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Afterword

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Martin R. Delany's only novel, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, was partly serialized in 1859 and then fully serialized in 1861–62, on both occasions in African American periodicals. The novel itself was not published in book form until 1970; a more reliable edition was published almost fifty years later.[1] The novel's critical reputation continues to grow—from neglected (because people did not know it existed) to canonical. Blake is now regarded as an essential nineteenth-century African American novel.

The fine essays in this cluster give an excellent sense of the novel's distinct strengths and challenges. As several of the contributors observe, *Blake* is a transnational novel variously set in the American South, Canada, Cuba, and a slave ship moving back and forth between Africa and Cuba. *Blake* is unique to the nineteenth-century United States in its depiction of a wide range of Black locales. As the settings suggest, the novel is a work about the Black diaspora, linking Blacks of the Americas and Africa. Diaspora as a theme is central to the essays in this cluster.

For good reason, Philip A. Brown reads the novel through a postcolonial lens and shows how Delany "demonstrates a sensitivity to the global currents of colonialism." Caleb Doan, too, admires the way *Blake*, as a work about the Black diaspora, examines the connections among different peoples of color in a world of colonialism. Nathanial Hawlish uses his own interest in postcolonial theory to engage connections between race and environmental studies. R. J. Boutelle's emphasis on "diaspora literacy" leads him to address Whites' "racist fearmongering" about Cuba becoming a second Haiti. During the mid-1850s, as Delany was completing his novel, Whites' fears of Black revolutionism in Cuba stimulated desires for annexation. Delany, on the other hand, regarded Cuba as central to his "theory of diaspora," as Boutelle puts it, and his hopes for a Black nationality in the Americas.

Four of the five essays take historicist approaches in which context is crucial. Tim Bruno moves in a different direction, arguing that the novel breaks through the constraints of time to speak to the summer of 2020 and what he calls the George Floyd Rebellion. *Blake*, Bruno says, "captures the concrete reality and lived experience of revolutionary time." Central to Black revolutionary time, he argues, is a "revolutionary tempo" that he calls deferral. As Bruno and the other contributors point out, deferral is central to a novel that charts a Black revolutionary conspiracy that never quite takes place (but seems on the verge of happening). The novel defers a Black uprising in the United States (Blake asks Blacks on the plantations he visits to wait for the word that will set off the revolution), and just as a Black revolution seems on the verge of happening in Cuba, the novel ends. But is this deferral? The evidence suggests that there are two remaining chapters, but the periodical issues with those chapters are missing. One cannot help wondering if Delany decided to describe a violent Black revolution in one or both of those chapters.

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[1] Floyd J. Miller brought out the first book edition, with Beacon Press, in 1970; Jerome McCann's Harvard University Press edition was published in 2017. Racist students and professors forced Delany out of Harvard's Medical School in 1850; Delany (could he return from the grave) would no doubt be astonished (and deeply gratified) that his novel was published by Harvard.

All of these essays emphasize Black themes and concerns in the novel as Delany articulated them for Black readers (those who would have come across the serializations in Black periodicals). But I wonder if Delany was so exclusively interested in reaching Black readers, which is to say that I think we could use more consideration of how Delany might have been thinking about possible White readers. Delany probably wrote the novel not too long after reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and in 1859, as he was working on a Black emigrationist plan in Africa, he hoped to fund his project by selling the novel to a commercial trade publisher in Boston or New York. Maybe he could make the kind of money that Harriet Beecher Stowe made with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He wrote to William Lloyd Garrison on 19 February 1859, urging him to look at the chapters he was serializing in the *Anglo-African Magazine* and asking if he could line up book publication with "a good publishing house."[2] The fact that Delany imagined publishing the novel as a book for White and Black readers alike begs the question of how he conceived of what we could call the novel's implied White reader. How did Delany imagine such a reader would respond to the novel's Black diasporic theme? As a form of education? Perhaps he was using the novel to build an interracial commitment to the work of establishing Black equality in the United States and beyond.

In a similar interracial vein, we could use more work on the influence of Stowe on *Blake*. As is well known, Frederick Douglass loved *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and championed it in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Delany challenged Douglass in the pages of Douglass's own paper, asking how he could support a White writer who didn't care about Black people, who plagiarized Black writers, and who championed Liberian colonizationism. Douglass defended Stowe and raised questions about Delany's emigrationism, asserting that it was not all that different from colonizationism. At that point (I speculate) Delany began writing *Blake*, which is to say that *Blake* had its origins, at least in part, in Douglass. But as Delany worked on the novel, something happened with his thinking about Stowe. He read her poem "Caste and Christ" in Douglass's 1853 fundraising annual *Autographs for Freedom* and respected her for depicting Christ not as an Uncle Tom but as a militant who was prepared to "fight for freedom!/ . . . in the battle's van."[3] He respected her even more when she wrote a second antislavery novel, *Dred* (1856), that had a Black militant at its center. Delany provides two epigraphs in *Blake* and both are from "Caste and Christ." Critics tend to argue that *Blake* revised and undercut *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but I see propinquity as well. We could use more nuanced accounts of *Blake* in relation to White abolitionist writing of the period.

Blake will continue to engage readers interested in nineteenth-century U.S. literature, Black literature, transnationalism, and diasporic studies. The provocative essays in this cluster offer fresh approaches to Delany's fascinating novel, and suggest directions where we might take our future work as well.

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[2] Delany to William Lloyd Garrison, letter of 19 February 1859, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library / Rare Books Department.

[3] Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Caste and Christ," *Autographs for Freedom*, ed. Julia Griffiths (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853), 6. For Douglass's and Delany's letter exchanges on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in spring 1853, see *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 224–237.