occasional pleasure of its threat” (Love 149). Lott’s formulation helps us understand the complicated dynamic we encounter with Holgrave. For here we see a character who understands that he has been racially marked by his history—primarily his family’s history—of economic failure. But he seems nevertheless to represent a version of the go-ahead male of the mid-century period. Indeed, he may even be the new and quite aggressive face of professional manhood.

But what we see, of course, is that Holgrave ends up renouncing the sort of aggression that he stages in his depiction of his ancestor Maule. Seeing that Phoebe has been partially mesmerized by listening to his story, Holgrave resists the urge, so “seductive to a young man,” to take advantage of Phoebe’s vulnerability and “twine that one link more, which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble” (212). Instead, he suggests that he will burn his short story: “the manuscript must serve to light lamps with,” he says (212). More dramatically still, Holgrave and Phoebe become romantically involved, a plot shift that hastens the “development [sic] of emotions” (305) necessary to secure middle-class distance from the outside world of commerce and racial difference. By novel’s end Holgrave has renounced his previous opposition to permanent homes built for posterity (184), and moves with Phoebe to live in the country home of the deceased Judge Pyncheon. The exchange between Phoebe and Holgrave over this contradiction sums up the dramatic shifts that take place in the wake of Holgrave’s reading of his magazine story to Phoebe: “[H]ow wonderfully your ideas are changed!” she says, to which Holgrave (“with a half-melancholy laugh”) replies as follows: “You find me a conservative already! Little did I ever think to become one” (315). Holgrave, it would appear, has settled on a form of manhood not at all unlike the conservative posture we see modeled by Edgar Saxon in The City Merchant. Here too, it would seem, we encounter a “bank romance,” a form wherein Holgrave’s “success” revolves around the repression of his racially tainted working-class blood and its attendant passions, and the “development [sic] of emotions” that are romantic and middle-class in nature.13

But isn’t it possible to understand Holgrave as conducting yet another form of racial performance, one in which he has smuggled himself into the Pyncheon house wearing a kind of whiteface mask? As various critics have pointed out, the novel is obsessed with false countenances: Uncle Venner advises Hepzibah to put on a “bright face” for her cent shop customers (66);
the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon is said to reveal the “indirect character of the man” (58); and Jaffrey is several times described as wearing a false face for the local community, one that hides a darker self below the surface (57; 116–19). Indeed, with regard to Jaffrey, Gilmore suggests that he assumes a kind of whiteface: “[T]he Judge essentially reverses the masking of white performers as minstrels and harlequins,” he says. “By polishing his face into a benign smile, the Judge can pass as ‘white,’ . . . hiding his ‘black and damnable’ interior under a layer of white respectability” (Genuine 134). I would argue that a similar dynamic of racial deception is at work with Holgrave. For again, and especially within the logic of this novel, Holgrave’s link to the working classes suggests that he is himself somewhat less than fully or purely white. Perhaps, indeed, Holgrave actually has mesmerized Phoebe, this as a means of accessing the spheres of middle-class enclosure offered by the Pyncheons. Certainly this would help explain Phoebe’s somewhat dazed admission of love to the inquiring Holgrave. “You look into my heart,” she says. “You know I love you!” (307). If nothing else, Holgrave’s entrance into the Pyncheon family has the odd feel of a performance, of something not quite right. Critics have long pointed out that the marriage effectively ends the feud between the two families, and thus represents a disavowal of the political and imaginative possibilities Hawthorne opened up so suggestively with Holgrave’s character. But, and as Cathy Davidson points out, Hawthorne arrived at this resolution only after considerable difficulty finishing the novel, a problem that seems to have begun after writing the famous scene in which Holgrave takes his postmortem daguerreotype image of the dead judge. Davidson suggests that during this period Hawthorne was facing “his own, direst apprehension about representation,” concerns that extend to the ethical politics not only of artistic reproduction but also of subjectivity itself in the mid-nineteenth century (“Photographs” 691).

