Adams, John Quincy, 54
Adams, Samuel, 104
African Americans, 38, 96–97, 116, 156–82, 202n9. See also sensationalism
Agnew, Jean-Christophe, 150
Alcott, William, 29; A Young Man’s Guide, 196n7
Alger, Horatio: Paul the Peddler, 118
The American, 51
Anti-Bullionist: An Enquiry into the Causes of the Present Commercial Embarrassments in the United States, 204
anti-Semitism, 2, 18, 36, 70–101, 191n1, 193n7. See also Jews
Arthur, Timothy Shay, 29, 154; Advice to young men on their duties and conduct in life, 106; Debtor and Creditor: A Tale of the Times, 105
Augst, Thomas, 29, 187n2
An Authentic Biography of the late Helen Jewett, a Girl of the Town who was murdered on the 10th of April, 1836 (anon), 197n6

Baker, Jennifer, 9, 43, 187n5
Baltimore Weekly Register, 51

bank romance, 38, 164, 179. See also sensationalism
Banks, Jenifer, 191n7
Barnum, P. T., 26
Bederman, Gail, 187n2
Beecher, Catherine, 169; Letters to the People on Health and Happiness, 201n5
Beecher, Henry Ward, 29, 154; Lectures to Young Men, on Various Important Subjects, 106
Bemis, George: Report of the Case of John White Webster, 196n1
Benjamin, Walter, 39
Bennett, James Gordon, 38, 123–48, 153, 155, 174, 197n2, 198n12, 198n14, 199n16, 199n17, 199n19, 199n21, 199n24, 199n25; The Thomas Street Tragedy. Murder of Ellen Jewett. Trial of Robinson!, 126, 197n6, 199n24. See also New York Herald
Benton, Thomas Hart, 7
Beowulf, 8
Berlant, Lauren, 22, 189n19
Bertolini, Vincent, 201n6
Bettelheim, Bruno, 188n13
INDEX

Biddle, Nicholas, 12, 15, 70, 106, 116, 131, 132, 160, 177, 191n1. See also United States Bank

Bird, Robert Montgomery: Sheppard Lee: Written by Himself, 7

Bisbee, R.: Troubled Treasures, 16

blackface minstrelsy, 25, 26, 94, 171–74, 177–78, 202n11, 202–3n12

Blessington, Lady: Flowers of Loveliness, 141–42

Bloch, Ernst, 39

Blumin, Stuart, 187n2

Boston Evening Transcript, 103

Boucicault, Dion: The Poor of New York, 6, 116

Brantlinger, Patrick, 59

Breevort, Henry, 41, 60. See also Washington Irving

Brodhead, Richard, 200n26

Bronfen, Elisabeth, 197n4, 200n28

Brook Farm, 148. See also George Ripley

Brougham, John: Much ado about a merchant of Venice. From the original text—a long way, 72

Brown, Charles Brockden: 43, 45; Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793: first and second parts, 21, 57, 115, 121

Brown, Gillian, 152, 167, 184, 200n26, 200nn28–29, 201n7

Brutus: “Hints from the Observer,” 50

Bucholzer, H.: Cleansing the Augean Stable, 30, 32

Buntline, Ned, 26, 36, 72, 83; Agnes; or, the beautiful milliner, 83, 194n14; Miriam; or, the Jew’s daughter. A tale of city life, 194n14; Morgan; or the knight of the black flag. A strange story of by-gone times, 194n12; Rose Seymour; or, the Ballet Girl’s Revenge. A Tale of New York Drama, 194n14

