

**Abstract** This essay reconsiders the politics of African American literature after the Civil War by focusing on revenge as a response to the wrong of slavery. Though forgiveness dominates literary and historical scholarship, I assemble an archive of real and imagined instances of vengeance in black-authored texts from the period following formal emancipation to the dawn of the twentieth century: the petitions of the freedmen of Edisto Island, South Carolina; the minutes of the 1865 Virginia State Convention of Colored People; the narrative of the ex-slave Samuel Hall; and the *Colored American Magazine*'s coverage of the lynching of Louis Wright. Reading these works alongside Pauline E. Hopkins's *Winona* (1902), I show how her novel develops a philosophy of righteous revenge that reclaims the true meaning of justice in a democracy. Ultimately, this archive can help us not only to examine anew a neglected literary period but also to reimagine racial justice, then and now.

**Keywords** slavery, vengeance, Reconstruction, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, *Winona*

Slavery . . . made revenge and ambition one.  
—W. E. B. Du Bois, *John Brown* (1909)

Justice is just revenge by another name.  
—Thane Rosenbaum, *Payback* (2013)

In one of its first issues of 1864, published nearly two years before the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, the *Liberator* (Boston) granted the nation immunity for racial bondage, citing the authority of the formerly enslaved. “Instead of showing that spirit of revenge against their old masters which the oppressions they have suffered would naturally excite, they desire no retaliation,” the

abolitionist paper observed of black troops who at the time were waging war against Confederates. “Their rights once restored, they seem perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones.” Looking forward to this kind of freedom, the article went on to advance a policy brief: “We do not urge the claim of reparation for the past, only of justice for the future” (Whipple 1864). The subtle shift from “they” to “we,” from ethnographic reportage to democratic declaration, concealed an important truth: not everyone agreed with the meaning of justice implicit in this prescription. To be sure, for many African Americans, forgetting, if not forgiving, the wrong of slavery was the best course for moving forward after the Civil War. But for others, redressing bondage required recourse to the vindictive passions that the *Liberator* denied. Speaking of his service in the First South Carolina Volunteers, Sergeant Prince Rivers relished the opportunity to “look our old masters in de face” and “to run the bayonet through them” (*Report* 1863: 22). If the Civil War provided an occasion to avenge the immediate wrong of slavery, the postbellum endeavor to enfranchise African Americans constituted another battlefield, one on whose terrain the fundamental matters of black liberty and equality would continue to be fought. Understood in this context, Rivers’s wartime vow not to “lay down my gun till . . . our brethren all get their freedom” posits a parameter that the *Liberator* could not countenance (23). “Justice for the future” would demand “reparation for the past”—and, given that the nation’s commitment to African American citizenship was wavering well before Appomattox, exactly when the newly freed might lay down their guns was unclear.<sup>1</sup>

At least since 1865, however, the formal end of the Civil War and the subsequent period largely have been told as a story of the laying down of arms. In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln (1953: 8:333) emphasized mercy and forgiveness as the sentiments best suited for a “just” and “lasting peace.” Robert E. Lee’s surrender to Ulysses S. Grant a month later would be mythologized in similar terms. According to some accounts, the Confederate general offered his sword to his Union peer, who then returned it. Grant would later call this story “the purest romance” (quoted in Downs 2015: 8). Invented as it may be, the narrative performed a cultural function whose import David W. Blight has magisterially unfolded in his 2001 study *Race and Reunion*.

In the intervening years, historians and literary scholars have been rightly attuned to the complex interactions between the two keywords in Blight's title, attending to the ways the practical work of sectional reconciliation encouraged a forward-looking posture that threatened to "bypass" the struggle for abolition and black rights that was "the heart of the Civil War's meaning" (Blight 2001: 63).<sup>2</sup> This essay suggests that we would do well to ask after another keyword as we revisit and expand the shifting boundaries of Civil War and Reconstruction: *revenge*. Specifically, I develop a notion of *righteous revenge* that supports the "emancipationist memory" that Blight identifies as a counter-current to reconciliationist impulses (2). Cast in this light, revenge emerges as a tool for seeking and supporting the ends of racial justice to which the Civil War gave material form but from which the federal government subsequently retreated.

The various narratives that African Americans composed in the long Reconstruction era—from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth—constitute the historical site for this endeavor.<sup>3</sup> Viewed from one angle, this archive would seem to confirm the story the *Liberator* sought to foretell. When in his address at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition Booker T. Washington (1900: 168) presented African Americans as the most "unresentful people that the world has seen," he was at once shaping the contemporaneous discourse of black respectability and participating in a long-standing practice of differentiating between justice and revenge. As one twenty-first-century scholar of the law explains, while the US legal system insists that justice is "dispassionate" and revenge is "irrational" (Rosenbaum 2013: 2), the two are "not polar opposites but, rather, codependencies" (2). Indeed, "justice is just revenge by another name," asserts Thane Rosenbaum (13). To pretend otherwise is to invoke a "false distinction" that ultimately impoverishes the meaning of justice and its reach (27). For "vengeance is one of the ways . . . human beings demonstrate their commitment to moral order and just treatment," particularly when they find themselves excluded from the justice afforded by the supposedly neutral channels of the law (2).

For African Americans living in the period that W. E. B. Du Bois (1999: 15) would call a "second slavery," this condition was all too familiar. Yet any solution required more than simply exposing a "false distinction" between revenge and justice. As Washington's interdiction implies, the advent of formal freedom certainly did not afford

black Americans the unqualified liberty to express their sentiments about national wrongs. Historical fears of slave rebellion gave way to perceived dangers of armed African American soldiers (Litwack 1979: 66). Newly installed president Andrew Johnson tried to extinguish the latter specter when he took the occasion of an October 1865 military review of the District of Columbia Colored Troops to issue a reminder that “with the termination of the war . . . resentments should cease” and black Americans must “abstain from all . . . revengeful feelings” (*South Carolina Leader* 1865). Far from avoiding conflict, the postwar policies that Johnson championed facilitated the unequal expression of racial grievance that would constitute one of the less obvious but nonetheless critical points of the color line. Whereas black Americans had to appear “unresentful,” ex-Confederates claimed the language of vengeance to support their demands for so-called justice.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere did this distortion play out more fully than in the practice of lynching, which white supremacists defended as punishment for accusations of “savage” behavior like rape. Inverting this rhetorical association, African Americans exposed the “vengeance of the mob” (Miller 1899) as the truly “barbarous, savage and illegal work” (*Richmond [Virginia] Planet* 1897). But calls for the “supremacy of the law,” as Howard University professor Kelly Miller put it in 1899, were accompanied by an acute awareness of the exclusions of the justice system and the attendant doubt about that domain as a path for restitution. Giving voice to this reality, a black weekly wondered aloud about the options available “when redress for [their] wrongs . . . seem[s] impossible”; pursuing one prospect, the paper envisioned aggrieved members of the race “grasping the sword . . . and sallying forth to be revenged on . . . savage tyrants” (*Richmond [Virginia] Planet* 1897). The question, then, was how to decry the hateful “spirit of revenge” (Douglass 1999: 678) that threatened African Americans while not abandoning the possibility that vengeance might align with a “spirit of justice” that could support the survival and even flourishing of black life (*Richmond [Virginia] Planet* 1897).

