

“A Green Oasis in the History of My Life”:

Race and the Culture of Debating in Antebellum Charleston, South Carolina

by

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Introduction

The year 1850 was one of sweeping change and great turmoil. Congress debated the Compromise of 1850, which would result in a series of measures that included the Fugitive Slave Act, a law that New Yorker Harriet Jacobs would describe as “the beginning of a reign of terror.”¹ Amid growing sectional conflict, the year also witnessed many other momentous events, including the creation of the University of Deseret, later renamed the University of Utah; the publication of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*; the incorporation of the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco; the succession of Millard Fillmore to the U.S. presidency on the death of Zachary Taylor; the beginning of the U.S. tour of Swedish soprano Jenny Lind,

promoted by P. T. Barnum; and the convening of the first national woman's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts.

At midcentury, Americans gathered for education and for entertainment, and they debated in legislative halls, in reformers' meetings, and also in local cultural institutions. **This was a heyday of debating societies in cities and in rural communities alike.** Participants—often though not always men—practiced their skills in debate, public speaking, and parliamentary procedure in a context of homosocial camaraderie, and thus they learned and enacted the forms of political, social, and cultural leadership. In 1850 the Farmers and Mechanics Association of Holden, Massachusetts, debated the justifiability of capital punishment and the potential benefits to the nation from the discovery of gold in California, and late in the year they asked, “Ought the Fugitive Slave law to be resisted by force of arms?”² In the port city of Charleston, South Carolina, where 1850 brought the elaborate funeral of proslavery politician John C. Calhoun, the young men of the College of Charleston likewise engaged in spirited debates. Two literary societies existed at the college at the time, the Cliosophic Society and the Chrestomathic Society; each society's membership debated among themselves, not yet against each other. In 1850 the Chrestomathic Society debated questions ranging from the abstract query “Can any circumstances justify a departure from the truth?” to the current-events question “Is the dissolution of the Union desirable?”³

At the same time, another group of young men in Charleston ran their own association, known as the Clionian Debating Society. **Their name marked a commitment to classical learning and especially acknowledged Clio, the Greek muse of history.** This group was founded in 1847 by young men in their teens or early twenties, identified today as African American but known at the time as free persons of color or free mulattoes. The Clionians met for a decade, from

November 1847 until January 1858, when, according to their records, they gave “expression to the solemnity and grief that pervaded their minds, while considering the impossibility of continuing the existence of our much loved, and highly cherished Institution under present *political* disadvantages.”⁴ The phrase “*political* disadvantages” points obliquely to the increasing restrictions on free persons of color in South Carolina as the sectional crisis intensified. This phrase, however, is a rare overt signal of the free community’s precarious situation to be found within a decade’s worth of society minutes. During 1850 the Clionians did not debate slavery or sectionalism. Instead, they emphasized European history—such as “Was Cromwell right in usurping the reins of Government in England?”—and nearly half of the year’s questions focused on classical subjects, including “Who was the most patriotic[,] Demosthenes or Socrates?” and “Was Caesar right in crossing the Rubicon or not?”⁵ Perhaps these young men fashioned analogies between classical antiquity and their own nation, but if so, such links are not recorded.

The structure and activities of the Clionian Debating Society were typical of popular debating associations in the antebellum era. The Clionians established protocols for membership and communal action, and they organized and performed debates on topics that were ubiquitous across the nation. They also established a small library and hosted regular events that their families, friends, and supporters attended. They can thus be read on one level as a representative, even ordinary, antebellum men’s debating club.

On other levels, however, they were not so typical. The Clionians were free men of color coming of age in the urban, slaveholding, coastal South, growing to manhood in circumstances that gave them access to some privileges and denied them others. The Clionians were not the only debating society in Charleston’s free black community at the time—their minutes refer to both the Euterpean and the Utopian Debating Societies—but unlike these groups, **the Clionians**

have left a remarkable legacy in the quality and extent of their publicly available, extant society records.⁶ Two manuscript minute books, one held at the Charleston Library Society and the other at Duke University, chronicle the group's complete trajectory from inception to dissolution, and this comprehensive coverage is unusual for any nineteenth-century popular debating society, especially outside the Northeast.⁷ Prior scholars have reviewed one minute book or the other, but not the two together.⁸

The availability of the Clionian Debating Society minutes offers an exciting opportunity to chart the evolution of a noncollegiate debating society of the sort that was ubiquitous across the nation, and at the same time to study the unique features of popular education as it was practiced in a specific local context, affected by norms of gender, work and leisure, religion, the urban environment, and the politics of race and sectionalism. That is the task of this lecture: to explicate the Clionians' minute books, in order to ask what such records can reveal about how the society functioned, what it valued, and how it construed education. I propose to show that the members of this group practiced self- and communal education as a means of enacting a degree of freedom, performatively asserting their own humanity through intellectual endeavor.

First we will briefly consider the history of debate as a Western educational practice and the circumstances of the free black community in antebellum Charleston. Then, turning to the Clionians' minute books, we will analyze their representations of five regular activities, as they governed themselves, debated, lectured, established a library, and archived their own history.

Debating as Education, Debating as Practice

Antebellum Americans participated in a national culture that recognized the popular debating society as a familiar social form. Debating had been associated with teaching and

learning in the West at least since the fifth century B.C.E., when the Greek Sophist Protagoras of Abdera taught his students to argue two sides of each question. Eighteenth-century American colonists, drawing on classical models and British precursors alike, established clubs like Benjamin Franklin's Junto for debating and other intellectual pastimes, and young male collegians founded literary and debating societies. College societies were run by students rather than faculty, were conducted in English rather than Latin, and addressed issues from abstract questions of morals to current politics. Harvard's Spy Club was holding "disputations" in the early 1720s, and college debating societies thrived from 1750 onward. By 1770 the College of New Jersey, later Princeton, boasted two groups, the American Whig Society and the Cliosophic Society, with the latter name signaling "praise of wisdom." Southern colleges followed suit. For example, two societies were organized at the University of North Carolina in 1795, the year it began offering classes. Both before and after the Revolution, such groups promoted the literary achievements and the speaking and argumentative skills of their members, as well as the pleasures of fraternal interaction and genial competition.⁹

Popular, noncollegiate debating received a boost in the late 1820s, when the Yale-educated scientific lecturer Josiah Holbrook began promoting the establishment of local "associations of adults for mutual education," which he called lyceums.¹⁰ Although Holbrook envisioned lyceums as societies for cooperative scientific study, the cultural connection of education with debate was strong, and thousands of antebellum groups called lyceums were debating clubs, from Massachusetts to California.¹¹ Free African Americans, especially in urban centers like Philadelphia and New York, established associations that promoted education and racial uplift, as scholars like Emma Jones Lapsansky, Elizabeth McHenry, and Shirley Wilson Logan have shown.¹² When in 1847 the young men of the Clionian Debating Society stated their

goals as “the promotion of their connection [to each other] and the improvement of their intellect,” they rhetorically linked themselves with other intellectual aspirants across the nation.¹³