Burke, Edmund: Reflections on the Revolution in France, 190n5

Burney, Fanny: Camilla, 107

Burroughs, Stephen, 115

Burton, Tim: Edward Scissorhands, 46, 66–69

Byron, Lord George Gordon: Don Juan, 141

C[—], Caroline: Myrrah of Tangiers, 193n10

Captain Kidd, 1, 7, 8, 10, 20, 47, 165

Carnes, Mark, 187n2

Carson, Oliver, 198n9

Castronovo, Russ, 155, 200n30

Chapman, Mary, 110

Charles, W.: The Ghost of a Dollar, or the Bankers [sic] Surprize, 43–45

Chicester, John, 138, 199n19

Citizen of Pennsylvania: An Examination of the Causes and Effects, of the Present State of the Circulating Medium, and of the Remedy for its Depreciation, 49, 55

City of New-York. Mordecai M. Noah (anon), 191n1

Clay, Edward: The Downfall of Mother Bank, 72, 191n1; New Edition of Macbeth. Bank-Ohs! Ghost, 108–10; Practical Amalgamation, 162–63, 201n3

Cobbett, William, 13

Cockrell, Dale, 189n20

Cohen, Patricia Cline, 125, 187n2, 197n1, 197n6

“Colloquy between a Bank Note and a Gold Coin” (anon), 13
Colt, John, 104, 119, 185; *Trial of John C. Colt for the murder of Samuel Adams*, 104; *Life, Letters, and Last Conversation of John Caldwell Colt*, 196n3

*The Columbian Centinal*, 51


Cott, Nancy, 199n25

*Courier and Enquirer*, 128–33, 139, 140, 197n5, 198n12. See also James Watson Webb

Crouthamel, James L., 131, 198nn9–14


Cvetkovich, Ann, 111, 189n24

“*The Dandy and the Soap Fat Man*” (anon), 23, 24

“The Daughter of Israel” (anon), 89

Davidson, Cathy, 180, 181, 203n14

Davies, Benjamin, 12

Day, Benjamin, 198n10. See also *New York Sun*

Dayan, Joan, 195n20
debt. See manhood; money

Defoe, Daniel: *Lady Credit*, 60–61;
  *Review*, 60–61

Denning, Michael, 23, 25, 28, 39, 196n12

Dickens, Charles: *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 153

Ditz, Toby, 4, 62, 65, 187n2

Douglass, Frederick: *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 157, 161


*The Dying Jewess* (anon), 82

Edwards, Ogden, 139, 140, 199n21

Ellison, James: *American Captive; or, the Siege of Tripoli. A Drama in Five Acts*, 73

Ellison, Julie, 110

Elmer, Jonathan, 189n24

*The Emerald, or, Miscellany of Literature*, 193n6

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 105, 107

*Evening Star*, 133. See also Peter Townsend

Fabian, Ann, 187n4

fantasy: of compensation for capitalist alienation, 3, 5, 6, 7, 27, 28, 34, 36, 37, 39, 40, 46, 60, 65, 82, 85, 86, 100, 121, 153, 164, 165, 177, 186; of economic origins, 1, 2, 40; and Jews, 36, 81–101; and race, 25, 39, 156, 157, 164, 166, 169, 172, 177; and mass culture, 27, 28, 39; and nostalgia for pre-capitalist period, 1, 2, 20, 46, 99, 186; and treasure, 7, 18, 20, 21, 36, 40, 43, 165, 169; and women, 129, 143, 148–55, 153; and working-class readers, 25, 28, 39. See also sensationalism

Faulkner, William: *Absalom, Absalom!*, 176

Fay, Theodore Sedgwick: *Sidney Clifton*, 90

Fichtelberg, Joseph, 107, 196n4

Fisk, Theophilous, 113; *The Banking Bubble Burst, or the Mammoth Corruptions of the Paper Money System Relieved by Bleeding*, 13; Labor, *the Only True Source of Wealth; or the Rottenness of the Paper Money Banking System Exposed, Its Sandy Foundations Shaken, its Crumbling Pillars Overthrown*, 13

Foster, Hannah Webster: *The Coquette*, 57, 121, 127

Foster, Stephen, 202n9

Franklin, Benjamin, 43, 188n9

Fraser, Nancy, 22, 189n19
Freedman, Jonathan, 193n7, 193n9
Freud, Sigmund: castration anxiety, 153; filthy lucre, 30, 168; the primal scene, 1–2, 5–6, 29, 39–40