Mining this tension, I explore how righteous revenge served some African Americans as a way to conceive their relationship to the social world after emancipation and to navigate their political and legal position within it.<sup>5</sup> In this, freed black men and women anticipated what twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophers have identified as the “virtues of vengeance” (French 2001), the way revenge functions as

an affirmation of self-respect and a testimony to abiding wrongs. The form this testimony took varied. Revenge could constitute a personal—and violent—confrontation with an oppressor. More frequently, it functioned, alongside bitterness and resentment, as a cultural language, one of the “ugly feelings” of Reconstruction (Ngai 2005): threatening to stage such a confrontation, refusing to forgive, or even recalling past crimes in the present constituted acts of revenge that were also claims to racial justice, though not always in the material sense.

Indeed, to theorize righteous revenge was necessarily to engage in fantasy, to use the imagination both to grapple with history and to attempt to reshape it.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, I devote considerable attention to Pauline E. Hopkins’s neglected 1902 novel *Winona*. Set in the antebellum United States, though clearly speaking to the era of Jim Crow, Hopkins’s text endows the logic of revenge with a human texture in the character of Judah, who responds to the legal deprivations of segregation by taking justice into his own hands and wreaking vengeance on his oppressors. Serialized in Hopkins’s *Colored American Magazine*, a publication that regularly chronicled the very real wrongs black citizens faced, the novel uses its protagonist to chart alternative paths for securing racial justice in a climate where such an end often seemed impossible. Giving voice to the resentment that Washington prohibited, *Winona* stands as a powerful expression of the more muted, though no less felt appeals to revenge on display in a range of African American writing in the period following formal emancipation: the petitions of the free yet disenfranchised men of Edisto Island, South Carolina; the minutes of the 1865 Virginia State Convention of Colored People; the narrative of the ex-slave Samuel Hall; and the *Colored American Magazine*’s coverage of the lynching of Louis Wright. Read in dialogue with these intertexts and contexts, *Winona* fashions a template for revolutionary political action for those perpetually denied liberty and equality.

Ultimately, this archive constitutes a collective rethinking of the enduring emphasis on justice in African American culture (see, for example, English 2013 and Ernest 2009). If “vengeance is the original meaning of justice” (Solomon 2000: 252), then the writings of Hopkins and other authors and activists open a window into the ways African Americans sought to recover this concept at a particularly perilous historical moment. Amid the unraveling of Reconstruction, these figures revealed what revenge could make possible if unrestrained from

white supremacist principles; they reconstructed its meaning in an effort to resist enervation of the radical aims of the Civil War. Pointing at once to the limits of racial justice in the law and to a path that could exceed those boundaries, revenge became a way to affirm the true meaning of justice and keep alive the possibility of an inclusive democracy.

### Representing Revenge

The freedmen who gathered in Lyceum Hall in Alexandria, Virginia, were prepared to put slavery behind them. Assembling in August 1865, four months after Lee's surrender, the delegates to the Virginia Colored State Convention began the task of creating an interracial democracy with the de rigueur reminder that they bore "no ill-will" toward their "former oppressors," that they wanted to "forgive and forget the past" (*Liberty, and Equality before the Law* 1865: 9). The men trained their sights instead on laying claim to the rights—the franchise in particular—guaranteed to them by the Declaration of Independence and the preamble to the Constitution. Yet, achieving such an end required recalling the wrongs of slavery, some of which scarcely seemed behind them. Lewis Scott, who traveled more than two hundred miles from a county near Virginia's border with North Carolina, eloquently explained the matter: "We will forget and forgive—forgive all those who have treated us as the beasts of the field, but while we forget all the innumerable wrongs which our people have endured for hundreds of years past, let our oppressors remember that we are now free, and if they would have bygones be bygones they must treat us as kindly as it is our desire and intention to treat them" (11). The "but" and "if" that punctuate Scott's statement suggest the complex rhetorical situation of black conventions like this one. Delegates were fearful of any appearance of bitterness, as one newspaper report would characterize the meeting (*Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser* 1865), and they also worried about their own personal safety, as whites threatened many representatives. In light of these circumstances, it is not hard to understand why delegates "cultivated" a "tone of moderation" (Litwack 1979: 504). Embracing "deadly hate" and a "spirit of revenge"—phrases that Frederick Douglass (1999: 678) associated with Confederate resentment at an 1883 convention—

seemed “counterproductive” for African Americans, at least strategically if not also conceptually (see also Blair 2014: 261).

Still, statements such as Scott’s point to the impossibility of any easy forgetting and forgiving, and they raise an even more profound concern: why forgive in the first place? Recent work in moral and political philosophy contemplates this question. In comparison with forgiveness, revenge has long suffered a bad reputation, but philosophers, along with legal scholars, have begun to reassess this state of affairs. As Thomas Brudholm (2008: 2) puts it, “To be able to forgive or forget is generally taken to be morally and therapeutically superior to harboring resentment and other ‘negative’ emotions” like bitterness. But “there are circumstances in which forgiving is a temptation, a promise of relief that might be morally dubious. Indeed, the refusal to forgive may represent the more demanding moral accomplishment.” For Brudholm, in fact, one of the signal purposes of this posture is to “point to the reality of existing conflict and discord” (48).

The emancipated slaves of Edisto Island expressly refused to accept such a reality. When in October 1865 General Oliver Otis Howard announced that the land allotted to them under General William Sherman’s Special Field Order 15 would be returned to the whites who once claimed them as property, he encouraged the freedmen to “lay aside their bitter feelings, and to become reconciled to their old masters” (quoted in Foner 2005: 77). They declined. A committee of three explained why:

The man who tied me to a tree & gave me 39 lashes & who stripped and flogged my mother & my sister & who will not let me stay In His empty Hut except I will do His planting & be Satisfied with His price & who combines with others to keep away land from me well knowing I would not Have any thing to do with Him If I Had land of my own.—that man, I cannot well forgive. (Bram, Moultrie, and Sampson 2008: 440–41)

In his reply, Howard (2008: 441) affirmed that the freedpeople “are right *in wanting homesteads*.” But he quickly moved on to a morality lesson, reminding this cohort that the “duty of forgiveness is plain and simple.” “Forgive as we hope to be forgiven of Him who governs all things,” Howard admonished.

Understanding this duty differently, other African Americans had already translated the refusal to forgive into a more physical form.

Private Grimm Smith, of the Massachusetts 54th, burst into his mistress's Charleston, South Carolina, home. Brandishing his gun, he threatened, "You damned bitch, I will kill you" (quoted in Egerton 2014: 47). William Harris and a group of women who had suffered a "most unmerciful whipping" while they were enslaved treated their master to the same when he was captured by Union troops. "Bringing the blood from his loins at every stroke," Harris would not let his former owner forget "days gone by." The women similarly served him a reminder "that they were no longer his." All their former owner could do was beg for leniency (Hatton 1864).

