



Educational Roots and Rebellious Routes: Reflections on the Career Outcomes of Four Black Students in Nineteenth-Century New York City

Citation

England, Nia Kiara. 2024. Educational Roots and Rebellious Routes: Reflections on the Career Outcomes of Four Black Students in Nineteenth-Century New York City. Master's thesis, Harvard University Division of Continuing Education.

Link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37378506>

Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material (LAA), as set forth at

<https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFIOWI2M2EwYTg>

Accessibility

<https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.

Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#)

Educational Roots and Rebellious Routes: Reflections on the Career Outcomes of Four Black
Students in Nineteenth-Century New York City

Nia Kiara England

A Thesis in the Field of History
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

May 2024

Abstract

Despite its long-term reputation for being cosmopolitan and progressive, nineteenth-century New York City was a place of grave racial inequality. To combat poverty and racial discrimination, Black elites and white philanthropists invested in primary education for Black children. This thesis traces the elementary school experiences and subsequent career paths of four children in this environment. Collectively, these case studies demonstrate how personal choices, communal backing, and alignment with respectability politics impact the efficacy of basic education.

Each subject faced a unique systemic racial barrier to educational attainment or career growth, and they each confronted these obstacles differently. Ira Aldridge, an actor, and James McCune Smith, a physician, traveled to Europe as young adults to seek equitable work and education opportunities, respectively. Their achievements highlight the role of personal initiative in one's career trajectory. Maritcha Remond Lyons, a leading educator, initially had to sue to attend high school and then earned a professional reference letter from the school. Her journey underscores the importance of community support in building one's career. Finally, Austin Reed, who received his basic education at a juvenile reformatory, demonstrates a tension between the potential for success and ineffective methods of resisting authority. Using memoirs, letters, speeches, and newspaper articles, this thesis argues that basic education must co-exist with the effective use of individual agency, strong community support, and respectability to land its intended impact on Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century.

Acknowledgments

I must thank my thesis director, Dr. Myisha S. Eatmon, whose guidance and feedback made the completion of this project possible.

I would also like to thank the Harvard Extension School and its faculty for providing the opportunity for non-traditional students to receive affordable, world-class training in historical research.

I want to acknowledge my brother Andreas England and thank my parents, Edward and Vivian England, who have shown an unwavering commitment to supporting my passion for lifelong learning. I must honor my late great-grandmother, Willie Mae Lacy, whose one hundred years of wit and strength have been a source of inspiration. Finally, I am eternally grateful for my dearest friends, who have been my source of rest, laughter, and joy throughout this process: Andi Akpe, Christian Gabriel, Cole Clemens, Mark (Zeta) Ricciardi, Michael Rivera, Quemuel Arroyo, and Sean (Cip) Cipriano.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iv
Preface. A Note on Terminology	1
Chapter I. Introduction.....	2
Historical Background	8
Historiography	15
Methodology and Sources.....	24
Overview.....	28
Chapter II. Ira Aldridge.....	30
Decision to leave the United States	33
Reception in Europe.....	34
New York’s Response to Aldridge’s Success Abroad.....	39
The Impact of Individual Agency and Patronage	41
Chapter III. James McCune Smith.....	45
Higher Education Abroad	48
Establishing a Career in New York City.....	51
Reflections on McCune Smith’s Achievements	56
Chapter IV. Maritcha Remond Lyons.....	59
Childhood Health Challenges	60
Fleeing New York City	62

A Leading Educator	67
Chapter V. Austin Reed	75
Indentured Servitude.....	77
New York House of Refuge.....	82
Life after the New York House of Refuge.....	88
Chapter VI. Conclusion	93
Bibliography	98

Preface.

A Note on Terminology

In this thesis, the word Black is used to be inclusive of all people “having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa,” regardless of “nationality or geopolitical boundaries;” this definition acknowledges the presence of Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century born outside of the United States.¹ The “B” in Black is capitalized to recognize “the heritage and identity of people of African descent.”²

¹ US Census Bureau, “About the Topic of Race,” Census.gov, accessed January 30, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>; Elise A. Mitchell, “Black and African American,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 43, no. 1 (2023): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2023.0005>.

² Mitchell, “Black and African American,” 86.

Chapter I.

Introduction

Charles Bennet Ray, born in Falmouth, Massachusetts, in 1807, moved to New York City in his twenties and established himself as a bootmaker.³ Before arriving in New York, Ray attempted to earn a college degree at Wesleyan University but was driven out of the institution after a mere six weeks of enrollment due to outrage from white students.⁴ While living in New York, Ray's boot business thrived, and he eventually became the owner and editor of the prominent newspaper, *The Colored American*.⁵ In addition to being an entrepreneur, Ray was deeply committed to improving the lives of Black Americans through advocating for the right to vote and access to education.⁶ Ray remained in New York City for fifty years, and his participation in legislative efforts and service as the president of the New York Society for the Promotion of Education among Colored Children was for the benefit of the Black community and his own children.⁷ All five of Ray's children who lived to adulthood attended college, a remarkable accomplishment for a Black family in this environment.⁸ His daughter, Charlotte Elizabeth Ray, is regarded as one of the first Black woman lawyers in the United States.⁹ Ray's youngest daughter, Henrietta Cordelia Ray, mastered English,

³ David E. Swift, "Ray, Charles Bennett," in *Oxford African American Studies Center* (Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013), <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-35358>.

⁴ Swift.

⁵ Swift.

⁶ Swift.

⁷ Swift.

⁸ Lois Baldwin Moreland, "Ray, Charlotte E.," in *Oxford African American Studies Center* (Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013), <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-37710>.

⁹ Moreland.

French, Greek, and Latin literature, earned a graduate degree from New York University, and was a published poet.¹⁰

The values held by Charles Bennet Ray and his children embody what it meant to be part of New York City's elite Black community. While small, this group was influential and diverse. Members of this community hailed from the North and the South, were born free and enslaved, and were formally educated or self-taught. Black elites in nineteenth-century New York City were united by their shared experience with racial oppression and their commitment to resisting oppression through education, self-sufficiency, activism, and morality.

In addition to Black elites, nineteenth-century New York City was home to enslaved people, poor Black workers, impoverished white immigrants, wealthy white business owners, and a range of philanthropic efforts. A widespread interest of philanthropists in this environment was educating Black children. White philanthropists regarded education as a path to improving life for Black people as poverty and income inequality increased.¹¹ Like Charles Bennet Ray, influential Black New Yorkers viewed education as necessary for freedom and independence.¹² It is important to note that from 1850 to 1900, the school enrollment rate for all American children was around fifty percent.¹³ As the rate of non-white five to nineteen-year-olds enrolled in school in the

¹⁰ Caleb A. Corkery, "Ray, Henrietta Cordelia," in *Oxford African American Studies Center* (Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013), <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-37711>.