Gaspey, Thomas: Calthorpe; or, Fallen Fortunes, 53
Gilfoyle, Timothy, 138, 187n2, 189n20, 197n1, 199n18, 199n23
Gilmore, Paul, 25–26, 180, 197n14, 202n10, 203n13
Girard, Stephen, 43–45
Gleason, Ebenezer, 115
Goddu, Teresa, 45, 191n8, 200n26
Godey's Lady's Book, 105

Gore, Catherine: Abednego, the Money-Lender. A Romance, 89
gothic. See sensationalism
Gouge, William, 11–12, 13
Greeley, Horace, 169; An Address Before the Literary Societies of Hamilton College, 201n5

Habermas, Jurgen, 22, 189n21
Halttunen, Karen, 187n2, 196n1
Hamilton, Alexander, 12
Harap, Louis, 72, 191–92nn2–3, 195n19
Hawthorne, Nathaniel: anti-Semitism, 93–94; and sensationalism, 26, 127, 156–82; The American Notebooks, 201n4, 202n9; The Blithedale Romance, 38, 129, 148–55; English Notesbooks, 93–94, 96; The House of the Seven Gables, 38, 113, 120, 125; 156–82, 186, 201n4, 201n6, 201–2nn7–9, 202–3n12; The Marble Faun, 191n3
Henderson, Andrea, 45
Hendler, Glenn, 23, 110, 189n21, 196n8
Herbert, Christopher, 30
Hoffy, Alfred: The Innocent Boy, 145, 146; Ellen Jewett, 145, 147
Holcroft, Thomas: The Road to Ruin, 52

Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 203n15
Hone, Philip, 130, 139
Horlick, Allan Stanley, 187n2
Horowitz, Helen, 189n20
Houston, Gail Turley, 187n4
Hyer, Thomas, 138

The Illuminator, 125
Imbert, Anthony: The Doctors Puzzled, or the Desperate Case of Mother U.S. Bank, 13–15
The Independent American, 51–52, 58, 65
Ingraham, J. H. (Joseph Holt), 199n23; The Clipper Yacht; or, Moloch the Money Lender [alternate title: Moloch the Money Lender; or, the Beautiful Jewess], 84; Frank Rivers; or, the Dangers of the Town, 199n23