Apparent confirmation of Solomon Northup's (2012: 164) prophecy in 1853 of a "terrible day of vengeance, when the master in his turn will cry in vain for mercy," such scenes actually constitute a minority report, as historians of the Civil War era repeatedly remark. "Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of slavery's fitful demise," Carole Emberton (2013: 81) explains, "is the surprising lack of interest among freedpeople in exacting some kind of retribution from their old masters for the physical violence they had endured" (see also Blair 2014: 261; and Egerton 2014: 67). Still, if relatively few ex-slaves took justice into their own hands, as in these wartime episodes, the post-bellum scenes from Alexandria and Edisto Island indicate that freedpeople's refusal of a personal, violent vengeance was not necessarily a form of forgiveness. Adapting Saidiya V. Hartman's (1997: 8) classic argument about the difficulty of differentiating between submission and resistance in the enslaved person's daily performances, we might remark that discerning between *forgiveness* and *revenge* among former slaves is no easy interpretive task. And this is a truth that obtains most powerfully in an archive that historical studies tend to leave underexplored: African American narratives and novels published in the wake of war.

Consider the case of Samuel Hall. Shortly after enlisting in the Union army, Hall confronted his master in Tennessee. As *47 Years a Slave* (Hall and Elder 1912) recounts it, Hall "showed" the white man the marks of the abuse he suffered at his hands. Pointing to "the scar on his neck where" his owner "had almost succeeded in making a fatal cut," Hall then "delivered himself of a few thoughts that were not calculated to ease" his former master's "peace of mind." Hall's fellow soldiers urged him on, encouraging him to "beat the man's brains out" (24). But Hall demanded only that the man release his wife and



children, and “load up his wagon” with food to facilitate their travel “over into the union lines” (25).

Revenge or mercy: Hall’s narrative is tantalizingly, perhaps even purposefully ambiguous about the disposition this scene depicts. The drama of the passage lies in the power Hall possesses, both over his enslaver and over his fellow soldiers. In one of the more rhetorically ornate sentences in his memoir, he indulges in a fantasy of revenge—its “undreamed of spectacular character.” This line appears just after the equally gripping report that his master’s wife “in a frenzy of terror begged for mercy” (24). In relenting, does Hall choose a path different from William Harris, keeping his revenge the stuff of dreams? Or does his demand for the restoration of his family and sustenance for the journey represent a species of vengeance—something like justice, both economic and personal?

Hall is one of many freedpeople who published narratives of their lives in slavery after legal emancipation. In recounting this scene in the first decades of the twentieth century, fantasizing about a real opportunity for violent retribution not taken, the writer enacts what might be termed *representational revenge*. For Hall’s tale, by virtue of its postbellum publication date, functions as a “‘weapon’ against the injustice of forgetfulness and nonacknowledgment” (Brudholm 2008: 123). Understood temporally, that is, revenge does more than underscore “conflict” in the present (48). It also keeps past wrongs alive (Ignatieff 1996: 121; Tillet 2012: 90).

But if *47 Years a Slave* bears witness to the legacy of racial bondage, dwelling on the particular nature of this representational act only leads to a further complication, for this scene of near revenge is one that Hall narrates indirectly. The author’s meditation on whether to murder his master appears in the third-person portion of the text, a prefatory section that he composes in coordination with his white collaborator and editor, Orville Elder. Perhaps this structural detail is a strategic self-fashioning driven by Hall’s desire for respectability; wanting to distance himself from any association with racial vindictiveness, he leaves this part of his tale to his partner. And yet, the latter, first-person section of the text reveals that the author is hardly reticent to engage in controversial racial critique. In a fiery passage that evokes David Walker’s *Appeal*, he assails those white Americans who “want the Negro problem solved” by reminding them of their “inhuman treatment toward my people.” Adopting a direct address, Hall

(Hall and Elder 1912: 38) declares, “your people” treated “my people” “like dogs, yes even placed them lower than a dog.” “Suppose they had begun solving this years sooner and remembered that he was flesh and blood the same as you.” This is hardly the stuff of reconciliation and reunion (see Schwalm 2009: 260).

It therefore is possible to understand Hall’s revenge fantasy as a strategic choice of a different sort. What if, in having Elder narrate this anecdote, Hall issues a displaced threat? As the passage makes clear, he did not seek physical revenge; Hall hears the cries for “mercy” issued by his master’s wife. But if “to be merciful is to treat a person less harshly” than one has a “right” to do (Murphy and Hampton 1988: 20), in this excerpt Hall wields a rhetorical double-edged sword. Recounting this decision in the space of his narrative—indeed, replaying it through the representational medium of the white Elder—Hall repeats the drama of the decision, as if to imply that he retains the right to make a different choice. Revenge is deferred and redirected but perhaps not finally denied.

With its manifold interpretive complexities, this *mise-en-scène* from *47 Years a Slave* underscores the ways that African American literature of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries invites a reconsideration of some of the foundational premises of historical accounts of Reconstruction.<sup>7</sup> It may be the case that former slaves had little time for the kind of revenge that characterized ex-Confederate discourse. And freedpeople surely sought enfranchisement through political and legal channels. But neither activity required them to repudiate revenge in the senses that Hall’s narrative makes available. To the contrary, representing revenge was one part of the process of gaining a foothold as a citizen in the Reconstruction-era nation and articulating claims to one’s rights more generally. As a representational project that responded to historical reality by drawing on the resources of fantasy, revenge functioned both to describe the conditions of black life in the age of *de jure* discrimination and to envision a way to redress these circumstances.

### Revenge, Represented

This is the imaginative task of Pauline E. Hopkins’s novel *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest*. Serialized in the *Colored American Magazine* (CAM) in 1902 (see fig. 1) but set in the 1850s,



**Figure 1** Cover of the May 1902 *Colored American Magazine*, in which the first installment of *Winona* appears. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard University, Washington, DC

*Winona* plays with history in its portrait of the embittered Judah, who brings Samuel Hall's rage into full relief. The child of a runaway slave woman, Judah is raised in freedom among the Seneca of western New York with his adopted sister, Winona. But in the main action of the novel, Judah is recaptured and, in a way that recalls Douglass's famous formula from his 1845 narrative, made into a slave. As Hopkins (1988: 328) describes this period, the "merciless lash was engraved on his heart in the bleeding stripes that called for vengeance."

Hopkins first imagined her black avenger in a play that she began to compose decades earlier but never staged. This first iteration follows the enslaved Zach, who lives with his half-sister, Winnie. The daughter of the deceased Colonel Carlingford, Winnie has been made a captive and her father's estate stolen. Zach communicates with the

spirit of Carlingford in the play, and he vows to track down those who perpetrated this wrong. Referring to one of his targets, Zach declares, “My vengeance would pursue him beyond the grave.” The play concludes after Zach confronts the criminals. In the final line, he reports to Carlingford’s ghost that in seeking revenge, “I realize all my boyish hopes” (Hopkins Papers, Plays, Peculiar Sam, typewritten file, “Untitled play”). Though Zach endures a bondage like Douglass, this conclusion suggests that his situation resonates even more with that of Hamlet. Shakespeare’s tragic figure was portrayed on the nineteenth-century American stage by one of Hopkins’s favorite actors, Edwin Booth (Brown 2008: 88). Praised as the “greatest Hamlet that ever trod the boards” (*Freeman* 1893), Booth was particularly talented at portraying the dilatory nature of the Danish prince’s bid to avenge his father’s murder (*Boston Daily Advertiser* 1870). In creating Zach, then, Hopkins revised an essential part of her beloved actor’s signature role. Hearing and heeding the ghost’s command, Zach does what Hamlet cannot: he “sweep[s] to my revenge” (Shakespeare 2016: 1.5.31).