Free Persons of Color in Antebellum Charleston

If their goals were commonplace, their social and political condition made them distinctive. The society’s minutes name fifty-five discrete individuals who were members, honorary members, or supporters, and they also refer broadly, without enumeration, to audiences for special occasions.¹⁴ The society’s secretaries characterize these audiences, formulaically, as “enlightened,” “delighted,” “large,” or “respectable,” with *respectable* meaning reasonably numerous but perhaps also signaling behavioral standards. The members and honorary members were exclusively male, but women of the community supported the group by attending the special meetings and making occasional donations of money or books.¹⁵ Among the named individuals whom I have identified through government records, the records of other Charleston associations, or the scholarship of historians, a few were members of the free communities in other cities, like honorary members A. M. Bland of Philadelphia and Daniel Alexander Payne of Baltimore. Most members and friends, however, were free persons of color residing in Charleston. It is highly likely that the audiences for the Clionians’ special events were drawn from this tight-knit community, which frequently intermarried and established a variety of social institutions, including cooperative economic enterprises, benevolence and burial societies, and schools.¹⁶

Historians of Charleston, such as Edmund Drago, Bernard E. Powers Jr., and Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, have provided invaluable foundations for the study of Charleston’s free community, from its heightened color consciousness to its religious, occupational, and wealth-

holding characteristics.¹⁷ Protestant Christianity was an important basis for moral action among this community, and free persons of color were active in the city's Episcopalian and Methodist congregations.¹⁸ Many were skilled workers, with women working as seamstresses and mantua makers, and men as carpenters and tailors, shoemakers and barbers, butchers and masons.¹⁹

Several Clionian Society members, including Henry Cardozo and William O. Weston, would become Methodist ministers and educators; both men also toiled as tailors during their working lives.²⁰ Some among Charleston's most prosperous free persons of color owned considerable property in homes, shops, and also slaves. Slave owners associated with the Clionians included several honorary members, such as wood factor Richard E. Dereef, carpenter Charles Holloway, and tailors Benjamin T. Huger, William McKinlay, and brothers Jacob and Samuel Weston.²¹

Historians like Larry Koger and Loren Schweninger have shown that **both benevolence and commercial advantage motivated slaveholding among free persons of color** in South Carolina. In the face of legal prohibitions on private manumission, free persons sometimes nominally owned relatives and friends. But free persons also bought and sold enslaved people in order to exploit their labor. **For some free men and women of color,** as Myers notes, **their sense of what their own freedom meant included holding other people in bondage.**²²

An alternative and more widely shared connotation of freedom, of course, was the possession of knowledge. In direct contravention of state law, free black adults in Charleston operated a number of private schools for their children. Sometimes the teachers were men and women of the community, including, in the 1850s, Clionian member Simeon W. Beaird and a supporter of the group, Frances Pinckney Bonneau. Sometimes members of the community employed young white college students as teachers, like John Amos, Francis, and William Mood.²³ It is highly likely that members of the Clionian Society were educated in private schools

like these, where readings might include histories of classical Greece and Rome as well as the liberty-filled speeches of Caleb Bingham's *Columbian Orator*.²⁴

Comparative prosperity, educational attainments, and even participation in slaveholding did not insulate free persons of color from virulent racism. Edmund Drago notes that between 1820 and 1861 Charleston's free black population experienced "increased restrictions and greater hardships," including prohibitions on travel outside the state, prohibitions on learning, discrimination in churches, threats of violence, and, in the second half of the 1850s, repeated legal and legislative efforts at widespread enslavement.²⁵

The period during which the Clionian Debating Society flourished was thus a time of increasing fear, uncertainty, and upheaval. What could such a society mean for its members? To attempt to elucidate their motivations, goals, and achievements, we will now turn to the formal features of those activities.

Self-Governance

The impression that emerges from the Clionians' minutes is a profound sense of orderliness, a deep investment in the rule of law, and a commitment to language—written and read—as the foundation for appropriate action. The group adopted and signed a constitution at its first minuted meeting, and members frequently read the constitution aloud, when initiating new members or installing new officers. Although they frequently changed the rules, they adhered carefully to them once they were in place. They also appealed to the rules to adjudicate conflicts. For instance, one unusual meeting in 1848 erupted in turmoil that briefly turned physical, when "Mr. Jacob Green . . . shoved Mr. [William] Gailliard against the mantle peice [*sic*]." The society

managed this crisis by recurring to the letter of its constitution, a solution that required several discussions but apparently restored harmony.²⁶

The Clionians conducted society business through officers and committees, and there was great scope for individual participation. They elected new officers every four months, a standing three-person Committee of Queries proposed questions for debate, and the members appointed ad hoc committees to compose correspondence. They even dissolved the society by committee; at the last minuted meeting, a committee of five was appointed to effect termination.²⁷ Conrad D. Ludeke was a member of the dissolution committee. During his involvement with the Clionians, he had enjoyed a range of participatory opportunities. Ludeke joined the society in 1852, when he was about seventeen. He helped to write a letter of thanks to a donor, chaired an administrative committee, served as the society's reporter and president pro tem, and participated in multiple debates.²⁸

The level of involvement in the debating society for Ludeke and his fellows contrasted sharply with their external situation. Although possessing rights to hold property, free African Americans like the Clionian members were considered denizens, not citizens, of South Carolina, as historian Marina Wikramanayake has shown.²⁹ They thus lacked political rights, and so, for example, they could not aspire to vote in elections even when they reached the age of twenty-one. Within the debating society, however, they voted on everything: on the admission of new members, on officers and members of standing committees, on orators, and on society rules. They voted on when and how often the group would meet; sometimes they determined to meet weekly, sometimes twice monthly or monthly. Thus they not only subscribed to the principle of the rule of law, but within the space of the society, they adopted the values and forms of democratic governance that the nation had failed to enact for so many.

Debates

Debating, the Clionian Debating Society's main activity, was thus conducted in a deliberate, formal fashion. Typically, the Committee of Queries proposed several questions for debate at a future meeting and the society chose among them; two members were appointed, often in an alphabetical rotation, to prepare the affirmative and negative cases. On the evening of the debate, the two men presented their cases, other members of the society joined in, and the debate concluded at a time stipulated in advance. The society's president rendered a decision, although the minutes are ambiguous on whether the decision was made on the so-called merits of the question or the strength of the arguments; antebellum societies rendered decisions in different ways, and there was not a widespread standard.³⁰ The Clionian minutes indicate the verdicts, although our ability to extrapolate meaning from them is limited. Many verdicts are consonant with what we would expect this group to support, such as an affirmative decision on the question "Is education beneficial to society?"³¹ Yet the president ruled for the negative in a debate asking "whether the United States was right in declaring her Independence," and the terms of that debate and the rationale for the decision remain a tantalizing mystery.³²

The direct sources of inspiration for the queries are likewise uncertain. Whereas historians of Charleston have correctly observed that the questions debated by the Clionians are similar to questions debated by students at the College of Charleston, the implication that the Clionians followed the lead of their local white peers is difficult to sustain when the dates of debates are compared. The Clionians more often than not debated questions *before* the same questions were argued by the collegians.³³ Furthermore, debating questions were comparable around the country, and had been so for decades, in college societies and popular groups alike.

Although organizational records typically remained private, questions appeared in newspaper ads and in published books. For example, Charles Morley's pocket-sized handbook, *A Guide to Forming and Conducting Lyceums, Debating Societies, &c.*, published in New York in 1841, listed topics and questions that were already conventional, from "Are fictitious writings beneficial?" to "Did Napoleon do more hurt than good to the world?"³⁴ Transference of questions by word of mouth also helped some questions to become standard, a part of shared assumptions about what a debate was.