Jack and the Beanstalk (as generic title): 8, 15, 21, 27, 28, 34, 39, 46, 76, 188n11. Variants: The history of Mother Twaddle, and the marvelous achievements [sic] of her son Jack (H. A. C.), 18, 77, 188n11; Jack and the Bean Stalk (Momberger), 18, 19, 188n15; Jack and the Bean Stalk (anon), 20, 188n16; Jack the Giant Killer (anon), 15; The Sur-
prising History of Jack and the Bean Stalk (anon), 15, 18, 34, 188n12
Jackson, Andrew: anti-Bank fiscal policies, 8, 12–15, 30, 31, 33, 38, 70–72, 101, 131, 143, 150–51, 154, 160, 161; Farewell Address, 13
Jackson, Frederick: The Victim of Chancery: or a Debtor's Experience, 105; A Week in Wall Street. By One Who Knows, 196n5
Jameson, Fredric, 9–10, 20, 26, 27–28, 165
Jefferson, Thomas, 12, 41, 42, 58
“The Jewess of Constantina” (anon), 83
Jewett, Helen, 26, 38, 123–48, 152, 153, 155, 189n23, 197n1, 199n16, 199n23
Jews: and African Americans, 93–100, 195n20; in American revisions of The Merchant of Venice, 70–101; and the “conversion romance,” 85–101; in fairy tales, 18, 20–21, 30, 76–78; and the “Jessica Complex,” 81–101; in political cartoons, 71, 80, 191n1; as scapegoat for market capitalism, 2, 5, 18, 20–21, 28–30, 33–34, 36, 37, 53, 70–101, 157, 160–61, 164, 191n1, 193n5, 193n7–8, 194n12, 194n14, 195n18; in sensationalism, 28–29, 30, 36; 70–101, 106, 111, 115, 144, 156, 157, 160–61, 164, 194n12, 194n13, 194n14, 195n20, 200n2; and the “theft of enjoyment,” 33, 34, 36, 70–101. See also anti-Semitism
Jim Brown (anon), 177–78
Johnson, Claudia, 190n5
Jones, J. B.: Border War. A Tale of Disunion, 74; The City Merchant; or, the Mysterious Failure, 38, 106, 159–64, 166, 168, 176, 182, 191n4, 200n2, 202n8; Life and Adventures of a Country Merchant, 192n4; The Western Merchant, 192n4
Journal of Commerce, 131
Kasson, Joy, 200n25
Keetley, Dawn, 199n23
Kellog, Edward: Remarks upon usury and its Effects, 192n5
Kerber, Linda, 42, 55
Kimmel, Michael, 187n2
The Knickerbocker, 135, 141
Ladies Home Companion, 79, 141
Ladies National Magazine, 89
Lee, Mary E.: “Aaron's Rod; or the Young Jewess,” 87–89, 98
Leggett, William, 133, 198n14. See also New York Evening Post
Lemire, Elise, 201n3
Leverenz, David, 4, 5, 28
Levine, Lawrence, 72, 191n2
The Libertine, 189n20
The Life of Ellen Jewett (anon), 197n6
Lippard, George, 26, 72, 127, 135; The Quaker City, 2, 13, 38, 73–74, 112–22, 150, 175, 196n11
London Times, 196n2
Looby, Christopher, 187n6, 189n24
Lott, Eric, 25, 171, 179, 189–90n25, 201–2n8, 202n11
Madison, James, 12
Maitland, James A.: The Lawyer’s Story; or, the Orphans Wrongs, 74
Manchester Messenger, 103
manhood: and anality, 118–19; and anxiety, 4–6, 25, 38, 42, 47, 61–65, 73, 106, 117, 129, 142–48, 155, 156, 165, 172, 196n13; black masculinity, 38, 156–82, 202n9; and castration anxiety, 18, 20, 46, 52, 53, 61–69, 81, 82, 88, 128, 145, 149, 153–54, 191n10, 194n11; compen-
satory forms of manhood, 27, 28, 34, 36–38, 48, 56, 107, 108, 121, 128, 144, 148; and debt, 41–48, 72–73, 79, 82, 90, 91, 99, 102–22, 157–59, 191n10, 194–95n17, 196n4; and degeneration, 169; and emotion, 38, 102–22, 182, 185; and Federalism, 55–58, 190nn5–6; and financial failure, 4, 7–8, 10–11, 18, 26, 27, 39, 40, 62, 102–21, 156–82; go-ahead manhood, 165–82; and the gothic, 23, 38, 45–48, 61–69, 102–22, 135; and homosocial rivalry, 62–65, 121; and humiliation, 4, 23, 28, 38, 41–48, 53, 62–65, 106, 108, 110, 112–22, 129–34, 148, 191n10; and masturbation, 169, 201n6; and panic, 64, 65, 102–22, 144, 145, 155, 185; literary manhood, 9, 26, 45; middle-class manhood, 6, 45, 103, 106–22, 135, 162, 179, 182; and misogyny, 53; 113–14; 129; 141–55; 176–77; professional or white-collar manhood, 5, 6, 21–23, 26, 27, 29–30, 37, 104, 108, 112–22, 124, 136–40; 155, 159–64, 74, 179, 184–86; and property, 8, 20, 42, 45, 55–58, 62–65, 140, 197n15; and rape, 63, 113–14, 118–19, 162, 164, 176, 191n10, 194n12; and sentimental-ity, 23, 38, 111, 114, 117–20; and submission, 62, 102–21, 129, 134; and success, 10, 20, 26, 40, 164–82; and the theft of enjoyment, 34–35, 36, 38, 61, 63, 69, 70–101, 128, 164, 184, 193n7; and victimage, 103–4, 134; and whiteness, 39, 156–82; working-class manhood, 6, 23–25, 28, 36, 39, 64, 113, 125, 161, 165, 167, 174, 179, 180, 201n4; and whiteness, 39, 156–82