¹¹ Kabria Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*, Early American Places (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019), 81, <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/book/82508>.

¹² Carla L. Peterson, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), loc. 1011.

¹³ National Center for Education Statistics, "120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait," ed. Thomas D. Snyder, January 1993, 6, 14, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf>.

United States remained below forty percent in the nineteenth century, educational opportunities for Black children in New York often focused on primary education.¹⁴ In this thesis, primary, basic, and elementary education are used interchangeably to describe the schooling experiences that take place before secondary school and higher education. Primary education for Black children in New York City evolved over the nineteenth century from one-room schools organized by benevolent societies, churches, and individual people to a robust collection of “Colored Schools” and integrated schools under the umbrella of the New York City public school district.¹⁵

Despite the existence of a group of thriving Black elites and several philanthropic initiatives to empower the Black community, early to mid-nineteenth-century New York City has been described as “the most proslavery and pro-South city North of the Mason-Dixon line.”¹⁶ This was the result of the economic interests of wealthy white New Yorkers who benefited from slavery, specifically the cotton trade, and working-class white immigrants who were turned against Black people due to competition for unskilled work.¹⁷ The number of immigrants in New York City increased throughout the century. In the early nineteenth century, foreign-born residents accounted for twenty to twenty-five percent of New York City’s population, and by 1845, this number had increased to

¹⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, 6; Carleton Mabee, *Black Education in New York State: From Colonial to Modern Times* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9b2x9d>.

¹⁵ Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*, 17–68; Val Marie Johnson, “‘The Half Has Never Been Told’: Maritcha Lyons’ Community, Black Women Educators, the Woman’s Loyal Union, and ‘the Color Line’ in Progressive Era Brooklyn and New York,” *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 842, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144217692931>.

¹⁶ Jonathan Daniel Wells, “Inventing White Supremacy: Race, Print Culture, and the Civil War Draft Riots,” *Civil War History* 68, no. 1 (2022): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwh.2022.0003>.

¹⁷ Wells, 48.

thirty-six percent.¹⁸ In 1845, there were 236,000 American-born residents living in New York City, 70,000 Irish immigrants, and 65,000 immigrants born elsewhere.¹⁹

Census data from 1800 to 1890 ranks New York City as the most populous city in the country.²⁰ In 1800, New York City had a Black population of 6,382; 3,506 (55%) people were free, and slavery was outlawed in 1827.²¹ By 1890, the Black population in New York City, including Brooklyn, grew to 33,888.²² In comparison to other large northeastern cities such as Boston and Philadelphia, a higher percentage of New York City's Black population was enslaved from 1800 to 1827; nearly 100% of the Black populations in Boston and Philadelphia were free by 1800.²³ As the number of free Black New Yorkers increased throughout the early nineteenth century, white hostility against Black people and attempts to separate from Black people also increased.²⁴

To address the needs of free Black New Yorkers, various benevolent societies were formed to offer educational opportunities and provide basic resources. White-led benevolent organizations, such as the New York Manumission Society, were composed of middle and upper-class citizens who worked toward the gradual abolition of slavery and established schools.²⁵ The Manumission Society aimed to prepare students to

¹⁸ Tyler Anbinder, *City of Dreams : The 400-Year Epic History of Immigrant New York* (New York, NY: Boston : Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 125, <http://archive.org/details/cityofdreams400y0000anbi>.

¹⁹ Anbinder, 127.

²⁰ Campbell Gibson, "Rank by Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places, Listed Alphabetically by State: 1790-1990" (U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 15, 1998), <https://www2.census.gov/library/working-papers/1998/demographics/pop-twps0027/tab01.txt>.

²¹ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in The United States" (U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005), 81, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2005/demo/POP-twps0076.pdf>; Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*, 17.

²² Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race," 81–82.

²³ Gibson and Jung, 63, 95.

²⁴ Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*, 18.

²⁵ Mabee, 21.

“become useful and respectable in society.”²⁶ Black-led societies such as the African Society for Mutual Relief were comprised of members who had the means to pay dues and provided resources to widows and children in need.²⁷

The efforts of benevolent societies conflicted with the proactive efforts of white supremacists to stifle the Black community. Some white people worked to pit Black workers and poor white workers against each other: “White supremacists also told the working class that abolition would make clothing and other goods more expensive, create a rush to the North of millions of free Black workers willing to toil for low wages, and instantly create a mass of poor Blacks that white laborers would have to support through higher taxes.”²⁸ There was an intentional effort to increase hostility against Black people and Black workers throughout the nineteenth century.

New York City’s racial climate impacted students as well as workers. Black students experienced harassment from white New Yorkers while traveling to school, endured the racist attitudes of some educators, and navigated the reality of limited job opportunities post-graduation.²⁹ Occupations for Black people, regardless of education or

²⁶ Trustees of the New York African Free School, “An Address to the Parents and Guardians of the Children Belonging to the New-York African Free School” (Samuel Woods & Sons, 1818), 3, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/iw-search/we/Evans?p_theme=eai&p_product=EAI&d_collections=SHAW&d_collectionName=SHAW&p_action=doc&p_topdoc=1&p_docnum=1&d_searchform=customized&p_text_custbase-0=45058&p_field_custbase-0=docnum&p_sort=YMD_date:D&p_nbid=O6BH5CCTMTY2MTI5MjgwNy43MDUxNzY6MT0xNT0xMjguMTAzLjE0Ny4xNDk&p_docref=

²⁷ Craig Steven Wilder, “The Rise and Influence of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, 1808-1865,” *Afro - Americans in New York Life and History* 22, no. 2 (July 31, 1998): 2, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/200974786/abstract/8C25638F5DC84D6CPQ/1>.

²⁸ Wells, “Inventing White Supremacy,” 60.