The Clionians debated ninety-three questions in ten years. Usually a single question was debated in one meeting, but about one time in ten, the debate was continued over two meetings. Like other debaters throughout the country, the Clionians argued issues of policy and value, both specific and abstract. They sometimes drew attention to current events. For instance, they debated in 1848 whether "the acquisition of California [would] be of any great use to the U.S." and in 1854 they asked of the ongoing Crimean War, "[Are] France & England right in interfering in the present struggle between Russia & Turkey?"³⁵

These "devoted disciples [*sic*] of Clio" spent a great deal of time with questions of historical interpretation, especially military careers.³⁶ They asked whether Charlemagne and Caesar were great men, and they repeatedly rehashed Napoleon's life and career. They compared his military prowess to that of Hannibal, they debated whether "ambition . . . led Napoleon to battle," they twice debated whether the exile to St. Helena had been right, and they argued about the meaning of Wellington's victory at Waterloo.³⁷

They also devoted attention to questions about learning, asking whether "Literary or Military glory" was more "desirable," whether "Ancient or Modern history" was more "interesting," and "whether success[es] in difficult Sciences are the results of Genius, or Industry

and Perseverance.”³⁸ The final query that the society adopted for debate—a question apparently never debated—turned out to be a poignant one. It was “Which is more conducive to Individual improvement—Solitude or Society?” At the group’s next minuted meeting, eight months later, the members discussed “the propriety and necessity of a change in the object and purposes . . . from a *debating* to a *reading* association . . . which was thought would be more favorable to the circumstances of the members.” Although a majority that evening chose to “continue as heretofore” and only to reduce the required quorum “from five to three members,” the group would shortly dissolve.³⁹ Improvement would have to persist in solitude, whether or not that approach was conducive to success.

Some questions that were common elsewhere were not taken up by the Clionians, and we are left to elicit meaning through absence, which is notoriously difficult to interpret. Direct questions about slavery, emancipation, and legal issues related to sectional tension were frequent in debating societies throughout the nation.⁴⁰ Although it seems probable that issues of slavery arose during debates on questions concerning topics like the U.S.-Mexican War, such details were not minuted, and the Clionians did not frame any debating questions directly about slavery.⁴¹ Why? Did they fear surveillance or retaliation by local whites? Did they wish to avoid fostering ill will among themselves, since the families from which their members came were both slaveholding and nonslaveholding? We cannot know for sure. The Clionians also did not debate common questions about dueling, the political rights of women, or theatrical entertainments. If, as Drago observes, “the free black elite could ill afford to indulge in dueling or pander to its code of honor,” it is also true that political participation was elusive for the men as well as the women of this community, and religious activity was more significant than entertainment to many of these young men.⁴² Yet personal salience was clearly not a primary

rationale for choosing debating questions, since it is difficult to imagine the direct relevance of a question like “Who was the Greatest and most virtuous General, Caesar or Pompey?”⁴³ Drawing meaning from the absence of certain topics and questions is at best a speculative enterprise.

The minutes, however, do create a sense of the emotional dimensions of debating. The questions are stylistically earnest, but society secretaries inscribe an impression of the debates as characterized by youthful zeal, not deadly solemnity. Minutes refer to the “spirited,” “animated,” or “heated” nature of the debates, or they claim that only the onslaught of time prompted debates to end. For example, secretary Henry Cardozo wrote in 1851 about a debate continued from the previous meeting: “In a short time,” he noted, “the heat of the former debates were [*sic*] rekindled and fresh fuel being now added thereto, created a flame, which would have continued to spread, were it not that that powerful Engine—Time arrived and quenched its glowing ardor.” William O. Weston later bemoaned: “The sands of time had slipped from under us & we could plead no more.”⁴⁴ Whereas local curfews imposed on the black population made clock-watching vital for these young men, society secretaries tended to reframe the fact of legal restrictions into a commentary on the members’ passion for debating. Contrary evidence appears rarely, as when in 1848 a society president beseeched “earnestly that every member would study his debate thoroughly before every meeting.”⁴⁵ Far more often, the minutes portray the members as devoted and enthusiastic.

Lecturing

Whereas debating was the primary, titular focus of the Clionian Debating Society, the group also provided opportunities for public speaking in officers’ addresses and in formal orations. The Clionians practiced the oratorical art as epideictic, naming and celebrating shared

values and stabilizing the community through regular rituals. At the ceremony of officers' installation, new officers spoke to the membership, with presidents typically returning thanks, endorsing the society's perseverance toward intellectual improvement, and offering encouragement. Subordinate officers indicated their commitment to the tasks before them, promising to do their best. These inaugural occasions ritually reconstituted the society, reaffirming the relationships among society members and their elected leaders.⁴⁶ The occasions of formal orations also stressed the society's goals and, sometimes, its links to the larger community of supporters.

Formal orations were of two types: first, members periodically delivered short prepared speeches to other members. These were called "quarterly," "semi-annual," "regular," or "private" orations. Second, at yearly anniversary occasions, annual orators spoke to members and guests. Five of the men who delivered quarterly orations—Enoch Beaird, Simeon Beaird, Henry Cardozo, William Gailliard, and William O. Weston—were later elected annual orator. Annual orators were usually members of the society, although the first one, in 1849, was honorary member Job G. Bass.

The texts of the Clionian orations do not survive, but the minutes provide brief descriptions. Topics emphasized the importance of well-directed learning for the individual and society at large. In orations before the members, for example, Enoch Beaird spoke on "good and careful reading," both Simeon Beaird and Augustus L. Horry lauded the virtue of "perseverance," and J. M. F. Dereef promoted "the advantages of reading standard works."⁴⁷ Annual orations had similar topics, with Henry Cardozo discussing "the reward and results of a well directed ambition" and Richard S. Holloway reflecting on the "advantages accruing from a

cultivated mind.”⁴⁸ The minutes represent these orations as a ritual celebration of the society’s aspirations.

The orations are sometimes presented as evidence of speakers’ own intellectual qualities. For example, William O. Weston was a quarterly orator in 1849, when he was about sixteen years old. He spoke on education, and the minutes record that his speech was “the grandest proof of the advantages derived from the attainment of the same.” The next year, when Augustus Horry spoke, the record stated that he “displayed a depth of intellect worthy of being cultivated.”⁴⁹ So the topical selections reinforced the purposes of the society, and individual performances were available to be assessed as evidence of its success.

Although the lectures described in the Clonian Debating Society minutes are similar to those delivered at other antebellum mutual-improvement societies, celebrating the virtues of personal commitments to learning, on one occasion a link to contemporary racial politics was more clearly in evidence. In 1855, when William O. Weston was society secretary, he recorded of Benjamin Roberts’s annual oration: “The ascendant star in the galaxy of Palestine’s hopes was burnished with a sun-like aspect by this son of Clio & the not far distant day when Ethiopia too shall stretch forth her hands, appeared but as the ’morrow before the phrophetic [*sic*] touch of the speaker.”⁵⁰ In his elaborate style, Weston pointed to Roberts’s focus on learning as the basis for the global spread of Christianity, and the allusion to Psalm 68:31—“Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God”—links his observations with one strand of nineteenth-century black nationalism, signaling hope for the evangelization of Africa and revival of African power.⁵¹ Although the nuances of Roberts’s position remain elusive, the reference does illustrate an imagined connection with the peoples of the African diaspora broadly.

Creating a Library

The Clionians not only emphasized debating and lecturing but also the reading and study necessary for competent oral performance and intellectual growth. Beginning in December 1848 they began discussing the establishment of a society library, and the minutes record additions to the library from 1849 through 1855.⁵² The library was accessible to members, and on anniversary occasions it was displayed for visitors.⁵³ Members were assessed fees for purchases, but the collection grew primarily through donations. Sometimes the minutes simply record the addition of “pamphlets of good speeches” or “several valuable works,” but they do identify a number of the holdings.⁵⁴ The Clionians and their network of patrons simultaneously sought standard works and locally significant public statements.