Marshall, Thomas F., 198n13

Marx, Karl: Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, v, 10, 75; On the Jewish Question, 77, 79

mass culture, 25, 27–28, 92, 104, 166, 170, 171, 180, 200n27, 202n9. See also sensationalism

Mather, Cotton, 43; The Life of Phips, 8–9

McCarthy, Cormac: No Country for Old Men, 21

Melville, Herman: “Bartleby the Scrivener,” 5, 29, 37, 45, 106, 183–86; The Confidence Man, 30, 46, 172; Moby-Dick, 27

Merish, Lori, 154, 197n15, 200n26

Michaels, Walter Benn, 197n14

Mihm, Steven, 3, 104–5, 115, 150, 187n1, 188n10, 197nn16–17

Millner, Michael, 111

“Mina Lowe. The Pretty Jewess” (anon), 84

Molin, Peter, 196n6

money: “American money,” 1, 8, 27; bank notes, 11–13, 49, 51, 132; as capital, 3, 8–10; “Christian money,” 92; counterfeit money, 12, 115–16; and excrement, 30–33; gold, gold bullion, specie, or hard money, 1–21, 27, 29, 30, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 41, 42, 45, 47–49, 51–54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 65, 68, 70–76, 81, 83, 88, 91–92, 94–95, 98–101, 105, 108, 115, 120–22, 132, 143, 149, 150, 152, 159–60, 164–65, 168, 183, 184, 188n9, 190n2, 191n10, 193n8, 194n12, 200n2; hoarded, 20, 30–33, 74–76, 91, 115–16; 201n7; and Jews, 2, 5, 18, 20–21, 28–30, 33–34, 36, 37, 53, 70–101, 157, 160–61, 164, 191n1, 193n5, 193nn7–8, 194n12, 194n14, 195n18; laundered money, 88; “mint drop” coins, 30, 32–33; “money as money,” 10; old money, 8; orientalized money, 87; paper money, 3, 5, 6, 11–13, 15, 21, 23, 27, 28, 33, 37, 38, 41–45, 47, 48–54, 68, 72, 81, 106, 115, 117, 122, 123, 127, 128, 143, 164, 166, 183, 190n2; and racial difference, 156–82; as
treasure (pre-capital), 2–25; 27, 28, 29, 33, 34–36, 39, 40, 48, 76, 99, 169, 182, 183; “shinplaster” bank notes, 15, 17, 150, 151; usury, 74–75, 192–93n5; “working-class money,” 168; worship of, 30
Moon, Michael, 118
Moretti, Franco, 188n7
Morrison, Toni, 166
Mott, Lucretia, 161
Murray, Judith Sargent, 43

Nelson, Dana, 5, 113, 187n2, 187n3, 196n13, 197n14
Nelson, Michael, 190n1
New York Daily Transcript, 130, 136, 137, 198n10
New York Enquirer, 72. See also Mordecai Noah
New York Evening Post, 133. See also William Leggett
New York Herald, 21, 26, 38, 103, 123–48, 174, 175, 197n7, 198n11, 198n14, 199nn16–17, 199n19. See also James Gordon Bennett
New York Mirror, 135, 141
New York National Advocate, 51
New York Sporting Whip, 189n20
New York Sun, 26, 103, 130, 136, 137, 139, 142, 197n7, 198n10, 198n11
New York Tribune, 103
Newfield, Christopher, 187nn2–3, 196n9
Niles Weekly Register, 41, 43, 50, 51, 52, 54, 57
Noah, Mordecai, 72, 191n1
The Northern Whig, 51