²⁹ Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 139, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.06703>; Anna Mae Duane, *Educated for Freedom: The Incredible Story of Two Fugitive Schoolboys Who Grew up to Change a Nation* (New York, NY: University Press, 2020), 4, <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/book/83019>.

personal ability, were often limited to unskilled work as “servants” or “laborers.”³⁰ In defiance of these obstacles, some Black people in nineteenth-century New York City were able to attain an education, obtain gainful employment, and exceed all expectations. While much has been published about Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century, fewer studies offer a microhistory of the career trajectories of individuals who received a primary education. This research will answer questions about the connections between basic education, personal choices, community support, respectability, and career outcomes. How did Black people in nineteenth-century New York City confront systemic racial barriers to education and employment? What steps did successful Black professionals take to build their careers? How did white mentorship, sponsorship, or patronage impact one’s professional trajectory? What role did respectability politics play in career outcomes?

This thesis uses case studies to trace the career paths of four students who had varying professional outcomes after receiving a basic education in nineteenth-century New York City. The subjects are actor Ira Aldridge (1807 - 1867), physician James McCune Smith (1813 - 1865), educator Maritcha Remond Lyons (1848 - 1929), and former New York House of Refuge resident Austin Reed (1820s? - 1890s?). These individuals were chosen due to the availability of memoirs, essays, speeches, letters, and newspaper articles that provide significant insight into their elementary school experiences and their subsequent career paths. Collectively, the primary sources reveal that they each navigated systemic racial barriers to education or career growth, pursued distinct paths after primary school, had varying levels of community support, and differed

³⁰ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 139.

in how they conformed to societal expectations. Ultimately, James McCune Smith and Maritcha Remond Lyons had flourishing careers in New York City, and Austin Reed and Ira Aldridge struggled to earn a living in this environment. As basic education was regarded as a foundation for job prospects, financial security, and upward mobility for Black New Yorkers during this era, this research is significant because it uncovers three factors that impacted the efficacy of primary school.

Historical Background

To analyze the career outcomes of people who received a primary education in nineteenth-century New York City, it is essential to understand the educational landscape, the labor market, and the social class structure. While some Black students received an education from schools founded by benevolent societies and churches, others received an education at the Colored Orphan Asylum, the New York House of Refuge for juvenile delinquents, and through certain indentured servant placements.³¹ The most impactful path to formal education for Black New Yorkers in the early nineteenth century was the African Free School (AFS), founded by the New York Manumission Society in 1787.³²

³¹ Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*, 21, 37; William Seraile, *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011), 25–26, <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/93/monograph/book/14721>; Nathaniel C. Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge : Instituted by the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York* (New York, NY: N.C. Hart; (Printed by M. Day), 1832), 21, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CY0101984899/SABN?sid=primo&xid=eb7aa1e0&pg=3>; Austin Reed and Caleb Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, First edition. (New York, NY: Random House, 2016), xxv.

³² Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*, 21.

Most teachers and administrators during the initial years of the African Free School were white and had a range of beliefs about what Black students could achieve in the United States.³³ Some white educators were gradual abolitionists and believed in their students' academic abilities, yet struggled to see a world where Black graduates could succeed in America.³⁴ The institution's controversial schoolmaster of over twenty years, Charles C. Andrews, exemplified this conflict. Andrews was a white Englishman hired by the trustees of the Manumission Society in 1809.³⁵ Though he was "not deeply learned," he taught "spelling, penmanship, grammar, geography, and astronomy" and was regarded as a thorough teacher and "good disciplinarian."³⁶ While Andrews claimed, "the progress of the pupils is such as to warrant the conclusion, that they are as susceptible of mental cultivation as the children of white parents," he was "not an abolitionist" "in the modern sense" and was ultimately forced to resign in 1833 for supporting sending Black people to Africa because they could not thrive in the United States.³⁷ Carla Peterson argues that there was a contradiction between the stated purpose of an African Free School education and the realities of the curriculum: "The school trustees often resorted to lofty sentiments about the education of African youth. Yet they were mostly interested

³³ Mabee, 22–23.

³⁴ Mabee, 21–23.

³⁵ John L. Rury, "The New York African Free School, 1827-1836: Conflict over Community Control of Black Education," *Phylon* (1960-) 44, no. 3 (1983): 188, <https://doi.org/10.2307/274931>.

³⁶ James McCune Smith, "Introduction," in *A Memorial Discourse* (Washington, D.C., 1865), 21, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044010183747?urlappend=%3Bseq=7>.

³⁷ Charles C. Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools: From Their Establishment in 1787, to the Present Time; Embracing a Period of More Than Forty Years* (New York, NY: Mahlon Day, 1830), 55,

https://books.google.com/books/about/The_History_of_the_New_York_African_Free.html?id=NwpeAAAcAAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false; Smith, "Introduction," 22; Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*, 22–23; Katherine A. Perrotta and Tiffany McBean Rainey, "Emphatically Our Battle: A Content Analysis of the African Free School of New York City Curriculum, 1787-1840," *The Journal of Educational Foundations* 35, no. 1 (2022): 153, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2690252719/abstract/9987DCFEAC5D4939PQ/1>.

in maintaining law and order among New York's black population, in instilling habits of mind and behavior that would prevent any outbreak of social disorder."³⁸ The African Free School attempted to create a curriculum that would control the conduct of the Black community. Ira Aldridge and James McCune Smith were educated at the African Free School under Charles C. Andrews.³⁹

In 1834, the African Free Schools were transferred from the New York Manumission Society to the Public School Society.⁴⁰ The Manhattan Colored Schools were an evolution of the African Free Schools and were a segregated component of the Department of Education's public schools.⁴¹ In the 1850s, the New York City Board of Education had control of the schools for Black children, and the Black community was excluded from "decision-making processes for their children's education."⁴² In 1869, Thomas Boese, the clerk of the Board of Education, wrote a report detailing the history of public education in New York. His section on the "Colored Schools" claims that "every opportunity and convenience is afforded that is given any other class of schools."⁴³ The schools were classified as Primary, Grammar, or Normal; normal schools educated teachers.⁴⁴ The school buildings needed improvement, and the irregular attendance of

³⁸ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 1162.

³⁹ "Ira Aldridge," *The Anglo-African Magazine*. Vol. 2, No. 1., January 1860, 29, Houghton Library - Harvard University.

⁴⁰ William Oland Bourne, *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York: With Portraits of the Presidents of the Society* (W. Wood & Company, 1870), 164, https://books.google.com/books/about/History_of_the_Public_School_Society_of.html?id=vH10AQAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁴¹ Bourne, 164; Thomas Boese, *Public Education in the City of New York: Its History, Condition, and Statistics: An Official Report to the Board of Education* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros., 1869), 146, https://books.google.com/books/about/Public_Education_in_the_City_of_New_York.html?id=kbC-0kxI06gC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false; Perrotta and Rainey, "Emphatically Our Battle," 154.