With *Winona*, Hopkins transforms Zach into Judah and translates her play into the novel form in which she was successfully working in the early 1900s, yet she compromises none of the drama. Indeed, in a suspenseful sequence that stretches across chapters and issues of the *CAM*, she gives her male lead a chance to avenge his wrongs. Judah confronts Bill Thomson, the man who enslaved him, and takes him as his prisoner. Staring down the barrel of Judah’s rifle, Thomson exclaims, “It’s murder to kill a man with his hands up!” (Hopkins 1988: 415). Unaffected and displaying a “calm, dispassionate smile” (415), Judah refuses to yield: “He judged it a righteous duty to condemn him to death” (416). The only mercy Judah extends is a choice of how Thomson will die: through a bullet or from a fall off the cliff. Thomson chooses the latter, and the chapter ends with “a splash of water—silence” (416). Hopkins thus concludes this installment of *Winona*. When she returns to the narrative in the next issue of the *CAM*, she offers the following reflection, as if deliberating with her readers about what to make of this character: “Judged by the ordinary eye Judah’s nature was horrible, but it was the natural outcome . . . of the ‘system’ as practiced upon the black race. He felt neither remorse nor commiseration for the deed just committed. To him it was his only chance of redress for . . . personal wrongs” (417–18).

If Hamlet provides a prototype for Zach, Shylock stands as a source for Judah; anti-Semitism in Shakespeare becomes antiblackness in Hopkins. Indeed, Hopkins's sense that her character's "horrible nature" is the result of racial bondage—the "system" perpetrated against blacks by whites—recalls Shylock's assertion in *The Merchant of Venice* that his vindictiveness is simply a response to the oppression he endures at the hands of the supposedly more virtuous Christians. As he articulates his position, "The villainy you teach me I will execute" (Shakespeare 2000: 3.1.67–68); possessing "hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions" (3.1.56–57), Jews are as human as Christians in every way. And like Christians, they will respond to the injuries they receive: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? . . . If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" (3.1.60–61, 62–63). In her novel, Hopkins (1988: 417) endows her male character with a similar sympathy. Admitting that Judah is a "morbid soul" and perhaps even fearing the course such an individual may pursue, Hopkins nonetheless entreats readers to consider the context that created him. To understand Judah is to adopt an alternative standard of evaluation—not the "ordinary eye." In this, Hopkins echoes Harriet Jacobs's (2001: 48) plea in her 1861 narrative that the slave woman "ought not to be judged by the same standard as others." Where Jacobs aims to forge solidarity between enslaved women and white women of the North in order to eradicate bondage, Hopkins crafts an "aggressively active black male hero" to advance a different conception of racial justice in the neoslavery of Jim Crow (Carby 1987: 154).<sup>8</sup>

As Hopkins (1988: 417) puts it, Judah's revenge constitutes "simple justice." This phrase anticipates what philosophers have identified as one of the virtues of vengeance: it asserts "self-respect" in the face of wrongdoing.<sup>9</sup> As Jeffrie Murphy has argued, revenge is "neither irrational nor immoral." Rather, it is a "strategy designed to see (and to let the victim see) that people get their just deserts" (Murphy and Hampton 1988: 95). It is such a balance that Shylock seeks but is denied and Hall secures via the rhetorical space of his narrative. Drawing these two voices together across the centuries and cultures that separate them, Hopkins crafts a heroic avenger for the drama that African Americans were living in the age of Jim Crow. If, as Hall asserts, you treat "my people" "like dogs, yes even placed them lower than a dog," then what other response can one expect than the symmetry subtending Shylock's question: "if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

## WINONA.\*

A TALE OF NEGRO LIFE IN THE SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST.

PAULINE E. HOPKINS.

## SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS I. TO XV.

About 1840 a white man appeared in Buffalo, N. Y., and joined the fortune with the Indian tribes of that section, finally becoming their chief with the name of White Eagle, and making his home on an island in Lake Erie.

Buffalo was the last and most important station of the underground railroad, and White Eagle was a handsome slave girl whose chief lover was a fugitive, leaving him a daughter, Winona. Another fugitive died, leaving a male child whom the chief adopted, by the name of Judah. The children passed their childhood in hunting, fishing and attending the public schools.

In 1862 Warren Maxwell, an Englishman, came to America for his law firm in search of the heir to the Carlingford estates, which were left without an heir, the right ultimately having gone to America to escape a charge of murder. Maxwell arrives in Buffalo, in search of a man and takes a steamer trip to Mr. James Maybree. In the night Winona and Judah bring the news that White Eagle has shot himself. The two men return to the island with the children; find the chief dead, and the vessel is captured by unknown parties. The children are friendless; Maxwell is greatly interested in them, and proposes taking them back to England with him. He leaves Buffalo for a few weeks, and upon his return finds that the children have been absent by their mother's design under the Fugitive Slave Act, and taken to Missouri.

Maxwell learns from the plantation of Colonel Vines, still searching for heirs to the Carlingford estates, on which Vines has a distant claim, and there he finds Winona and Judah. Judah visits him by night, and tells of the cruelties he has suffered. Vines and he agree to be taken to St. Louis the next week and sell them on auction.

While waiting their arrival Maxwell meets Mr. Maybree, and learns that he is bound for Kansas to assist the Free Soilers in swinging Kansas into the lot of freedom, and asks his advice.

Maxwell proposes a voyage by the underground railroad to John Brown's camp in Kansas. The fugitives after escape from Maybree gain the shelter of Pardon Seward's cabin, a station of the underground railroad, in the morning they start for John Brown's camp, where they leave Mr. Maybree, Winona and Judah. Maxwell and Seward start on the same trip to Kansas. The next night the two men are captured by the soldiers of the Government. Seward is killed and Maxwell made prisoner.

Maxwell is taken from the hands of Colonel Vines, tried, and sentenced to be hanged, after one year in the penitentiary for holding slaves to escape. Disposed of as a boy, Winona is thrown into jail as a runaway slave, and Vines Maxwell's whoremaster for John Brown's men, who rescue him from his perilous position.

A steamer bound for St. Louis with great slaughter, by Winona, disappears at sea, except the woman and rescued Maxwell, who is then taken to the Brown camp and hidden in the hills.

Soon after this the anti-slavery men are attacked by the Rangers, who set fire to the camp. Seward, Colonel Vines is killed; Thomson is captured by Judah, who compels him to leap to death from a high cliff to the bed of the Foxswatimie River.

## CHAPTER XV. (Concluded).

A superb, masterful smile played over the ebony visage of the now solitary figure upon the mountainside. In his face shone a glitter of the untamable torrid ferocity of his tribe not

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pleasing to see. The first act in his bold and sagacious plans was successful; once free, it only remained for him to carry them out with the same inexorable energy.

The upraised hands and straining eyeballs, rigid and stonelike, the gaping, bloodless lips, the muttered curse—all had passed from sight like an unpleasant dream. Judah, intently listening to the ominous thud, thud, thud, of that falling body, the swish of displaced bushes, and the rattle of gravel and stones, was not moved from the stoicism of his manner, save in the fearful smile that still played over his features. Then, as he listened, there came a last outcry, a scream that startled all nature and awoke echo after echo along the hillside—a scream like no sound in earth or heaven—unrumored and appalling. He made a step forward to the brink and looked over and then drew back.