O’Malley, Michael, 156–57

Paine, Thomas, 43, 45
Palmer, Edward: Usury, the Giant Sin of the Age, 192n5
panic (economic), 5, 6, 8, 64, 162, 185.
See also Panic of 1819; Panic of 1837; Panic of 1857
Panic of 1819, 5, 7, 11, 12, 38, 42, 48–54, 58, 76, 159
Panic of 1837, 5, 15, 76, 104, 105, 106, 107, 115, 116, 127, 148, 156, 159, 196n4
Panic of 1857, 5, 46, 76, 106
Parkes, Lyman, 115
Parkman, George, 102, 107
Peacock, Thomas Love: Paper Money Lyrics, v, 3, 132
Pennsylvanian, 129
penny press newspapers, 21, 26, 38, 123–48. See also sensationalism
Penuel, Suzanne, 194n11
Philadelphia Aurora, 50, 52
Philadelphia Democratic Press, 51
Plummer, Laura, 190n1
Poore, Benjamin Perley: The Mameluke, 89
Pocock, J. G. A., 42, 57
racial amalgamation, 161–64
Radcliffe, Ann, 45
Raine, William: The History of old Mother Goose, and the golden egg, 20–21, 76, 78
Reed, Naomi, 184
Remini, Robert, 187n4
Restell, Madame, 130
Rezneck, Samuel, 190n4
Reynolds, David, 188n18, 189nn23–24, 196n11
Richmond Enquirer, 51
Ripley, George, 148
Robinson, H. R., Fifty Cents. Shin Plaster, 150, 151
Robinson, Peter: *Trial, Confession, and Execution of Peter Robinson for the Murder of Abraham Suydam*, 196n6

Robinson, Richard P., 38, 123–48, 197n6, 197n8, 199n17, 199n19

Roediger, David, 25, 157, 189n22

Rogin, Michael, 94

Rotundo, E. Anthony, 187n2

Rousseau, Peter L., 187n4

Rubin-Dorsky, Jeffrey, 60


Ryan, Mary, 22, 187n2, 189n19

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen, 105

Sandage, Scott, 3, 4, 10–11, 39, 157, 169, 172, 187n1, 200n1

Sanderson, Joseph: *The History of the Little Frenchman and his Bank Notes*. “Rags, Rags, Rags,” 49–50

Sarony, Napoleon: *Treasury Note*, 31

Saxton, Alexander, 25, 189n22, 197n8, 198n9, 202n11

Schiller, Dan, 198n9

Schlesinger, Arthur M., 188n10

Schudson, Michael, 22, 189n19

*Scientific American*, 169

Scott, Sir Walter, 141

Sedgwick, Catherine: “Wilton Harvey,” 105; *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*, 196n7

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 118

Sellers, Charles, 3–4, 49, 187n1, 187n4, 188n10, 190n3, 196n10

sensational public sphere, 21–40, 45, 48, 65, 104, 127, 145, 156, 157, 166, 172, 175, 181, 183, 186, 189n21, 189nn23–24