⁴² Perrotta and Rainey, "Emphatically Our Battle," 154.

⁴³ Boese, *Public Education in the City of New York*, 146.

⁴⁴ Boese, 145.

students was a concern.⁴⁵ Some students commuted long distances, and the teachers were Black.⁴⁶ Maritcha Remond Lyons received her primary education at Colored School No. 3 in Manhattan and journeyed “several miles every day to attend.”⁴⁷

Different from the African Free Schools and the Manhattan Colored Schools, the New York House of Refuge (NYHR) used work assignments, basic education, and emphasis on discipline to promote a “prompt and energetic correction of their vicious propensities, and hold out every possible inducement to reformation and good conduct.”⁴⁸ NYHR was the country’s first reformatory for children, and it was founded in 1825 by the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents.⁴⁹ The Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents was formerly known as the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, and it was comprised of the “prominent New York businessmen, philanthropists, and politicians” who operated NYHR.⁵⁰ In addition to teaching children a trade, NYHR had its own school that focused on “reading, writing, and arithmetic,” and children were “most carefully instructed in the nature of their moral and religious obligations.”⁵¹ The residents of NYHR were often poor young people who became “subject to the notice of...Police, either as vagrants, or houseless, or charged

⁴⁵ Boese, 146.

⁴⁶ Boese, 146.

⁴⁷ Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was* (New York, NY, 1928), 9, https://search-alexanderstreet-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3338331.

⁴⁸ Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge*, 21.

⁴⁹ Gunja SenGupta, *From Slavery to Poverty: The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York, 1840-1918* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009), 136–41, <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/book/10744>.

⁵⁰ SenGupta, 134; Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xxix.

⁵¹ Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge*, 21.

with petty crimes.”⁵² Despite NYHR’s stated purpose, it has been described as “a scene of racism, exploitation, and violent cruelty against boys and girls.”⁵³ It was not uncommon for children to be beaten for breaking small rules, such as talking while working.⁵⁴ The NYHR’s focus on discipline to ensure labor productivity and prepare children to re-integrate into society created a harsh environment for the young people who lived there. Austin Reed received his basic education at NYHR.

While there were differences in the teachers, teaching methodologies, and exact curriculums at the African Free Schools, the Manhattan Colored Schools, and the New York House of Refuge, each institution was interested in providing basic education, preparing students for employment, and ensuring students would not engage in disruptive or unproductive behaviors in their youth or as adults. Despite the goals of primary education, race and class-based discrimination restricted work opportunities for all Black New Yorkers, regardless of their educational attainment.⁵⁵ Racism against Black workers and white attempts to separate from Black workers increased as chattel slavery was coming to an end; “by the end of the period of emancipation in 1827, whites had legally, economically, and socially designated black people as a separate, dependent, and unequal group within the New York City community.”⁵⁶ Systemic barriers undermined the advantages of earning a primary education.

Students who received a primary education entered a labor market with minimal skilled or lucrative employment opportunities. Some of the most common occupations

⁵² Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xxvii; Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge*, 21.

⁵³ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xxxiv.

⁵⁴ Reed and Smith, 24.

⁵⁵ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 139.

⁵⁶ Harris, 5.

among Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century included domestic labor, “waitering and barbering,” laundry, peddling fruit and vegetables, and “maritime work.”⁵⁷ As these roles did not always provide stable or sufficient income for adults, children often contributed to the household earnings by working as waiters, servants, and chimney sweepers.⁵⁸ Teachers and administrators expected most of their students to be enrolled long enough to receive only a rudimentary education before needing to leave school and accept unskilled work.⁵⁹ Limited work opportunities for adults created a need for child labor and negatively impacted the educational attainment of young people.⁶⁰

It is worth highlighting that nineteenth-century New York City had a thriving “race-based geographically separate community” called Weeksville.⁶¹ Weeksville existed from the 1830s to 1910 and had its own schools, churches, newspapers, and small businesses.⁶² Compared to the broader New York City population, Weeksville had a “wide variety of occupations and a relatively large proportion of skilled workers, business owners, and professionals—both women and men.”⁶³ Maritcha Remond Lyons found the community support she needed to thrive and make an impact as an educator here.⁶⁴

In addition to facing limited educational and career opportunities, Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century also navigated the Black community’s unique social class system that was heavily impacted by politics of respectability. As Black New

⁵⁷ Harris, 80.

⁵⁸ Harris, 80.

⁵⁹ Mabee, *Black Education in New York State*, 21.

⁶⁰ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 80.

⁶¹ Judith Wellman, *Brooklyn’s Promised Land: The Free Black Community of Weeksville, New York* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014), 2, <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/36078>.

⁶² Wellman, 2–4.

⁶³ Wellman, 4.

⁶⁴ Wellman, 148.

Yorkers often did not earn enough money for class distinctions to be solely based on material wealth, other factors such as valuing education, engaging in social justice efforts, and demonstrating morality impacted one's standing within the Black community.⁶⁵ As described by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "the politics of respectability emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations."⁶⁶ This framework lays a foundation for understanding why middle-class Black abolitionists were intensely focused on ensuring the entire community was engaging in behaviors that would showcase "Black equality."⁶⁷ Respectable behaviors at this time included boys learning practical workforce skills, girls learning valuable domestic tasks, and adults committing to hard work, "morality, piety, and temperance."⁶⁸

Black middle-class abolitionists aimed to liberate all Black Americans while still maintaining their relatively superior social status.⁶⁹ As Black New Yorkers during this era lived in a society that considered "all blacks as inferior and defined that inferiority partially in class terms," Black middle-class abolitionists "sought both to control the black working class and also to define themselves in relation to that class."⁷⁰ Choosing a career in the arts, engaging in petty crime, or remaining unmarried could impact one's standing in this class system.⁷¹ While not all Black people agreed that the "moral

⁶⁵ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 9; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 1011.

⁶⁶ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb00476.0001.001>.

⁶⁷ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 172-73.

⁶⁸ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 1380; Peterson, loc. 1011.

⁶⁹ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 173.

⁷⁰ Harris, 173.