A while he leaned upon his gun in meditation. He was a morbid soul preying upon its recollection, without the gift of varied experience; it was not strange that vengeance seemed to him earth's only blessing. To him his recent act was one of simple justice. Hate, impotent hate, had consumed his young heart for two years. An eye for an eye was a doctrine that commended itself more and more to him as he viewed the Negro's condition in life, and beheld the horrors of the system under which he lived.

Judged by the ordinary eye Judah's nature was horrible, but it was the natural outcome or growth of the "system" as practiced upon the black race. He felt neither remorse nor commiseration for the deed just committed. To him it was his only chance of redress for the personal wrongs inflicted upon Winona and himself by the strong, aggressive race holding them in unlawful bondage. Time and place were

**Figure 2** The concluding passages of chapter 15 of *Winona*, where the narrator meditates on Judah's "act" of "simple justice." *Colored American Magazine*, October 1902. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard University, Washington, DC

The particular strategy black Americans should adopt in order to respond to these wrongs was a pressing concern when *Winona* was serialized. Whether or not *CAM* readers had Shylock in mind,<sup>10</sup> they surely would have heard in Judah's demand for "simple justice" an echo of Robert W. Carter's (1902) "Suggestive Thoughts on the Race Question," which employs that very phrase (see figs. 2 and 3). Appearing after the conclusion of the novel, Carter's article recounts the repeated calls for equality made by black Americans: "In the name of law and order, we have appealed to the courts. . . . In the name of justice, we have made known our grievances in a petition to Congress and the Supreme Court!" But "our wrongs have not been righted." To deal with this reality, Carter recommends a strategy of direct democratic action, an appeal to public sentiment that recalls Jacobs's plea. "We will henceforth come before the people," he avers and promises unceasing action: "we shall continue to so agitate until we receive simple justice"

have passed resolutions condemning the lawlessness and wrongs perpetrated upon the Negro race by white ruling classes in the South, and we shall continue to so agitate until we receive simple justice which is all we ask. In the name of law and order we have appealed to the courts for redress, but have received no favorable reply. In the name of justice we have made known our grievances in a petition to Congress and the Supreme Court of the United States! Yet our wrongs have not been righted, but injustice and tyranny is practiced against us by a race of free people, living under the one flag and governed by the same Constitution.

Therefore, in the name of Christianity and civilization, we will henceforth come before the people. For yet among the Anglo-Saxon race the Negro has friends as of old. He had them when the National Convention was forming the Constitution; he had them in the dark and gloomy days of slavery; in the Thirty-ninth Congress they stood as a "Gibraltar" defending his rights, and are no less firm today.

To these, therefore, we will unfold our message of dissatisfaction from the pulpits, from newspapers of the Afro-American people, and from the public platform. For they will give us their sympathy when we are driven by lead from the ballot box, and will scorn with us the laws upholding this outrage. They will drop for us the sympathetic tear when our fellow-man is lynched without due process of law and burned at the stake without Christian consideration. With us they will bow their head in shame when they behold the "Jim Crow Cars" wherein as a people we are compelled to ride.

Will not the learned editor of the New York Journal turn his eloquent columns against these great wrongs? Or will he, with others, continue to dwell upon the thought of "Negro inferiority," his "passive submission to authority" and the idea that his primitive stock is too near his savage state and therefore an objection to his stay

in the South? But it is not a passive submission to authority on the Negro's part! It is committing himself to circumstances over which at present he has no control. But whether moral or immoral, whether savage or civilized, ignorant or educated, the Negro is not wanted in the South, and he is therefore invited to return to Africa, as a healing medicine to the Negro question, as they have determined that he cannot rise in this country to the political and civil equal of the white man.

But could the Negro rise to the fullness of manhood in Africa? Would he reach the height of civil and political liberty in the Philippine or in the Sandwich Islands? Could he accomplish in Cuba that which they say he can never achieve in America? In Africa he will find the soil red with British and Dutch blood, who were late in war for the possession, and the better right than the other, to the black man's land. In the Sandwich Islands he will find a white President instead of the former dark skinned Queen. In the Philippines he will find the North American shooting to death the natives, and devastating his home to get full possession of the soil. In Cuba the American prejudice would be harder to bear than during the late Spanish rule. But with all of these facts looking us square in the face, we are yet persuaded to cast our lot in Africa, the "land of beauty, fertility and comfort," to avoid "white competition and no longer be led by false hopes of rivalry, or of social identification with the white race."

But when and where did the Negro seek social identification with the white race? The Negro never enters or seeks to enter the dining room of any gentleman without an invitation. We are aware that the Washington-Roosevelt dinner caused much useless comment, mostly from Southern people, who think and talk as do Senator Morgan, yet we entertain the opinion that Mr. Washington was there only by the unexpected invitation of President Roosevelt.

**Figure 3** Robert W. Carter calls for "simple justice" in his *Colored American Magazine* essay "Suggestive Thoughts on the Race Question," which appears pages after the final lines of *Winona*. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard University, Washington, DC

(1902: 444). This proposal notwithstanding, the essay raises a question that it does not resolve: Will the channels of formal politics and legal petition lead to the "simple justice" that Carter seeks? The essay never overtly engages one of the most suggestive thoughts on the race question: are Judah's tactics what is needed at present?

This intertextual resonance opens a number of ideas. What would it mean to do "simple justice" within the political and legal structures of Jim Crow America? Given the way state-sanctioned forces systematically suppressed the rights of black Americans, do Judah's methods belong in the realm of the extralegal and extrapolitical? Or do they represent a reworking of these very structures from within?

The portrait of Judah that the novel paints points toward the latter. Ebenezer Maybee, a white character who owns a hotel on Grand Island, New York, recounts that Judah was trained by his adoptive father "to speak like a senator." Appearing in a passage where Maybee

also refers to Judah as an “Injun-nigger” (Hopkins 1988: 310), this characterization betrays a perverse fondness that repeats Thomas Jefferson’s praise of the indigenous Americans whose annihilation he coolly documented. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), a text Hopkins knew, the third president held up the Indian chief Logan as an example of “eminence in oratory” (Jefferson 1984b: 188). The evidence that *Notes* offers in support of this claim is a speech that Logan composed in response to the attack he suffered at the hands of a white settler who murdered Logan’s family in an erroneous attempt to avenge an assault perpetrated by another tribe. Describing the violence he inaugurated in reply to this wrong, Logan justifies his actions in a passage that Jefferson quotes: “This called on me for revenge. I have sought it: I have killed many: I have fully glutted my vengeance” (189). While Jefferson admires Logan’s account, the prospect of enslaved Africans pursuing a similar course shakes him to the core. Contemplating “whether the slave may not as justifiably take a little from one, who has taken all from him, as he may slay one who would slay him” leads Jefferson to his various claims about black inferiority and ultimately allows him to affirm his call for colonization (269). In short, Jefferson’s comparative case studies of revenge follow the pattern of his comparative racialization more generally: American Indians may be admired, but black Americans must be reviled.