A few works held by the Clionians were extremely common in mutual-improvement associations of the time, especially *Webster’s* unabridged dictionary and the *Life* of Benjamin Franklin.⁵⁵ Like other societies of the time, **the Clionians in their choice of published texts emphasized religious and historical themes, along with transatlantic intellectualism.** The library was inaugurated in 1849, when Job G. Bass gave the society a bible. Religious themes persisted, from the group’s purchase of Francis Hawks’s *Monuments of Egypt* in 1850, which argues that archaeological discoveries in Africa reveal the truth of scripture, to the donation in 1855 of the works of first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.⁵⁶ Other works emphasized European history and echoed the debating questions. The library included two volumes of Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *History of England*, Thomas Carlyle’s *French Revolution*, William Grimshaw’s *History of France*, and Richard Swainson Fisher’s *Book of the World*.⁵⁷ Military and political history dominated the library’s holdings, but in 1850 the group purchased Elizabeth Starling’s *Noble Deeds of Woman*, just four months after supporter Emma Farbeaux gave the

society three unnamed books by “distinguished Authoresses.”⁵⁸ The Clionians held primarily nonfiction, although in 1850 Bass donated a volume by American writer James Kirke Paulding, and in 1851 the local schoolteacher Frances Pinckney Bonneau presented the works of Irish poet Thomas Moore.⁵⁹

Books like these were standards of the day, common in libraries across the nation.⁶⁰ Yet the Clionians also established a collection of locally relevant texts. The group owned copies of pamphlet speeches such as an address on the value of education by Professor Francis W. Capers of the Citadel, a lecture on geology delivered to the South Carolina legislature by Professor Richard T. Brumby of South Carolina College, and a sermon by James W. Miles, an Episcopal minister and a professor of Greek and history at the College of Charleston.⁶¹ In 1854 Henry Cardozo gave the society a copy of a book by John Bachman, a College of Charleston professor of natural history, entitled *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race Examined on the Principles of Science*. Published in 1850, Bachman’s book intervened in ongoing public debates about whether different races of people derived from a single origin or multiple origins. The multiple-origins—or polygenist—position was a powerful resource for proslavery advocates, and Bachman, a monogenist, criticized this perspective. Cardozo’s donation implies that he wanted to promote engagement with Bachman’s ideas—and possibly an endorsement of them—among his fellows.⁶² The Clionians’ library did not hold works supporting polygenism, despite their easy availability.⁶³

Few texts on contemporary politics were among the library holdings, and even Bachman’s book was presented as scientific scholarship, not a political polemic. One exception occurred in April 1850, however, when the society planned the purchase of “Five political speeches recently delivered in the Senate.”⁶⁴ Presuming that the term “the Senate” referred to the

national and not the state legislature, these speeches may have concerned topics like the Fugitive Slave Act, the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, or the imprisonment of free black seamen in Southern ports.⁶⁵ If not in their minuted debates, then in their acquisition of print media the Clionians may have tracked the ongoing sectional crisis and its local effects.

Archiving Their History

The Clionians not only amassed publications, but they also created a written history of their own activities. They purchased blank, bound manuscript books in which to record their proceedings; the first minute book, for instance, came from Charleston bookseller and stationer John M. Greer.⁶⁶ The minutes refer to documents that are no longer extant, such as a book of rules, treasurers' records, and copies of correspondence. The Clionians also asked orators to supply texts of their speeches for the society's library, and many speakers complied instantly, indicating that speaking from a prepared text was common practice.⁶⁷ Much less customary was a request for a debater's notes, although in 1848 the society asked William Marshall for a copy of his arguments against restraining the liberty of the press, and Simeon Beaird for his arguments concerning the justice of the U.S.-Mexican War.⁶⁸

Although record-keeping was a common activity of antebellum debating societies, the Clionian minutes are more explicit about the goals of preservation than most records. In 1849, for instance, Simeon Beaird minuted his motion following Weston's quarterly oration: "S. W. Beaird now rose to move the Society, request a copy of the beautiful speech just delivered, that they may always preserve its valuable and sound contents among the relics of the body."⁶⁹ The Clionians lived in a city already deeply invested in its history. In 1848 the Charleston Library Society, a bastion of the white elite, had celebrated its centennial with much fanfare about the

significance of historic preservation and of establishing a record of excellence available for future emulation.⁷⁰ Furthermore, other societies within the free black community in Charleston kept detailed minutes, such as the Brown Fellowship Society, the Friendly Moralist Society, and the Friendly Association.⁷¹ The Clionians' efforts to capture and preserve records of what they did and said, like the archiving efforts of other local groups, were a performative assertion of their own worth and the value of their activities. Even now, their two manuscript minute books—which landed in publicly accessible archives through means now lost to history—still assert the group's presence, aspirations, and actions.⁷²

A Green Oasis

On July 20, 1853, Augustus Horry attended a Clionian Debating Society meeting. He had joined the society in 1849 and had participated actively, appearing regularly in debates, serving on committees of correspondence, and once, in 1850, delivering a quarterly oration. Horry had given gifts to the society: a maple table and four armchairs, some “valuable works” for the library, and a decorative picture. Then in December 1852, by letter from Philadelphia, Horry informed the group that he “had left the State ‘probably for life’” and thus, with regret, must resign. He promised to send a “Gilt Frame Mythological Picture” as soon as possible. In January the society unanimously elected Horry an honorary member, and when he was back in Charleston that summer, he was invited to the July 20 meeting as an “especial guest.” Horry waxed eloquent at this meeting, and William O. Weston noted in the minutes that he concluded with gratitude, saying “that this memorable scene would be one that he would be able to point out as being a green oasis in the history of his life.”⁷³ Horry's metaphor of this meeting as a “green oasis” resonates with the sense of the society generally as a place of safety, growth, and

sustenance. Yet Horry's metaphor is not only spatial; he did not say "a green oasis in the desert of my life." The oasis is also temporal, an experience shared with others along an unfolding path, to be carried into the future. If the young men of the Clionian Debating Society created an oasis in space and time, how might we summarize its features? This oasis can, I believe, be better understood as a place of renewal than as a place of escape.

The living waters of this oasis were practices of literacy—reading, writing, speaking, debating—that were widely accepted as substantive education of the day. Across the nation, those who lacked access to formal institutions of higher education—as well as those who had previously enjoyed collegiate training—created societies for themselves where intellectual culture could flourish, whether in coastal cities or interior settlements. These groups tended to be comparatively homogenous in gender, racial identification, and social standing. The Clionians operated consistently with other groups of ambitious young men in formalizing their procedures for action, in debating questions both abstract and concrete, in displaying their goals through lectures, in establishing library resources, and in generating texts that asserted their own presence and intellectual capacities. They practiced their developing skills in the context of male camaraderie, and their minutes repeatedly referred to "our brotherlike assemblage," "this brotherly Institution," and the "beloved Society."⁷⁴ The positive value of the association was regularly endorsed by men and women of the community.