⁷¹ Tonya Bolden, *Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl* (New York, NY: Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2005), 16; Johnson, "'The Half Has Never Been Told,'" 838.

perfectionism” promoted by the middle class was the sole path to equality, the Black middle class was an elite group that was regarded as the “undisputed leaders” of this community.⁷²

The controversial concept that Black people who have achieved relative success should lead the rest of the community is well illustrated in W.E.B. Du Bois’ “The Talented Tenth” essay. When reflecting on examples of Black people in the nineteenth century who succeeded and were “worthy of leadership,” Du Bois included “Ira Aldridge, whom all Europe loved to honor,” and James McCune Smith, who graduated from a prestigious university abroad.⁷³ Du Bois argued that the Black race would be “saved by its exceptional men;” thus, it is necessary to ensure the “Talented Tenth” receive a “Higher Education” so “that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races.”⁷⁴ Like the nineteenth-century New York City Black elite, Du Bois regarded education and morality as a path to equality. One’s alignment to politics of respectability heavily influenced one’s social standing and perceptions of success among Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century.

Historiography

Evaluating the career paths of four Black students educated in nineteenth-century New York City requires examining the existing historical literature on this group. Historians and economists such as Philip S. Foner, Robert Fairlie, and William Sundstrom situate the experiences of Black New Yorkers during this era within the

⁷² Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 173; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 1011.

⁷³ W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*, [1st electronic ed.], Black Thought and Culture (New York, NY: James Pott and Company, 1903), 7, 11.

⁷⁴ Du Bois, 2–3.

greater context of the United States by addressing the connections between race, labor, and class from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. Their works showcase how discrimination in the United States labor market differed based on region and decade within the nineteenth century.

Discrimination in the Labor Market:

The hurdles Black workers faced trying to secure gainful employment in the nineteenth century were multifaceted. Philip S. Foner's work *Organized Labor and the Black Worker 1619-1981* (1981) offers a broad analysis of Black workers' efforts and struggles to improve job prospects, working conditions, and wages.⁷⁵ Foner illustrated that discrimination against Black workers in northern cities increased as chattel slavery in the United States was coming to an end: "Before the 1840's and 1850's, black workers in many Northern cities had monopolized the occupations of ... stablemen, porters, bootblacks, barbers, and waiters...A huge influx of white foreigners, particularly after the Irish famine in 1846...pushed" Black workers "out of these occupations, depriving many blacks of employment."⁷⁶ Though education was regarded as a method to increase the competitiveness of Black workers in this exclusive labor market, literacy did not consistently improve work opportunities. Robert Fairlie and William Sundstrom's article, "The Emergence, Persistence, and Recent Widening of the Racial Unemployment Gap" (1999), analyzed labor trends between 1880 and 1910 and found a higher employment gap for literate Black workers.⁷⁷ This work asserted that "the racial unemployment gap

⁷⁵ Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981*, Reprint edition (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018).

⁷⁶ Foner, 6.

⁷⁷ Robert W. Fairlie and William A. Sundstrom, "The Emergence, Persistence, and Recent Widening of the Racial Unemployment Gap," *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 52, no. 2 (January 1999): 260–61, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/236359262/abstract/D78D46BF7BB54088PQ/1>.

seems to have been greater for the literate than for the illiterate... This suggests the possibility that literate blacks faced more discrimination in hiring practices than illiterate blacks, a finding consistent with historical evidence on wage differentials and occupational segregation.”⁷⁸ This finding explains why educated Black workers often relied on manual labor to make a living. Foner, Fairlie, and Sundstrom’s arguments portray the complexity of the relationship between skill sets and job opportunities for Black Americans in the nineteenth century.

The limited impact of education on employment opportunities is further emphasized by Leslie M. Harris’ research on the career paths for Black students in nineteenth-century New York City and Fairlie and Sundstrom’s findings about wage discrimination. In her seminal work *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (2003), Harris argues that educated Black workers were often restricted to low-wage roles. Harris claimed that “the majority of students only obtained a basic education before seeking out working-class jobs. These students, despite their education, often experienced the same difficulties as uneducated black New Yorkers in finding skilled jobs.”⁷⁹ Educated Black job seekers did not have an easier time securing gainful employment. Fairlie and Sundstrom also mentioned that in some parts of the country, Black workers were excluded from jobs that paid well, but there was minimal indication of wage discrimination among unskilled Black workers.⁸⁰ Discriminatory hiring practices restricted opportunities for Black workers to secure high-paying jobs. Harris, Fairlie, and Sundstrom offer a framework for understanding the connection

⁷⁸ Fairlie and Sundstrom, 261.

⁷⁹ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 139.

⁸⁰ Fairlie and Sundstrom, “The Emergence, Persistence, and Recent Widening of the Racial Unemployment Gap,” 261.

between education and employment opportunities for Black workers; the understanding of career outcomes for this population can be augmented by delving into the microhistories of Black workers and analyzing contributors to individual exceptionalism or obstacles.

Nineteenth-Century New York City:

In addition to Harris, several other historians and academic researchers, such as Jonathan Daniel Wells, Carla Peterson, Anna Mae Duane, and Kabria Baumgartner, have published works that focus on the experiences of Black people in nineteenth-century New York City. Collectively, these scholars have addressed the proactive steps white supremacists took to subjugate Black workers, the unique ways that social class was determined for Black New Yorkers, behaviors associated with the Black elite, and some of the factors that contributed to career success. Their research provides a foundation for understanding the relationship between race, education, labor, and economic outcomes for nineteenth-century New York City's Black community.

As chattel slavery was declining and the white immigrant population in New York City was increasing, racial tensions among workers intensified. While Foner discussed poor white immigrants replacing Black workers in northern cities, Harris described the impact of this in New York City specifically: "Increasing numbers of European immigrants gradually displaced blacks in many of the occupations they had held as slaves...the desire among different classes of whites to control blacks was based on their fears that blacks, supposedly degraded by slavery, might influence urban and state politics."⁸¹ Increases in the white immigrant population resulted in less clear

⁸¹ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 5.

“distinctions” between the types of occupations associated with Black workers and poor white workers and the roles they played in society.⁸² This connects to the argument made in Jonathan Daniel Wells’ article “Inventing *White Supremacy*” (2022) that “throughout the years immediately before, during, and after the Civil War, racial supremacists in New York City... repeatedly reminded white laborers that peoples of African descent were biologically inferior and therefore unfit for political and social rights.”⁸³ White supremacists also “promoted a conservative platform that called for... a reconstruction of the Union based on its prewar foundation.”⁸⁴ There was an intentional effort to relegate Black workers to an inferior status permanently. Harris and Wells provide significant context on why the labor market was segregated; the individual impact of occupational segregation can be illustrated by detailing the career trajectories of Black workers who pursued drastically different career paths.