Within nineteenth-century African American culture, the trope of Indian vengeance also functioned as a point of contrast, albeit to different ends. Anna Julia Cooper (1988: 194), a contemporary of Hopkins’s, supported her case that the African American “has never once shown any general disposition to arise in his might and deluge this country with blood or desolate it with burning, as he might have done,” by remarking that native peoples have “presented an unbroken front of hostility” to the agents of colonialism. Offering a case in point for the “simultaneous desire and repulsion” engendered by the figure of the Indian in American culture (Deloria 1998: 3), Cooper reasons, “It *may* be nobler to perish redhanded, to kill as many as your battle axe holds out to hack and then fall with an exultant yell and savage grin of fiendish delight on the huge pile of bloody corpses. . . . I don’t know” (1988: 195).

Where Cooper uses the caricature of Indian barbarity to chart an alternative course for black resistance—one for which she seems almost to yearn—Hopkins deploys the trope to establish a coalition between Indian and black Americans. With its references to the



Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, and more subtle allusions to the manifold dispossessions that native Americans suffered throughout the era—from the 1830 Indian Removal Act animating the text’s antebellum plot to the 1887 Dawes Act that is part of the novel’s contemporaneous context (Brown 2008: 368–71)—*Winona* highlights the “shared history” of abuse that both groups endured (O’Brien 2009: 252). Judah stands as the literary embodiment of these collective wrongs and accordingly portends an apocalyptic redress. As a black man who can “speak like a senator” *and* avenge like an Indian, if you will, he is Jefferson’s American nightmare. Which is to say, he is Cooper’s (repressed) American dream.

### Revenge, Unrestrained

Hopkins’s fictional form gives her a freedom to imagine the black avenger that Cooper, much like the men of the convention in Alexandria, lacked. Bringing together the oratorical powers of a figure like Lewis Scott and the physical resistance associated with Judah’s American Indian heritage, Hopkins articulates her race’s “innumerable wrongs” without the requisite rhetorical moderation. In doing so, she imagines the alternative paths that might be needed to realize the rights the Virginia delegates sought and paves the way for an agitation more radical than the one Robert Carter recommended in his consideration of black freedom after formal emancipation. With *Winona*, simply put, Hopkins represents revenge unrestrained.

Holding this project in mind, we might read Judah as the novel’s attempt to fashion a militant postbellum politician who is righteously vindictive—a *black* John Brown who could lay claim to the rights African Americans deserved.<sup>11</sup> The modifier in that last sentence is no rhetorical indulgence; it points to a necessary distinction. For the *white* John Brown also appears in *Winona*. When Judah makes a first attempt to kill Thomson earlier in the novel, Brown enters the scene. The narrator explains that Brown

threw himself on the enraged black and stayed his hand. . . .

“Why stay my hand? Vengeance is sweet,” replied Judah, his dark, glowing eyes fixed in a threatening gaze upon his foe bound and helpless at his feet.

“There is a time for everything, my son. Stay thy hand and fear not; vengeance is mine,” said John Brown. (Hopkins 1988: 394)

This exchange signifies on Romans 12:19: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” Although the Biblical teaching presented here often is taken as a prohibition against revenge, this is not necessarily the case. Understood from another angle, this line issues “a *promise* of vengeance”—but not one to be realized by humans (Murphy and Hampton 1988: 98n13). It is intriguing, then, that Hopkins has Brown claim that “vengeance is *mine*,” without completing the injunction from Romans. This elision complicates the question of the proper channel of revenge. Is Brown here usurping a power that is outside of his domain, as Romans would seem to suggest? Or is he acting as a divine agent?<sup>12</sup>

This maneuver—between leaving vengeance to God or pursuing it—appears frequently in African American meditations on revenge. For instance, in “The ‘Jim-Crow Car’ in Washington,” an essay on the racialization of rail travel, the *CAM* surveys the “general feeling of humiliation” experienced by black passengers forced to occupy segregated cars. Noting that “there are often bitter denunciations . . . and mutual condolences” articulated within these spaces, the article nonetheless asserts that African American riders realize their “helplessness”: “The only expressed hope heard is that somehow ‘God is goin’ to stop it.’” The essay’s conclusion gives this divine appeal a particular shape. In the final lines, a black female passenger imagines a train collision and remarks that the “white people” “done put us here in front so we’ll be killed first.” She then has a second thought: “But maybe God will kill the ‘hind people first after all” (Deekun 1902: 302). According to this fantasy, the segregated seating structure, intended to maintain white supremacy, might actually contribute to its undoing.

Considered from the vantage point of its cutting conclusion, “The ‘Jim-Crow Car’ in Washington” hints at the sort of destruction conventionally associated with an Old Testament divinity. Hopkins gives her male protagonist a name that indexes this theological heritage—Judah was one of the Israelite leaders (Brown 2008: 375)—and she invests in him the power to fulfill what the woman in the Jim Crow car desires of her God.<sup>13</sup> In the passage discussed above, Judah affirms his divine mission when he replies to John Brown: “I am the Lord’s instrument to kill this man” (Hopkins 1988: 394). This language comes from the historical Brown himself, who defended his antislavery battles by explaining that the Lord “used me as an instrument” (Sanborn 1885: 259). For Brown, such a sanction mattered because it justified his campaign as something other than an attempt to “gratify any

personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit” (565).<sup>14</sup> When she adapts this phrase for Judah, however, Hopkins collapses the distinction. She emphasizes that Judah deploys revenge to redress “personal wrongs” (Hopkins 1988: 418)—a phrase that would cast doubt on his crusade—but also offers him divine authority in order to eliminate any question about the justness of his efforts (“I am the Lord’s instrument”). Divine retribution seems firmly in the hand of humans; it is their “righteous duty” (416).

In Hopkins’s America, this theological quandary about the proper channel for revenge was inextricable from the problem of racial representation that animates this exchange and separates John Brown from Judah, the white avenger from the black avenger. In other words, through this scene, Hopkins also draws our attention to the *racialized* limits of representing revenge. Writing about Brown a few years later, W. E. B. Du Bois (2007b: 38) would highlight the abolitionist’s commitment to interracial cooperation, the “plane of perfect equality” on which he worked. By contrast, Hopkins creates an antagonism between Judah and John Brown that has its formal embodiment in their line-by-line exchange excerpted above. In doing so, she suggests how difficult it was to portray an African American character who is righteously vindictive already in the nineteenth century.

Readers of the *CAM* would have had little difficulty grasping the material stakes of this aesthetic problem. “Recent Developments in the ‘Land of the Free,’” a nonfiction piece published alongside *Winona*, announced that an African American minstrel performer had been lynched while on tour in Missouri. According to a newspaper report on which the *CAM* appears to draw, a group of young white men hurled snowballs at Louis Wright as he walked the streets of New Madrid before his evening performance in early February. Wright apparently used “vile epithets” in reply—and this was a response the whites could not abide. The group attacked the actor after his show, crying, “Whip the nigger,” as they rushed the stage (*Sun* 1902).<sup>15</sup> Wright, who was armed, fired a shot into the gang. With this last detail, however, the *CAM* departs from published accounts. In the periodical’s estimation, Wright did *not* shoot directly into the crowd; he only fired a warning into the air. As the article puts it, Wright “*should* have fired manfully into that mob of advancing white men” (Williams 1902: 286; emphasis mine). But the protocols of white supremacy prevented him from responding head-on. Wright was

arrested by the police and jailed. Overtaking the sheriff, a group of white men removed Wright from his cell and lynched him.