Yet the young men of the Clionian Debating Society performed these conventions of learning within a context of oppression, to which their 1858 phrase "present *political* disadvantages" elusively alludes. One scholar has stated that the Clionians chose conventional foci to distinguish themselves from slaves and to deflect white suspicions of potential subversion, but this assessment implies that the white power structure was a primary audience

for the Clionians' activities.⁷⁵ Although the society's minute books could withstand the surveillance of someone worried about insurrection, neither the minutes nor the activities they describe rhetorically invoke a surveilling audience. These minutes are addressed to the Clionians themselves: literally, since meetings began with the reading of the previous meeting's minutes, and also conceptually, as they carefully recorded items of significance to the participants and even contained oblique in-jokes.⁷⁶ Likewise, the recorded activities are represented as members' displays for one another and occasionally for supporters. These are displays of thoughtfulness and rectitude. In their study of African American manhood, Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins note that in the antebellum urban North, free black men often valued a vision of manhood that emphasized "honor and integrity . . . and being responsible for oneself, one's family, and the community."⁷⁷ In the urban South, the Clionians similarly enacted self-respect and, as their minutes put it, "usefulness to ourselves and to others."⁷⁸

Furthermore, we should be careful not to collapse the Clionians' emphasis on Western educational forms into a simple alliance with whiteness. It is true that classical subjects were the same as those taught by and to the white male elite, yet it does not necessarily follow that an interest in classical antiquity—or in debating, for that matter—was motivated by a desire for emulation. Instead, such an interest lays claim to the heritage of world culture generally, not defined by genetic descent but owing to curiosity and imagination. In 1903 W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in *Souls of Black Folk*: "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. . . . From out the caves of the evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. . . . Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America?"⁷⁹ Read beside the poetic genius of Du Bois, the everyday minutes of the Clionian Debating Society from a half century

before seem to resonate with a similar impulse. In 1851 Clionian member Stephen J. Maxwell delivered a lecture on education, showing, as the minutes say, “the importance of Learning in preparing Man to act his part in the great drama of life and in opening his mental eyes to the works of nature particularly as exhibited in the Starry firmament above.”⁸⁰ On this reading, **the Clionians, as they turn skyward, join a project of resistance.** Debating and lecturing and writing letters and reading books and voting on the rules become what Hine and Jenkins call one of “the myriad ways in which slaves and free people in the Americas, against all odds, kept alive the will to survive, for themselves and their descendants, with their humanity intact.”⁸¹ This oasis, then, is a place to perform freedom.

The details of the case, of course, prevent a full-throated endorsement, since mature reflection on U.S. history, like mature reflection on Greek and Roman history, demands attention to paradoxes. This group—like others of its day—was exclusionary along multiple axes, and the society simultaneously corresponded with northern black abolitionists and made honorary members of local black slaveholders. Topics of racial justice were rarely if ever broached in debate, yet Roberts’s oration hints at a potential sense of identification with people of the African diaspora, and the donation of Bachman’s book and the apparent plan to acquire U.S. Senate speeches suggest that these subjects were not entirely deflected.

Three years after the Clionian Debating Society dissolved, the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor began the bloody war that would end chattel slavery and, as Hine and Jenkins note, would “politiciz[e] black men.”⁸² It is one of the ironies of history that the men of the Clionian Debating Society, who in the 1850s had no prospect of political participation, would deploy their linguistic skills in and for U.S. institutions.

Three brief examples will show this. First, Conrad D. Ludeke left Charleston for New York in 1860. In 1861 he enlisted in the Union Army—perceived as a white man with a “dark complexion”—and he served until 1866, achieving the rank of captain and serving as an adjutant, keeping infantry records. After the war he returned to Charleston and worked as a butcher and, later, a U.S. pension agent, until his death in the 1890s.⁸³ Second, Henry Cardozo, who became a Clionian in 1849, at age eighteen, went to Cleveland in 1858, where he worked as a tailor. After the war he returned to South Carolina, and he served in the state legislature during the 1870s. Cardozo’s brothers were the first two superintendents of an important school for the freedpeople in Charleston, where former Clionian William O. Weston also taught. Henry Cardozo himself was a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, editor of a Methodist newspaper, and a trustee of Claflin College. He died in 1886.⁸⁴ Finally, Simeon W. Beaird was an active member of the Clionian Debating Society from its inception, when at age twenty-two he became the group’s first president, until its dissolution, when he served with Cardozo, Ludeke, Weston, and Robert L. Deas on the dissolution committee. By the mid-1860s Beaird was living in Augusta, Georgia, as a Methodist minister and a teacher of freedpeople. In 1867–68 he served as a member of the Georgia state constitutional convention, and in 1870 he chaired a delegation to the White House that articulated the grievances of Georgia’s African American citizenry to President Ulysses S. Grant. By 1873 Beaird was a minister in Aiken, South Carolina, and treasurer of Aiken County. He died in 1894.⁸⁵

The common features of these careers are practices of literacy, both written and oral, from record-keeping to exhortation, publishing to debating. Perhaps, like Augustus Horry, these men found the Clionian Debating Society to be “a green oasis” in the history of their lives as well. If so, their stint at the oasis may have given them space and time to hone their rhetorical

skills. Extant records supply suggestive evidence of the practical benefits of learning for these men, but we can also imagine that pursuing knowledge in society, not solitude, was also an experience of joy.⁸⁶

Notes

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Endnotes

¹ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Lydia Maria Child (Boston, 1861), 286.

² Entries for February 16, 23, March 2, 30, December 14, 21, 1850, in Holden Lyceum, Record Book, 1849–1853, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA. In 1852 the Farmers and Mechanics Association of Holden changed its name to Holden Lyceum.

³ Entries for February 20, March 6, June 19, 1850, in Book 1 (#173/4), Chrestomathic Literary Society Minute Books, College of Charleston Archives, Special Collections, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC. The Chrestomathic Society first began to discuss the possibility of a debate between the two societies on January 20, 1858; see Book 3 (#173/6).

⁴ Entry for January 14, 1858, in Clionian Debating Society (Charleston, SC), Proceedings, 1851–1858, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC (hereafter CDS-Duke).

⁵ Entries for September 11, March 4, October 14, 1850, in Clionian Debating Society (Charleston, SC), Proceedings, 1847–1851, Charleston Library Society, Charleston, SC (hereafter CDS-CLS). In these notes, dates indicate when debates occurred; questions were chosen at earlier meetings.

⁶ On the other debating societies, see entries for December 17, 1848, January 2, February 15, September 6, December 26, 1849, January 1, December 2, 1850, January 1, 1851, CDS-CLS; December 22, 1851, January 1, December 30, 1852, CDS-Duke. In 1851, the Clionians passed the following resolution: “Resolved, that as [in] order to preserve the distinctiveness of the Clionian Debating Society that whomsoever shall become a member shall in no wise be a member or apply for membership in other Institutions raised and carried on for the support of the same principles.” One member, William E. Marshall, already “a member of another Institution of the same character,” was to be the only exception; entry for October 6, 1851, CDS-Duke.

⁷ The two minute books break in September 1851, and the meeting of September 22 is described in both; see CDS-CLS and CDS-Duke.

⁸ Edmund L. Drago and Bernard E. Powers Jr. refer to the first volume: Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center: From Education and Civil Rights to Preserving the African American Experience*, rev. and ed. W. Marvin Dulaney (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2006), 35–38; Powers, *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822–1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 52. Michael O’Brien consults the second: O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810–1860*, vol. 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 424.

⁹ Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815–1876* (New York: Pageant Press International, 1971), 19, 21, 89; “The American Whig-Clionophic Society,” 2011, <http://whigclio.princeton.edu/history/>, accessed September 16, 2014. See also David Potter, *Debating in the Colonial Chartered Colleges: An Historical Survey, 1642 to 1900* (New York: Teachers College, 1944), 64–93; David Potter, “The Literary Society,” in *History of Speech Education in America: Background Studies*, ed.