sensationalism: and African Americans, 38–39, 96–97, 156–82; and the bank romance, 38, 164, 179; and the conversion romance,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spielberg, Steven: <em>Jaws</em>, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spillers, Hortense, 176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stansell, Christine, 187n2, 197n3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevens, John D., 197n1, 198n9, 199n22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoker, Bram: <em>Dracula</em>, 8, 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streeby, Shelley, 25, 36, 114, 189n24, 196n12, 197n14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevenson, Robert Louis: <em>Treasure Island</em>, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure of feeling, 108, 111, 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sunday Flash</em>, 189n20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan, James: <em>An Address to the President, Senate, and House of Representatives, of the United States, on the Means of Creating a National Paper by Loan Offices</em>, 190n2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swift, Jonathan: <em>Gulliver's Travels</em>, 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Vermilye: <em>The Banker; or, Things as they have been!</em> A Farce, in Three Acts, 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennenhouse, Leonard, 191n9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theft of enjoyment, 5, 33–34, 36, 38, 46, 47, 54, 61, 63, 68, 69, 76, 81, 82, 83, 85, 87, 88, 91, 100, 128, 144, 164, 172, 184, 190n25, 193nn7–8, 194n14. See also Slavoj Žižek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson, George, 26, 72, 127, 189n24; <em>Venus in Boston: A Romance of City Life</em>, 29–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson, James, 107, 187n8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd, John, 201n6; “The Jew,” 193n10; <em>The Student's Manual</em>, 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townsend, Peter, 133, 198n14. See also <em>Evening Star</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townsend, Rosina, 136, 137, 139, 140, 199n16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traister, Bryce, 191n7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treasure. See money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Trial of Richard P. Robinson</em>, 197n5, 197n6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States Bank, 2, 3, 12–15, 45, 50, 106, 115, 116, 127, 130–34, 148, 160, 177. See also Nicholas Biddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urban gothic. See sensationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usury. See money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Buren, Martin, 8, 15, 30, 33, 109–10, 131, 160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street novels. See sensationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warner, Michael, 55–56, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, George, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson, Harry L., 187n4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webb, James Watson, 128, 130–34, 137, 138, 139, 198nn12–13. See also <em>Courier and Enquirer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster, John White: <em>The Extraordinary Confession of Dr. John White</em>, 102–4, 107, 108, 113, 119, 135, 196n1, 196n2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Weekly Rake</em>, 23–24, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weyler, Karen, 191n8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Wheel of Life” (anon), 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Whip, and Satirist</em>, 189n20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>White Slavery!! Or Selling White Men for Debt!</em> (anon), 157–59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whiteness. See manhood; sensationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiting, William: <em>The Age of Paper; or, the Bank Contest</em>, 116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitley, F. J.: <em>Capital Fashions for 1837</em>, 15, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitman, Walt: <em>Franklin Evans</em>, 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilentz, Sean, 23, 187n4, 199nn20–21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkes, George: <em>The Lives of Richard P Robinson and Helen Jewett</em>, 197n8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Raymond, 196n8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winthrop, Theodore: <em>Cecil Dreeme</em>, 94, 111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Wise, Daniel: *The Young Man's Counselor, or, Sketches and Illustrations of*
the Duties and Dangers of Young Men, 29
Wood, Sarah: Dorval; or the Speculator, 57, 115, 121, 191n8, 191n10
Working Man’s Advocate, 138

Zip Coon on the Go-Ahead Principle (anon), 172, 173
Zimmerman, David, 187n4
Žižek, Slavoj, 33–34, 46, 47, 76–77, 81, 185, 190n25, 193n8
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Paper Money Men: Commerce, Manhood, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum America by David Anthony outlines the emergence of a "sensational public sphere" in antebellum America. It argues that this new representational space reflected and helped shape the intricate relationship between commerce and masculine sensibility in a period of dramatic economic upheaval. Looking at a variety of sensational media—from penny press newspapers and pulpy dime novels to the work of well-known writers such as Irving, Hawthorne, and Melville—this book counters the common critical notion that the period’s sensationalism addressed a primarily working-class audience. Instead, Paper Money Men shows how a wide variety of sensational media was in fact aimed principally at an emergent class of young professional men. “Paper money men” were caught in the transition from an older and more stable mercantilist economy to a panic-prone economic system centered on credit and speculation. And, Anthony argues, they found themselves reflected in the sensational public sphere, a fantasy space in which new models of professional manhood were repeatedly staged and negotiated. Compensatory in nature, these alternative models of manhood rejected fiscal security and property as markers of a stable selfhood, looking instead toward intangible factors such as emotion and race in an effort to forge a secure sense of manhood in an age of intense uncertainty.

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