“Recent Developments in the ‘Land of the Free’” appears in the *CAM* one issue prior to the installment of *Winona* featuring the scene where Judah seeks revenge but John Brown stays his hand. Such a position seems to grant at least fictional fulfillment to a prophecy the article articulates near its conclusion. “Colored people are getting away from the fear of the white man, whipped into them during slavery—and the war should come, if their lives and civil rights are not to be protected” (Williams 1902: 293).<sup>16</sup> Just recently “whipped” into slavery in the narrative time of *Winona*, Judah exemplifies the aggressive insistence on his rights of life and liberty that this essay envisions.

An article published in the next *CAM*, “Shall the Wheels of Race Agitation Be Stopped?” moved the conversation in an even more provocative direction and endowed it with deeper historical roots. The author of the piece, *Richmond Planet* editor John Mitchell (1902: 388), confesses, “I indulge in the hope that I shall see the day before I close my eyes in death that the black man will fire upon a white mob with the same certainty and deadly accuracy that a white man would fire upon a black mob.” Mitchell’s formulation seeks the reciprocity of revenge that was lacking in the Wright case—the self-respect the young performer could not assert. Reminding readers that “the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is an inherent one,” he goes on to declare, “The man who defends that right to the death is a hero” (387). For Mitchell, the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of vengeance are courses that cross, perhaps necessarily so.

Such an intersection offers one way to understand Judah’s pleasure at his pursuit of vengeance—the image of his smiling face as he threatens Thomson. If Hopkins is ambivalent about her male lead, as some readers have suggested (see Patterson 1998: 451; and Wallinger 2005: 190–91), she at least amplifies the principle that Judah embodies. Recurring once again to Jefferson’s *Notes*, this time to his comments on the immorality of slavery in a query on “Manners,” Hopkins issues a striking revision to the third president’s confession that “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just” (Jefferson 1984b: 289). Pluralizing his first-person pronoun but retaining his apocalyptic prediction about what would become the Civil War, Hopkins’s narrator declares, “We tremble for *our* country when we reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever” (Hopkins 1988: 386; emphasis

mine). This line gives new meaning to the “total emancipation” that *Notes* envisions (Jefferson 1984b: 289). Hopkins does not simply affirm the divine sanction of Judah’s quest. She elevates it to the status of an inclusive and transformative “we,” that guarantor of rights in the nation’s founding documents now expanded to represent a new cohort of citizens who are committed to getting—and giving—their just deserts.

Like the revision proposed by Mitchell, Hopkins’s interpolation subtly excavates one of the elided elements of the Declaration. When Jefferson drafted this document, he argued that racial bondage violated the “most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him” (Jefferson 1984a: 22). But within a few lines, this radical treatment of the personhood of those legally classed as nonpersons gives way to an exclusive “us,” who are the victims both of the slave trade and of the martial violence of Africans who have armed themselves in support of the king’s cause. Indicting King George III, Jefferson writes, “He is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among *us*, and to purchase that liberty of which he had deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them” (22; emphasis mine). When the Continental Congress deleted this passage, it wrote out not only a story of slavery as violation of human rights—including *black* rights—but also a story of slavery as a double violation of *white* rights. The latter narrative has found many more opportunities to write itself back into American culture than the former and perhaps nowhere more powerfully than in the discourse of white grievance—and vengeance—that marked the Reconstruction era.

It was the pervasive assessment of this period as a “hideous mistake . . . based on ignorance” and “revenge” that Du Bois (2007a: 587) would set out to challenge in his 1935 *Black Reconstruction*. This revision depended at least in part on rejecting a notion of vengeance as a zero-sum game—the idea, forged in the era of de jure slavery, that black “ambition” and “revenge” were one in the same (Du Bois 2007b: 49). At the dawn of the twentieth century, Hopkins was already engaged in this project, but she tackles a different dimension of the problem. If for Du Bois slavery rendered revenge and black ambition synonymous, Hopkins asks us to consider how Judah’s sense of justice might function to *unmake* the racial inequality that was the afterlife of bondage. As *Winona* suggests, a significant aspect of this

legacy was the way it granted unequal access to vindictive passions, making Judah so difficult and yet so necessary to imagine.

According to the *Broad Ax* (Chicago), such an undemocratic dispensation was precisely the cause of Wright's death. Reflecting on the case years later, the black newspaper argued that his murder boiled down to one detail: Wright "*resented* an insult heaped upon him" (*Broad Ax* 1908; emphasis mine). Read alongside Hopkins, Wright, and Mitchell, this understated remark contains within it other possibilities. What if Wright had been able to achieve "simple justice"? What if he had shot directly into the white crowd?

*Winona* brings these counterfactuals into being in the form of Judah. Significantly, the novel describes the protagonist not only as a "senator" but also as a "prophet." If prophets "*announce* truths their audience is invested in denying" (Shulman 2008: 5), then Judah performs this office when he exclaims that the "sin" of slavery "will be punished in a great outpouring of blood and treasure until God says it is enough" (Hopkins 1988: 352). In this paraphrase of Lincoln's second inaugural, Judah stresses that the end of the Civil War, when it came, would constitute divine *mercy*. Justice required more (see Morel 2015).<sup>17</sup>

When the brother of Edwin Booth assassinated the president weeks after he delivered this oration, mercy was in short supply. "Henceforth all thoughts of pardon are too late / . . . Now alone shall stand Blind JUSTICE," announced a poem printed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* on April 22 (Stedman 1865). For the Ohio preacher J. H. Mac El'Rey, this justice rested squarely in human hands. "Not to visit vengeance upon such traitors is to offend God and provoke His vengeance," he asserted (quoted in Janney 2013: 58). A few answered the call: African American troops reportedly shot Confederate soldiers who celebrated the assassination, and others who received the news similarly were "fired" and "beaten" (58). Conjuring an image of the entire Confederacy under the rule of freed slaves, one white soldier hoped that African Americans would "make a clean shucking of the South" (quoted in Janney 2013: 61). Another admitted feeling a "*spirit of vindictiveness and vengeance*" (quoted in Hodes 2015: 120).

Such sentiments did not last. The immediate desire to both avenge Lincoln's murder and vindicate the antislavery aims of the Civil War was soon subsumed by a spirit of clemency made material by Andrew Johnson's obstruction of black enfranchisement (Hodes 2015: 222–23;

see also Downs 2015: 94–95). By the time Hopkins’s novel was serialized, the “sin” of slavery was firmly entrenched in other forms, namely, lynching and political exclusion. When Hopkins has Judah repeat Lincoln’s proclamation in 1902, then, she uses her fictional medium to call for a reprisal of a historical event that seemed dead and gone: a war that would end slavery *and* secure African American civil rights—the realization of the justice that Lincoln named. This is the war that “should come” again, as “Recent Developments in the ‘Land of the Free’” puts it (Williams 1902: 293).

In *Winona*, that is, Lincoln’s call for charity is replaced by his meditation on divine justice, about which Jefferson trembled decades before. It is an appeal to demolish the walls of racial segregation issued by a character who seems divinely permitted to deliver black Americans from the trials of Jim Crow. In Judah’s prophecy, the postbellum period is collapsed into the antebellum, and post-Reconstruction America gives way to a United States still squarely under construction. The nation-building struggle that ostensibly ended in 1865 was too merciful. And Lincoln’s just and lasting peace is something that might best be realized, paradoxically, by drawing on the virtues of vengeance to which Hopkins gives imaginative form.