Karl R. Wallace (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 238–58; David Potter, “The Debate Tradition,” in *Argumentation and Debate: Principles and Practices*, ed. James H. McBath, rev. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 14–32; Stephen H. Browne, “Satirizing the Debating Society in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 26, no. 1 (1989): 1–10; Edward Schiappa, “Antilogie,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik: Herausgegeben von Gert Ueding*, vol. 1, *A–Bib*, ed. Gregor Kalivoda and Franz-Hubert Robling (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 701–8; Mary Thale, “The Case of the British Inquisition: Money and Women in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London Debating Societies,” *Albion* 31, no. 1 (1999): 31–48; Ronald F. Reid, “Foreword: A Long and Proud Tradition,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37, no. 1 (2000): 1–11; W. Martin Bloomer, “Controversia and Suasoria,” in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 166–69; David Zarefsky, “Debate,” in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, 191–97; W. Martin Bloomer, “Declamation,” in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, 197–99; B. Evelyn Westbrook, “Debating Both Sides: What Nineteenth-Century College Literary Societies Can Teach Us about Critical Pedagogies,” *Rhetoric Review* 21, no. 4 (2002): 339–56.

¹⁰ Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), esp. 13–33; Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1956).

¹¹ As historian Joseph F. Kett observes, Holbrook “did not invent the popular literary society; rather, he baptized existing societies as lyceums”; Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750–1990* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), xvii.

¹² Emma Jones Lapsansky, “‘Discipline to the Mind’: Philadelphia’s Banneker Institute, 1854–1872,” in *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 399–414; Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Shirley Wilson Logan, *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

¹³ Entry for November 9, 1847, CDS-CLS. In 1852 the young white men of the Holden Lyceum in Massachusetts stated that they joined together “for the purpose of mutually improving, developing, and cultivating our moral, mental, and social qualities; and to inspire confidence in ourselves and each other”; entry for November 27, 1852, Holden Lyceum Record Book.

¹⁴ The minutes identify twenty-nine individuals who were members or who were considered for membership, seventeen honorary members, and ten additional patrons. One person, Augustus L. Horry, was a member first and later, after he left Charleston for Philadelphia, an honorary member.

¹⁵ “A brilliant assemblage of the fairer & sterner sex” attended the 1855 anniversary meeting; entry for January 1, 1855, CDS-Duke. See also entries for January 1, 1850, CDS-CLS; February 16, 1857, CDS-Duke.

¹⁶ Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center*, 34; Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 48–53; James B. Browning, “The Beginnings of Insurance Enterprise among Negroes,” *Journal of Negro History* 22, no. 4 (1937): 417–32; Robert L. Harris Jr., “Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780–1830,” *Massachusetts Review* 20, no. 3 (1979): 603–25; Robert L. Harris Jr., “Charleston’s Free Afro-American Elite: The Brown Fellowship Society and the Humane Brotherhood,” *South Carolina*

Historical Magazine 82, no. 4 (1981): 289–310; Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, “‘A Middle Ground’: Free Mulattoes and the Friendly Moralist Society of Antebellum Charleston,” *Southern Studies* 21, no. 3 (1982): 246–65.

¹⁷ Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center*; Powers, *Black Charlestonians*; Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Drago’s 2006 book is a revised version of his *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations: Charleston’s Avery Normal Institute* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center*, 43–44.

¹⁹ Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 46.

²⁰ On Cardozo, see *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Spring Conferences of 1887* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887), 84; Eric Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction*, rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 40; *1860 United States Federal Census* [database online] (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com, 2009), Cleveland Ward 4, Cuyahoga Co., OH. On Weston, see Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers*, 226; Charleston city directories, 1877–1906, available on Ancestry.com.

²¹ Larry Koger, *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790–1860* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1985), 143, 148–49, 226.

²² Koger, *Black Slaveowners*; Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790–1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 104–8; Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 39; Myers, *Forging Freedom*, 122–28.

²³ Drago, *Charleston's Avery Center*, 46–47; C. W. Birnie, “Education of the Negro in Charleston, South Carolina, Prior to the Civil War,” *Journal of Negro History* 12, no. 1 (1927): 19; Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 21; Myers, *Forging Freedom*, 101–2; Francis A. Mood, *For God and Texas: Autobiography of Francis Asbury Mood, 1830–1884: Circuit Rider, Educator, and Founder of Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas*, ed. Mary Katherine Metcalfe Earney (Dallas: Listo, 2001), 40–50. The obituary of Simeon W. Beaird stated that he was educated in the school of “the Rev. Mr. Mood, of the M. E. Church”; this may refer to John Mood (1792–1864), the father of John Amos, Francis, and William or possibly to Henry Mood (1819–92), their elder brother. See “The Rev. T. [sic] W. Beaird,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, January 24, 1895, p. 5.

²⁴ Daniel Alexander Payne, educated in Thomas S. Bonneau’s school in Charleston and later a schoolmaster there himself, remembered these curricular materials in his *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1888), 15. Payne privately taught Frances Pinckney Bonneau and her siblings (36). He fled South Carolina in 1835 after white authorities closed his school (27–40). Payne was named an honorary member of the Clionian Debating Society in 1847, when he was living in Baltimore, and the members corresponded with him in 1849–50; entries for December 22, 1847, May 21, 29, 1849, July 31, August 14, 1850, CDS-CLS. In 1852 Payne was elected bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and he would publish its first history in 1891. He was also a founder and early president of Ohio’s Wilberforce University.

²⁵ Drago, *Charleston's Avery Center*, 38–44; Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South* (New York: Norton, 1984), 153–94.

²⁶ Partial entry, preceding that for February 2, 1848, CDS-CLS; see also entries for February 2, 4, 9, 10, March 1, 1848. The pages recording the troubled meeting were torn out of the minute book, following the society's decision on March 1 to "blot [the record of the February 1 meeting] from off the proceedings of the Society." Hence it is not possible to discern the points of conflict.

²⁷ Entry for January 14, 1858, CDS-Duke. The minutes are not specific about the committee's tasks; presumably they would dispose of the society's treasury and find homes for its library, record books, and other possessions.

²⁸ Entries for February 23, July 1, October 25, December 16, 1852, February 14, March 23, July 20, December 21, 1853, July 12, 1854, January 22, 1855, April 7, 1856, January 14, 1858, CDS-Duke.

²⁹ Marina Wikramanayake, *A World in Shadow: The Free Black in Antebellum South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 48–54.

³⁰ Angela G. Ray, "The Permeable Public: Rituals of Citizenship in Antebellum Men's Debating Clubs," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41, no. 1 (2004): 5n5.

³¹ Entry for January 6, 1851, CDS-CLS.

³² Entry for December 1, 1847, CDS-CLS. The minutes state simply: "The debate opened by the regular debaters, and was sustained principally on the negative. It was then decided in the negative. The question for the next evening's debate was chosen . . ."

³³ Drago, *Charleston's Avery Center*, 36; Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 52. Drago lists nine questions debated by the Clonian Debating Society alongside similar questions debated by the Chrestomathic Literary Society at the college. Yet in only one case (question 6) did the collegians debate the question prior to the Clonians' debate. Compare CDS-CLS; and Books 1, 2, and 3 (#173/4, 5, 6), Chrestomathic Literary Society Minute Books, College of Charleston

Archives. The debating records of the other College of Charleston debating society of the time, the Cliosophic Society, are not extant. Francis Mood was a member of that group; Mood, *For God and Texas*, 45–50. Mood supplied “a code of Laws” to the Clionians, donated books to the society, and attended one of its meetings; see entries for December 15, 1847, January 19, 1848, October 8, November 5, 1849, CDS-CLS.