Given the extensive barriers Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century faced trying to obtain gainful employment and achieve monetary success, social class or notions of achievement within this community were often linked to one’s conformity to respectability politics, value of education, or involvement in liberation. Harris argued that “class was not determined only by distinctions between those who performed manual labor and... non-manual jobs, or between those who were financially stable and materially successful and those who were not... class distinctions among blacks affected arguments about black community, particularly as expressed through political activism.”⁸⁵

Engagement in the fight for freedom and equity was attributed to being part of the middle

⁸² Harris, 5, 34.

⁸³ Wells, “Inventing White Supremacy,” 48.

⁸⁴ Wells, 48.

⁸⁵ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 8–9.

class. Similarly, in her work, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (2011), Carla Peterson highlighted that elite status was often not defined by one's "wealth."⁸⁶ Peterson claimed the factors that defined Black elites include "understanding the value of real estate" and "steady employment in primarily skilled trades."⁸⁷ Black elites advocated for education, hard work, and morality as a means to "success, respect, and in due course, political and civil equality."⁸⁸ The qualities that defined the Black elite highlight the impact of respectability politics and emphasize that there were limited opportunities for Black people to distinguish themselves with career outcomes or wealth. Examining the paths of individual Black New Yorkers depicts the influence of one's chosen profession, family life, and demeanor on one's alignment with respectability politics and social status within this community.

As the barriers to building a successful career in this environment were numerous, some scholars highlighted factors contributing to individual exceptionalism. Peterson's *Black Gotham* combines techniques used in memoirs and social histories to highlight contributors to success, such as having a "staid" demeanor, education, "hard work," and "strict adherence to a code of respectability."⁸⁹ Perceptions of one's moral conduct impacted one's career and life outcomes. Similarly, Anna Mae Duane's work *Educated for Freedom: The Incredible Story of Two Fugitive Schoolboys Who Grew up to Change a Nation* (2020) provides context on how James McCune Smith and Henry Highland Garnet optimized education to build careers in medicine and the ministry, respectively.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 1005.

⁸⁷ Peterson, locs. 998–999.

⁸⁸ Peterson, loc. 1011.

⁸⁹ Peterson, locs. 103–164.

⁹⁰ Duane, *Educated for Freedom*.

Duane attributes McCune Smith's overwhelming accomplishments to being a "star student," support from a minister who prepared him to receive a medical education abroad, "careful objectivity," and "adherence to the rules."⁹¹ The factors Duane associates with McCune Smith's success allude to the idea that he had to be near perfect to thrive. While Peterson and Duane establish the importance of conforming to respectability politics to flourish in this community, analyzing the life choices of individuals within this group reveals how certain people maintained a high social status without fully meeting societal expectations.

Black Women:

In addition to the challenges of obtaining an education and attaining gainful employment outlined by Harris, Peterson, and Duane, it is worth highlighting that Black women faced both racism and sexism in nineteenth-century New York City. Kabria Baumgartner's work *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America* (2019) traced the lengths Black women went to obtain an education and become educators.⁹² Her work provides context on the numerous challenges Maritcha Remond Lyons faced while trying to complete high school after her family fled New York City to escape the draft riots of 1863: "She was ineligible to attend Providence High School because the school committee refused to accept her diploma."⁹³ As a teenager, Lyons convincingly testified before "the Rhode Island state legislators" to advocate for herself to be able to attend high school.⁹⁴ Baumgartner's work acknowledges Lyons' contributions to Brooklyn schools and more broadly discusses the

⁹¹ Duane, 2, 22, 114.

⁹² Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*.

⁹³ Baumgartner, 166.

⁹⁴ Baumgartner, 169.

impact of Black teachers: “Teachers shaped the community, tended to the intellectual and moral improvement of African American children and youth, and deepened their own knowledge.”⁹⁵ Baumgartner describes schools opened by Black women, the social causes they joined, and their commitment to the moral development of the broader Black community.

Baumgartner also highlights how some Black men in this environment perpetuated gender inequality by undermining and minimizing the contributions of Black women. Baumgartner provided an example of how a community leader thought about women: “Alexander Crummell, an African American minister, concluded that in antebellum New York ‘the desire for learning was almost exclusively confined to colored men. There were a few young women in New York who thought of these higher things.’”⁹⁶ This aligns with Peterson’s argument that the Black men who led the community did not think women needed equal education: “Like most men of his time, [William] Hamilton believed that the goal of female education was to develop the feminine virtues of modesty and gentility. To the extent that women were to improve their own minds, it was to help form the manners of their menfolk.”⁹⁷ Thorough education was not regarded as a necessity for women. Context from Baumgartner and Peterson on how the Black community in New York City thought about women situates Lyons’ experiences as a student and an educator.

This significant body of research demonstrates that there were limited opportunities for Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century to receive a robust

⁹⁵ Baumgartner, 169, 80.

⁹⁶ Baumgartner, 80.

⁹⁷ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, locs. 1374–1377.

education, and educated Black people faced substantial challenges in finding skilled employment with equitable wages. The historiography also shows that one's adherence to respectability politics impacted one's career success and standing within the Black community. Additionally, Black women faced restrictions based on their race and gender. Fortunately, despite these barriers, the historiography about Black people in nineteenth-century New York City demonstrates that some members of this community earned an education and built successful careers. While there is extensive historical research on race, education, and labor in nineteenth-century New York City and the broader country, fewer studies offer an intimate accounting of the career trajectories of students who attended primary school in this environment. The microhistories in these case studies shed light on the lived experiences of navigating systemic racial barriers to education and employment. Examining the journeys of four Black people who received a primary education in nineteenth-century New York City expands the historiography by illustrating how effective use of individual agency, sufficient community support, and alignment with respectability politics must co-exist with primary education for it to land its intended impact. This research is meaningful because it identifies factors that collectively overshadowed the significance of basic education.

Methodology and Sources

To analyze the range of career and life outcomes for each subject post-primary education, research was conducted on the New York City primary schools they attended, the curriculums they followed, and the career paths they chose. Documents published by local schools, benevolent societies, and nineteenth-century education leaders provide insights into the subjects' experiences as students and the labor market that awaited them.⁹⁸ In addition to historical documents published about educational institutions, Maritcha Remond Lyons and Austin Reed wrote memoirs of their respective lives reflecting on their childhoods, education experiences, and life after education. James McCune Smith and Ira Aldridge left behind letters, speeches, and articles that discuss their journeys as students and professionals.⁹⁹ The combination of historical documents and personal narratives offers insight into the four subjects and the broader education and labor landscape in nineteenth-century New York.