### **Coda: Afterlives**

Writing in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, the novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2016) wondered if the “only valid resentment in America [is] that of white males.” Her question is as much a commentary on Donald Trump’s path to political power as it is on the racialized history of revenge inherited from Reconstruction. And this history haunted the nation well before Trump.

Recall, for example, the media’s celebration of the “instant forgiveness” offered by some relatives of the African Americans murdered by a white supremacist in Charleston in June 2015 (Mangu 2015)—as if this forgiveness precluded the possibility that the victims could still feel anger or that in forgiving they offered absolution (Lebron 2017: 125; Baptist 2015). Or consider the characterization of Black Lives Matter by some as motivated by “hate and revenge” (Chumley 2018)—as if articulating wrongs and laying claim to rights, as the Alexandria delegates did in 1865, could constitute only vindictiveness, not vindication.<sup>18</sup>

If the templates of revenge and forgiveness remain more or less black and white, in the most limiting ways, this is not because other narratives do not exist. As I have argued, African American writing of the long Reconstruction discloses a different story. Recent work in literary studies and history has begun to expand the parameters and figures associated with this period. As we continue this effort, we ought to turn to Pauline Hopkins, Samuel Hall, and the many other authors and activists who sought to reclaim revenge from a white supremacist discourse that enabled only its basest expression. Considered in all of its complexity, this writing can help us not only to examine anew this neglected period but also to reimagine the meaning of justice, then and now.

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## Notes

Too many people to name here have helped me with this project; although not everyone agreed with my conclusions, their generous engagement has made this essay better. Special thanks go to the members of the Civil War Caucus, especially John Levi Barnard, Kathleen Diffley, Betsy Duquette, Derrick Spires, and Michael Stancliff, and to Carissa Harris and Gregory Downs.

- 1 For the early part of this history, see Fagan 2016: 142–48.
- 2 Caroline E. Janney (2013: 5) proposes that we differentiate between “reunion, or the political reunification of the nation,” and “reconciliation,” which “was not necessary for reunion” (6) and is more difficult to account for. For work that engages related questions, see, in history, Downs 2015; Egerton 2014; and Williams 2017; and in literature, Kennedy-Nolle 2015; Marrs 2015; and Thomas 2017.
- 3 There is a productive debate about the historical endpoints of both the Civil War and Reconstruction, traditionally identified as 1865 and 1877, respectively. See, for example, Downs 2015: 2–8; and Thomas 2017: 20–27. On implications for literary history, see Marrs and Hager 2013. My understanding of this period follows Heather Cox Richardson’s (2006:



- 90) claim that Reconstruction was a “process, not a time period”—one that continued for black Americans in particular well after the conclusion of official governmental and military commitments.
- 4 As Martha Hodes (2015: 253) puts it, in the wake of the Civil War it was Confederates who “displayed the greater thirst for vengeance,” and Johnson “took their side.” Accordingly, revenge came to be associated, primarily but not exclusively, with the interests of vanquished whites rather than with the cause of emancipation.
  - 5 Brook Thomas (2017: 313) explores the idea of “just revenge” in Charles W. Chesnutt’s fiction. Daylanne K. English (2013: 74) argues that Hopkins’s *Winona* and other postbellum black novels invent “alternative forms of justice.”
  - 6 Robert C. Solomon (2000: 261) notes that “fantasies of vengeance” allow injured parties to see themselves as something other than “victims” (260). On the porous border between the historical and the fantastic in African American letters, particularly in the periods of slavery and Jim Crow, see Daniels 2013.
  - 7 This archive can respond to Kidada E. Williams’s (2017) call that scholarship on the postbellum period attend to “the more obscure inner lives of African Americans.” See also Salamishah Tillet’s comments in Prior et al. 2017; and Thomas 2017: 14.
  - 8 An advertisement for the novel that appeared in the *CAM* (1902: 335) underscores the role of Judah as a “brave young Negro” and remarks that the tale is “filled with incidents of heroism for which many Negroes have been noted in our past history.”
  - 9 Self-respect is central to John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (1999: 386). Rawls entertains the possibility that resentment might be warranted in a case of the unjust distribution of social wealth (323); he allows for “militant action” (323) even as he clearly prefers nonviolent civil disobedience.
  - 10 Hopkins (1988: 407) makes explicit reference to *Merchant* when she interposes Gratiano’s comment to Antonio (“You have too much respect upon the world”) into a conversation between Winona and her suitor Warren Maxwell.
  - 11 Understood thus, Judah has at least one potential historical analogue in Matthew Gaines, a black senator who served for a short time in the Texas legislature early in Reconstruction. If Hopkins used her novel to push the limits of literary representation, Gaines (1872) took up a similar effort from within the formal political system by fashioning himself as a “John Brown” Republican, as he put it in a letter he published after returning from an 1872 party convention. Drawing on the figure of Samson, with whom Brown also was compared in this era, Gaines concludes his missive with a prophecy-cum-threat. “If there is not a change made in things,” the senator avows, then “farewell” to the Republican Party: “To

that I was as strong as Sampson so that I could pull down the walls of corruption and build up the country.” Gaines points to the possibility of vengeance taking institutional form and destroying those structures from within in order to transform them. Such a reconstruction would fundamentally recast what it means to use the political system to represent—and secure—the rights of black Americans. See Malone 1981.

- 12 On this complication, see Kerrigan 1996: 119–20.
- 13 One piece of this tradition, “The Fall of Jericho,” appeared in the *CAM* alongside *Winona* as part of a series of “Fascinating Bible Stories.” In this episode, the magazine recounts the tale of Joshua as he leads the Israelites in “vengeance on the nations of Canaan” (Hall 1902: 117).
- 14 On Hopkins’s familiarity with the source for this language, see Brown 2008: 369; and Wallinger 2005: 198.
- 15 The *St. Louis Republic* (1902) claimed that the white men approached Wright in the theater not to whip him but to “force him to apologize.”
- 16 In her study of Hopkins’s *CAM* novels—*Winona*, *Hagar’s Daughter* (1901–2), and *Of One Blood* (1902–3)—Rachel Ihara (2012: 134) draws attention to “moments specifically designed to elicit textual pleasure for black readers,” including white characters getting punished. I would class scenes of revenge among these pleasures and emphasize how the intertextual resonances I trace function to facilitate both enjoyment *and* empowerment. See Solomon 2000: 260–61.
- 17 On the complex reception of these lines in Lincoln’s speech, particularly among African Americans, see Hodes 2015: 136–38.
- 18 In this regard, the complete title of the 1866 Civil Rights Act is revealing: “an act to protect all persons in the United States in their civil rights, and furnish the means of their vindication.” Etymologically, *vindication* and *vengeance* are related; as the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains, both come from a family of Latin words that mean to lay claim to something (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “vindication,” [www.oed.com/view/Entry/223513?redirectedFrom=vindication#eid](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223513?redirectedFrom=vindication#eid), and s.v. “vengeance,” [www.oed.com/view/Entry/222147?redirectedFrom=vengeance#eid](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/222147?redirectedFrom=vengeance#eid)). This linguistic kinship reminds us of what Paul Ricoeur (2007: 228–29) argues is the paradoxical relationship between legal justice and revenge.

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