³⁴ Charles Morley, *A Guide to Forming and Conducting Lyceums, Debating Societies, &c, with Outlines of Discussions and Essays, and an Appendix, Containing an Epitome of Rhetoric, Logic, &c.* (New York: A. E. Wright, 1841), 26, 49.

³⁵ Entries for December 16, 1848, CDS-CLS; June 8, 22, 1853, March 28, 1854, CDS-Duke.

³⁶ Entry for June 8, 1853, CDS-Duke. One society secretary, Henry Cardozo, noted what he called, positively, “the usual share of interest that historical questions generally afford”; entry for June 14, 1852.

³⁷ On Charlemagne and Caesar, see entries for January 12, September 28, October 12, 1853, CDS-Duke. On Napoleon, see entries for March 1, April 5, June 7, 1848, March 21, 1849, March 31, 1851, CDS-CLS; October 25, 1852, CDS-Duke.

³⁸ Entries for December 8, 22, 1847, November 5, 1849, CDS-CLS; December 8, 29, 1851, CDS-Duke.

³⁹ Entries for June 2, 1856, February 2, 1857, CDS-Duke.

⁴⁰ Ray, “Permeable Public,” 12; Richard L. Weaver II, “Forum for Ideas: The Lyceum Movement in Michigan, 1818–1860” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1969), 164. During the time that the Clionians were active, the Chrestomathic Literary Society at the College of Charleston debated questions such as “Is the American Union threatened with dissolution by the Slavery Question?” “Will the revival of the Slave trade be beneficial?” “Will the Slavery

question produce a dissolution in the Union?” “Is Slavery Right?” “Who derived the greatest advantage from the Slave Trade, Master or Slave?” and “Is the law prohibiting the education of slaves in Carolina just?”; entries for December 19, 1849, in Book 1 (#173/4), February 21, 1855, in Book 2 (#173/5), October 8, 1856, February 11, April 22, June 3, 1857, in Book 3 (#173/6), Chrestomathic Literary Society Minute Books, College of Charleston Archives.

⁴¹ Entries for November 23, 1847, September 18, 1848, CDS-CLS. See Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center*, 40.

⁴² Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center*, 38.

⁴³ Entry for June 28, 1852, CDS-Duke.

⁴⁴ Entries for December 29, 1851, May 11, 1853, CDS-Duke.

⁴⁵ Entry for May 17, 1848, CDS-CLS.

⁴⁶ On the symbolic significance of inaugurals, see Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency: Deeds Done in Words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 29–56.

⁴⁷ Entries for December 26, 1848, December 26, 1849, August 14, 1850, CDS-CLS; July 26, 1854, CDS-Duke.

⁴⁸ Entries for January 2, 1854, January 7, 1856, CDS-Duke.

⁴⁹ Entries for August 15, 1849, August 14, 1850, CDS-CLS.

⁵⁰ Entry for January 1, 1855, CDS-Duke. On Roberts’s later ministerial career, see *The Centenary Souvenir, Containing a History of Centenary Church, Charleston, and an Account of the Life and Labors of Rev. R. V. Lawrence, Father of the Pastor of Centenary Church* (Charleston, SC, 1885), xiv; and A. W. Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools* (Springfield,

MA: Willey and Co., 1892), 412. Pegues's focus is E. Rainey Roberts, son of Benjamain L. Roberts and Catherine Dereef Roberts, and the text provides useful detail about the family.

⁵¹ William R. Scott, "Ethiopianism," in *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 234–35.

⁵² Most library holdings were donated or purchased in 1849–51.

⁵³ See, e.g., entry for January 2, 1854, CDS-Duke.

⁵⁴ Entries for April 10, 1850, CDS-CLS; and September 25, 1851, CDS-Duke.

⁵⁵ Entries for December 26, 1849, December 2, 1850, CDS-CLS.

⁵⁶ Entries for January 1, 1849, December 2, 1850, CDS-CLS; June 15, 1855, CDS-Duke.

⁵⁷ Entries for October 8, December 26, 1849, CDS-CLS; December 8, 1851, CDS-Duke.

⁵⁸ Entries for December 2, August 14, 1850, CDS-CLS.

⁵⁹ Entries for January 1, 1850, March 10, 1851, CDS-CLS.

⁶⁰ Comparison of the Clionian Debating Society's library list with catalogs from mid-nineteenth-century libraries held at the American Antiquarian Society reveals considerable overlap, especially for works mentioned in the previous paragraph. Furthermore, two decades after the Clionians created their library, a number of the same texts were listed in Charles H. Moore's *What to Read, and How to Read, Being Classified Lists of Choice Reading, Appropriate Hints and Remarks, Adapted to the General Reader, to Subscribers to Libraries, and to Persons Intending to Form Collections of Books, Brought Down to September, 1870* (New York: Appleton, 1871).

⁶¹ Entries for April 17, May 1, 1850, August 11, 1851, CDS-CLS.

⁶² Entry for December 6, 1854, CDS-Duke.

⁶³ Major polygenist texts included Samuel George Morton's *Crania americana* (1839) and *Crania aegyptiaca* (1844), Charles Hamilton Smith's *The Natural History of the Human Species* (1851), and Josiah Clark Nott and George Robins Gliddon's *Types of Mankind* (1854). See William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); and, for texts, Robert Bernasconi, ed., *American Theories of Polygenesis*, 7 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2002).

⁶⁴ Entry for April 10, 1850, CDS-CLS.

⁶⁵ Recent Senate speeches were available in published form; see, e.g., *Proceedings of the U.S. Senate, on the Fugitive Slave Bill,—the Abolition of the Slave-Trade in the District of Columbia,—and the Imprisonment of Free Colored Seamen in the Southern Ports: with the Speeches of Messrs. Davis, Winthrop and Others* ([Washington, DC]: T. R. Marvin, [1850]).

⁶⁶ Seller's card pasted inside front cover, CDS-CLS. The card notes that Greer's shop was at 135 King Street. Charleston city directories list Greer at this address in 1837–38 and 1840–41 but at 207 King Street by 1849; James W. Hagy, *Directories for the City of Charleston, South Carolina, for the Years 1830–31, 1835–36, 1836, 1837–38 and 1840–41* (Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 1997), 81, 107; James W. Hagy, *Directories for the City of Charleston, South Carolina, for the Years 1849, 1852, and 1855* (Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 1998), 17.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., entry for February 16, 1848, CDS-CLS: “Mr. S. W. Weston the ‘Quarterly orator’ greeted the Society with a commendable address; and after the conclusion the Society requested a copy, and in compliance to request the original was immediately transfer[r]ed to the same.” Making formal requests for copies of orations became so ritualized that the honor it represented threatened to be eroded: in 1856, for example, Henry Cardozo stated that his motion to request a

speaker's text was motivated by "a sense of duty" to the society's future benefits and "not simply a compliance with custom"; entry for January 7, 1856, CDS-Duke.

⁶⁸ Entries for January 26, October 1, 1848, CDS-CLS. The position that Beard supported in the debate is not apparent from the minutes.

⁶⁹ Entry for August 15, 1849, CDS-CLS.

⁷⁰ A committee of the Charleston Library Society wrote to request a copy of James L. Petigru's centennial oration, stating that, upon publication, "Your address will then form a part of our history; and when, at the end of this century, our successors celebrate another Centennial Anniversary, we earnestly trust that they will be able to follow your example; and to commemorate the continued progress and increasing usefulness of the Society, and to do honor to the memory of its founders. In such a celebration, the Orator of this day will not probably be forgotten"; letter of M. King, Charles Fraser, and R. B. Gilchrist, in *Oration, Delivered before the Charleston Library Society, at Its First Centennial Anniversary, June 13th, 1848*, by James L. Petigru (Charleston, SC: J. B. Nixon, Printer, 1848), 3.