Maritcha Remond Lyon's memoir, *Memories of Yesterdays, All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was—An Autobiography*, was never officially published, and the manuscript remains at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The manuscript is dated 1928, and Lyons shares that she did not have time to begin writing it

⁹⁸ Trustees of the New York African Free School, "New York African Free School Address"; Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*; Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge*; Bourne, *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York*.

⁹⁹ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*; Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*; James McCune Smith and John Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006); "Ira Aldridge"; Maritcha Remond Lyons, "Maritcha Remond Lyons - Writings 1869-1917," 1917 1869, r. 1 b. 2 f. 2, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21221#detailed>; Maritcha Remond Lyons, "Maritcha Remond Lyons - Letters 1869-1929," 1929 1869, r. 1 b. 2 f. 1, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21221#detailed>; "Ira Aldridge Society Records," 1973 1886, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21048>.

until she retired.¹⁰⁰ Lyons wrote the memoir in honor of her father’s wish for her to write a book.¹⁰¹ In addition to outlining her academic and professional experiences, the memoir details how her parents and other Black leaders in New York City engaged in political activism. Lyons also describes the devastation of the Draft Riots of 1863 and the impact of the riots on her own family and the broader community. Lyons’ memoir offers deep insight into how she thought, the choices she made, and the many people who supported her in becoming a renowned educator and community leader.

Like Lyons, Austin Reed’s memoir was also never officially published during his lifetime. In 2009, Yale University scholars became aware of a manuscript authored by a Black man who described his experiences within New York’s prison system during the nineteenth century.¹⁰² The manuscript was finished around 1858 and was discovered at an estate sale in Rochester, New York, nearly 150 years later.¹⁰³ Reed’s accounts were “carefully authenticated” by researchers at Yale who used the “House of Refuge files, prison ledgers, newspapers, census documents” to verify his assertions.¹⁰⁴ Caleb Smith, professor of English and American Studies at Yale, edited the manuscript and wrote an introduction that provides historical context on Reed’s experiences.¹⁰⁵ As Reed wrote his manuscript with the intent that it be published, Smith standardized the spelling and

¹⁰⁰ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 1–2.

¹⁰¹ Lyons, 1.

¹⁰² Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xvi; Random House Group, “The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict,” Random House Books, January 2017, <https://www.randomhousebooks.com/books/241480/>.

¹⁰³ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, v; Random House Group, “The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict.”

¹⁰⁴ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, v; Reed and Smith, xx; Random House Group, “The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict.”

¹⁰⁵ “Caleb Smith | English,” accessed December 21, 2023, <https://english.yale.edu/people/tenured-and-tenure-track-faculty-professors/caleb-smith>.

punctuation while preserving the uniqueness of Reed's writing style.¹⁰⁶ The edited book also includes two letters Reed wrote to the NYHR sixty years after the beginning of his stay there; the spelling and punctuation of these letters are not edited as they were not written for publication.¹⁰⁷ The manuscript was published in 2016 using a title created by Reed, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*.¹⁰⁸ Though Reed's descriptions of his time spent between prison sentences were difficult to corroborate, his early childhood, indentured servitude arrangements, incarceration at a juvenile delinquent facility, and incarceration in adult state prisons aligned with the prison and census records.¹⁰⁹ Reed is also relatively consistent in referring to officers of NYHR by their legal names and referring to the children who lived there, including himself, using aliases. Though Reed's legal first name was Austin, he referred to himself as Rob throughout the memoir. Reed's memoir and the historical context provided by Caleb Smith are the most significant source of information about his life.

Different from Lyons and Reed, context about the life of James McCune Smith exists in speeches and research papers that he produced, as well as articles published about him. John Stauffer, Professor of English and American Literature and African American Studies at Harvard University, compiled McCune Smith's works and provided a biographical sketch and historical context in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (2006).¹¹⁰ Stauffer's compilation serves as a major source of information for this research. In convention with some leading scholars, like Stauffer,

¹⁰⁶ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, lxvi–lxvii.

¹⁰⁷ Reed and Smith, 229.

¹⁰⁸ Reed and Smith, liv.

¹⁰⁹ Reed and Smith, xxxix, xx.

¹¹⁰ Smith and Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith*; "John Stauffer," John Stauffer, accessed November 23, 2023, <http://www.johnstauffer.org/>.

who have discussed McCune Smith in their works, publications written about him during his lifetime, and examples of how he signed his name in some of his personal letters, this thesis will refer to him as “McCune Smith” instead of using the singular surname “Smith.”¹¹¹ Keyword searches for James McCune Smith in online newspaper archives such as Accessible.com and Chroniclingamerica.loc.gov also provide more details about his life and impact. The combination of McCune Smith’s own words and articles written about him paint a full picture of his educational and career experiences.

A constraint of this research is the more limited availability of firsthand accounts from Ira Aldridge. Aldridge did not publish a memoir, nor is there a compilation of his writings or speeches. Fortunately, there is an Aldridge Collection at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture that includes letters he has written, newspaper clippings, honors he’s received, and legal documents.¹¹² As Aldridge received publicity throughout his career, context about his performances and their reception can also be found by searching for his name in *The New York Times* archive and Chroniclingamerica.loc.gov. The combination of historical documents about educational institutions, memoirs, letters, speeches, and newspaper articles about their lives provides sufficient primary sources for this case study.

¹¹¹ Amy M. Cools, “The Life and Work of James McCune Smith (1813-1865)” (Edinburgh, Scotland, The University of Edinburgh, 2021), 2, https://era.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/38333/CoolsAM_2021.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Note: For examples of McCune Smith being referred to with two surnames by academics, see John Stauffer’s *The Work’s of James McCune Smith*, Leslie M. Harris’ *In the Shadows of Slavery*, and W.E.B. Du Bois’ “The Talented Tenth.” Additionally, examples of McCune Smith signing his letters with two surnames or a first initial and two surnames can be found in Stauffer’s *The Work’s of James McCune Smith* pages 315, 320, 321, and 323. Finally, the September 28, 1860 *New York Times* clipping offers an example of McCune Smith being referred to with two surnames by a publication written during his lifetime.

¹¹² New York Public Library, “Archives.Nypl.Org -- Ira Aldridge Society Records,” accessed January 3, 2024, <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21048>.