I find this reading compelling, but I want to extend this idea, and suggest what this particular scene might also imply about the connections between class and race in the age of commerce and paper money masculinity I have been describing here. For Holgrave’s photographing of the judge’s corpse represents an exchange not at all unlike what occurs when he incapacitates Phoebe by reading his magazine story to her. Here, however, the transaction is much more violent, as, vampirelike, Holgrave utilizes another form of mass culture—the daguerreotype—in order to steal the judge’s image as “a pictorial record” for his own keeping (302). “This is death!” exclaims Phoebe when she sees the image produced by Holgrave’s creepy handiwork. “Judge Pyncheon dead!” (302). But Holgrave’s response makes it clear that Phoebe has experienced a momentary confusion over the represented and the actual. “Such as there represented,” he says to her, referring to the
“Success” and Race in The House of the Seven Gables

daguerreotype. “[H]e sits in the next room” (302). Holgrave is being ironic, but his emphasis on the need to distinguish between the reproduced image of Judge Pyncheon and his actual corpse is telling, for it is a reminder that for many the daguerreotype raised just such questions. Indeed, as Davidson points out, early commentators on the new technology of photography often suggested that the photographer was sometimes suspected of having stolen the actual soul of the subject whose image had been taken.\(^{15}\) I would suggest that Hawthorne participates in this line of thinking, but in ways that involve the fraught status of race and manhood in this novel.

What does Holgrave want with an image of the dead Judge Pyncheon? My suggestion is that at least a portion of his motivation can be detected in the narrator’s description near novel’s end of the dead judge, in which he turns to an unexpected discussion of the actual pigmentation of the judge’s skin as he sits still upright in his chair in the parlor. As he explains, “The gloom has not entered from without. . . . The judge’s face, indeed, rigid, and **singularly white**, refuses to melt into this universal solvent. . . . Has it yet vanished? No!—yes!—not quite! And there is still the **swarthy whiteness**—we shall venture to marry these **ill-agreeing words**—the **swarthy whiteness** of Judge Pyncheon’s face. The features are all gone. There is only the **pallor** of them left. And how looks it now? There is no window! There is no face! An infinite, inscrutable **blackness** has annihilated sight! Where is our universe? All crumbled away from us” (276; emphasis added). At once playfully overstated and remarkably serious, the passage is perhaps Hawthorne’s most profound effort to address the issue of race in the novel. For what he provides here is a last, lingering moment in the history of the “Anglo-Saxon” aristocracy the Pyncheons represent. Moving from “**singularly white**” to an “ill-agreeing” state of “**swarthy whiteness**” to a featureless “paleness” and then (finally) to “**blackness**,” Judge Pyncheon’s face seems here to be the face of elite white American culture “itself.” Increasingly diluted by differences of class and race, that face appears here to reflect a failed last moment in the maintenance of upper-class whiteness.

Holgrave’s photographic “**vamping**” of the judge might thus be read as a rather radical act of appropriation, one that involves both class and race. For, while seizing the judge’s “**soul**,” Holgrave should also be thought of as appropriating that which is most dear to those of the judge’s class—the conception of white racial purity. It might be said, in other words, that captured on the magically depthless surface of Holgrave’s daguerreotype plate is the image of the Pyncheons’ lost whiteness “**itself**,” merged rather dramatically now with yet another document of the sensational public sphere. And I would suggest by extension that Holgrave (who is, after all, replacing the deceased judge as the head male of the Pyncheon family) is himself now wearing
this whiteness—a racial determinate that is, again, a kind of mask. Working in tandem with the “conservative” posture he assumes before Phoebe, this mask allows Holgrave access to the more rarified world of whiteness occupied by the likes of The City Merchant's Edgar Saxon, even as he seems to have retained contact with the sullied world of capitalist desire and racial difference. Holgrave, it seems, is able to have his enjoyment, and disavow it at the same time.

Hawthorne’s imagined resolution thus has its nightmarish underbelly. For like a true vampire, Holgrave, once invited across the threshold of his victim’s habitation, will never leave. Instead, the House of the Seven Gables (as well as, perhaps, the novel of the same name) will continue to be haunted by the differences of race and class that it has sought, generation after generation, to repress and displace—Hawthorne’s imagined version of an Africanist presence notwithstanding. “Pretty good business!” observes the local laborer, Dixie, as Holgrave and company ride off to their new home. “Pretty good business!” (319). Dixie is correct. For Holgrave—who seems to have known all along that there was no “treasure” of any value to be found within the Pyncheon home—understands that success for the paper money man at mid-century necessitates the following combination: a “conservative” posture of middle-class affect (the “development of emotions” Hawthorne describes), as well as continued access to the passions and appetencies of capitalism itself. Here these passions are displaced onto figures of blackness, but they remain central to the organization of middle-class desire and selfhood nevertheless. No wonder there is such tension between Holgrave’s story and Hawthorne’s novel. Like a repressed form of cultural knowledge forcing its way to conscious enunciation, Holgrave’s story makes its uncanny appearance within The House of the Seven Gables in order to tell Hawthorne what he seems not to want to know: that compensatory fictions are tenuous creations requiring consistent forms of ideological maintenance, lest they give way to the scandalous reality of paper money manhood in antebellum America.