⁷¹ Brown Fellowship Society Records, 1794–1990, and Friendly Moralists Society Records, 1841–1856, both at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston; Friendly Association Records, 1853–1869, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

⁷² Neither the Charleston Library Society nor the Regenstein Library at Duke has records of the manuscripts' provenance. The minute book at Duke has a small label from Dellquest's Rare Book Shop in Los Angeles, and a penciled notation reads, "11/19/30 / Flowers Collection / Fr. / Dellquest's / \$25.00 / Boyd"; inside front cover, CDS-Duke. ("Flowers Collection" refers to Duke Library's George Washington Flowers Memorial Collection, and "Boyd" refers to

historian and library director W. K. Boyd.) Dellquest's opened in Los Angeles in 1922, founded by A. W. Dellquest Jr., who was formerly in business with his father in Augusta, Georgia; "Business Notes," *Publisher's Weekly*, July 8, 1922, p. 82. In Augusta, Dellquest's Book Shop specialized in books "relating to Southern States, Slavery, Civil War, Etc."; ad, *The Biblio*, July 1921, p. 24. It is possible that Simeon Beard, a member of the Clionians' dissolution committee in 1858 and a postwar resident of Augusta, was the original source of the minute book now held at Duke. Duke's collection includes at least one book previously owned by Beard: opposite a library label for the Flowers Collection, Beard's signature and the date 1862 appear on the flyleaf of W. H. Seat, *The Confederate States of America in Prophecy* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1861); see <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000778241>.

⁷³ Quoted entries are for September 25, 1851, December 16, 1852, July 6, 20, 1853, CDS-Duke; see also entry for February 28, 1849, and passim, CDS-CLS.

⁷⁴ Entries for December 17, 1848, May 22, December 2, 1850, CDS-CLS.

⁷⁵ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 424.

⁷⁶ William O. Weston's minutes refer to "the President's hat" as the signal that the time for debate was at an end; entries for April 14, May 11, August 3, October 12, 1853, February 1, April 25, 1854, CDS-Duke.

⁷⁷ Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, "Black Men's History: Toward a Gendered Perspective," in *Question of Manhood*, ed. Hine and Jenkins, 1:22.

⁷⁸ Entry for May 17, 1848, CDS-CLS.

⁷⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Bantam, 1989), 76.

⁸⁰ Entry for April 14, 1851, CDS-CLS.

⁸¹ Hine and Jenkins, "Black Men's History," 2.

⁸² Hine and Jenkins, “Black Men’s History,” 51.

⁸³ Entry for June 19, 1860, in Friendly Association Records, 1853–1869, South Carolina Historical Society; Conrad D. Ludeke, Compiled Military Service Records, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1780s–1917, Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC; Conrad D. Ludeke, Military Pension Application File, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773–1985, Record Group 15, National Archives. Ludeke is listed in Charleston city directories between 1875 and 1895, sometimes with a “c” (colored) designation, sometimes not, and the 1898 directory and subsequent directories list Julia Ludeke as his widow; directories are available on Ancestry.com. For samples of Ludeke’s handwriting—to demonstrate that the young free man in Charleston in the 1850s was the same person as the first lieutenant in the 90th New York Infantry—compare Friendly Association Records; and Conrad D. Ludeke to Mrs. William R. Hill, May 14, 1863, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁸⁴ Entry for February 28, 1849, CDS-CLS; *Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, Being the Regular Session, Commencing November 22, 1870* (Columbia, SC: John W. Denny, Printer to the State, 1870); *The Centenary Souvenir, Containing a History of Centenary Church, Charleston, and an Account of the Life and Labors of Rev. R. V. Lawrence, Father of the Pastor of Centenary Church* (Charleston, SC, 1885), xix–xlvi; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . 1887*, 84; Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers*, 40; Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center*, 52, 66.

⁸⁵ Entries for March 15, 1848, CDS-CLS; January 14, 1858, CDS-Duke; “The Freedmen’s Celebration,” *Christian Recorder*, July 29, 1865, p. 1; “School Directory,” *Loyal Georgian*, February 17, 1866, p. 3; Heather Andrews Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education*

in Slavery and Freedom (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 110, 113, 128–29; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the People of Georgia, Held in the City of Atlanta in the Months of December, 1867, and January, February and March, 1868, and Ordinances and Resolutions Adopted* (Augusta, GA: E. H. Pughe, 1868); “Washington,” *New York Tribune*, March 17, 1870, p. 1; “Appointments of South Carolina Conference,” *Christian Recorder*, March 6, 1873, p. 2; *Annual Report of the Comptroller General of the State of South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year Ending October 31, 1874, to the General Assembly*, in *Reports and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, at the Regular Session, 1874–’75* (Columbia, SC: Republican Printing Co., 1875), 200; “Rev. T. [sic] W. Beaird.” A photograph of Beaird’s tombstone in Pinelawn Cemetery, Aiken, SC, appears on www.findagrave.com. Many secondary sources confuse Simeon W. Beaird with Thomas P. Beard (1837–1918), an African American newspaper editor and politician in postwar Augusta.

⁸⁶ For direct references to “joyful meetings” or the “joyous day,” see entries for August 15, 29, 1849, January 1, 1850, January 1, 1851, CDS-CLS; January 10, 1853, February 16, 1857, CDS-Duke.

Cultural capital was created by the mingling of faiths and peoples who arrived on its shores, voluntarily and not: Barbadians, Brits, French Huguenots, Jews, and enslaved West Africans. Painter and Charleston personage extraordinaire Jonathan Green, whose work hangs in the Gibbes Museum of Art, is best known for his paintings of Gullah people—descendants of enslaved African Americans in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Peter Frank Edwards. "Corene," by artist Jonathan Green, hangs in Charleston's famed Gibbes Museum of Art. Peter Frank Edwards. Green did the visual design for a reimagined Porgy and Bess at Spoleto Festival USA in 2016, drawing extensively on vivid West African motifs. It's important to note that the green Sahara always would've turned back into a desert even without humans doing anything—that's just how Earth's orbit works, says geologist Jessica Tierney, an associate professor of geoscience at the University of Arizona. Moreover, according to Tierney, we don't necessarily need humans to explain the abruptness of the transition from green to desert. Instead, the culprits might be regular old vegetation feedbacks and changes in the amount of dust. "At first you have this slow change in the Earth's orbit," Tierney explains. "For such models it would be necessary to have some idea of how many people lived in the Sahara at the time, but Tierney is sure there were more people in the region than there are today, excepting coastal urban areas. Charleston is the largest city in the U.S. state of South Carolina, the county seat of Charleston County, and the principal city in the Charleston–North Charleston–Summerville Metropolitan Statistical Area. The city lies just south of the geographical midpoint of South Carolina's coastline on Charleston Harbor, an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean formed by the confluence of the Ashley, Cooper, and Wando rivers. Charleston had an estimated population of 137,566 as of latest U.S. Census estimate in 2019. The... View Antebellum Era Research Papers on Academia.edu for free." In the decades before the Civil War, Americans appealed to the nation's sacred religious and legal texts - the Bible and the Constitution - to address the slavery crisis. The ensuing political debates over slavery deepened interpreters' emphasis on historical readings of the sacred texts, and in turn, these readings began to highlight the unbridgeable historical distances that separated nineteenth-century Americans from biblical and founding pasts.