Overview

While the four people included in this case study are united by their learnings in primary school being less significant to their career outcomes than their personal choices, access to community support, and respectability, the differences between these individuals are numerous. Whereas Austin Reed and Maritcha Remond Lyons enjoyed middle-class early childhoods, James McCune Smith was born enslaved.¹¹³ While it is documented that McCune Smith, Reed, and Lyons were passionate about their primary school curriculums during their youth, Ira Aldridge had an affinity for recitation and theater. The subjects of this case study also differ in their overall educational attainment, their chosen professions, and their levels of career success in New York City. As Aldridge is only six years older than McCune Smith, they attended the African Free School during the same time and became lifelong friends.¹¹⁴ McCune Smith was also the godfather and physician of Lyons, who was thirty-five years younger than him.¹¹⁵ Austin Reed, who spent his time in New York City as a juvenile delinquent in the New York House of Refuge, does not have known connections to the other subjects.

The chapters are arranged in a sequence that highlights the connections between the professional trajectories of the four individuals. Chapter II traces Ira Aldridge's education at the African Free School, his decision to leave New York City, his extraordinary achievements in Europe, and the New York perception and reception of his accomplishments abroad. This chapter argues that while his education at AFS provided

¹¹³ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xxi; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 2637; Smith and Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith*, xiii.

¹¹⁴ Ira Aldridge, "Letter from Ira Aldridge," *The Weekly Anglo-African*, June 23, 1860, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030179/1860-06-23/ed-1/seq-2/>.

¹¹⁵ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 7.

him with a foundation to be able to recite lines, it was his choice to travel for work and his ability to garner support from local European audiences and news outlets that had the largest impact on his success. Chapter III outlines James McCune Smith's outstanding academic performance as an African Free School student, the preparation and resources that enabled him to travel to the University of Glasgow for his medical education, and his highly impactful career as a physician and abolitionist in New York City. This chapter demonstrates that McCune Smith's decision to study abroad and the community support he received to do so, combined with his adherence to respectability politics, resulted in him being a textbook example of professional success.

Additionally, Chapter IV discusses Maritcha Remond Lyons' experience as a Manhattan Colored School student, the discrimination she faced while trying to receive a high school education, and her exceptional contributions as a leading educator in Brooklyn. This chapter asserts that Lyons' commitment to lifelong learning and access to family and community resources to confront discrimination respectfully led to professional success and elite status despite not conforming to gender norms. Finally, Chapter V discusses Austin Reed's middle-class early childhood, his family's financial issues resulting from his father's death, the education he received while incarcerated as a juvenile delinquent, and his ultimate inability to escape a life of petty crime. This chapter contends that lack of effective family and community help and dismissal of societal expectations resulted in the inability to build a successful career despite receiving a basic education and learning a trade. The chapters are united by depictions of lived experiences navigating systemic racial barriers to educational attainment and gainful employment, as well as vivid illustrations of the impact of agency, support, and respectability.

Chapter II.

Ira Aldridge

My Dear Friend and School-fellow - I received the "Anglo-African" containing a memoir of myself, and I readily detected the author. It is unnecessary to tell you the conflicting feelings, the pleasing reminiscences, it awakened. I was a boy again; the thoughts and incidents of other days came rushing thick and fast upon me, the retrospect causing both pain and pleasure.

—Letter from Ira Aldridge to James McCune Smith¹¹⁶

When New York City-born actor Ira Aldridge traveled to Europe in the 1820s to build his career as an actor, both his decision to move abroad and his chosen profession were acts of rebellion against societal norms. This was an exceptional course of action as most Black American teenagers did not relocate to a different continent for work opportunities in the early nineteenth century. Acting was also regarded as an immoral career during this era, and Aldridge's father, a minister, forced him to stop acting in New York.¹¹⁷ Aldridge's mid to late-1820s representations of Shakespeare in Europe, resulting in overwhelming praise and continued professional opportunities, were a culmination of his earliest documented acts of effective resistance against the professional expectations of a Black man in the nineteenth century; he neither settled for manual labor nor committed to a typical skilled trade.

¹¹⁶ Aldridge, "Letter from Ira Aldridge."

¹¹⁷ Matthew Rebirthorn, "Introduction: 'Nineteenth-Century' 'American' 'Theater' and 'Performance,'" *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 6, no. 2 (2018): 390; Bolden, *Maritcha*, 16.

Ira Aldridge was born in New York City on July 24, 1807.¹¹⁸ His father was a preacher and straw vendor; his mother died when he was around ten years old.¹¹⁹ Though the family was of modest means, Aldridge's father enrolled him in school with the hopes that he would pursue a career in the ministry.¹²⁰ Aldridge's classmate, James McCune Smith, wrote a sketch in 1860 describing Aldridge's early life and career. Per Aldridge, McCune Smith's sketch was the only biographical publication about him that is completely accurate.¹²¹ McCune Smith described Aldridge as an African Free School student who had not "distinguished himself in any direction."¹²² McCune Smith explains that Aldridge was taught by Charles C. Andrews who was known for his ability to identify and invest in a student's strengths: "It was a peculiar talent, constantly exercised by that teacher, to find out what a boy was good for - in other words, the bent of the child; and having once ascertained this, he would spare no pains to cultivate such bent with untiring industry."¹²³ Per Aldridge's brother, he was "held in considerable favor for his quickness...both by his teachers and his schoolmaster."¹²⁴ An 1850 memoir published about Aldridge's career states that he won prizes at the African Free School for "declamation," which is the practice of rhetorical speaking.¹²⁵ It is possible that Andrews encouraged Aldridge to hone his recitation skills early on.

¹¹⁸ Bernth Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge: The Early Years, 1807-1833*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 4, https://key-idp.iam.harvard.edu/idp/profile/SAML2/POST/SSO?execution=e1s1&_eventId_proceed=1.

¹¹⁹ Lindfors, 18.

¹²⁰ Lindfors, 4, 23.

¹²¹ Aldridge, "Letter from Ira Aldridge."

¹²² "Ira Aldridge," 29.

¹²³ "Ira Aldridge," 29.

¹²⁴ "Ira Aldridge," 29.

¹²⁵ *Memoir and Theatrical Career of Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius* (London, England: Onwhyn, Catharine Street, Strand, 1850), 10, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=udel.31741113286852&seq=16>; "Definition of DECLAMATION," in *Merriam-Webster*, October 30, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/declamation>; Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge*, 25.

Aldridge left the African Free School on Mulberry Street in 1822 when he was fifteen years old, as this was the final age boys were able to attend AFS.¹²⁶ Though Aldridge's total years of education are unknown, his ability to recite Shakespearean texts as a teenager is likely reflective of at least a "basic four-year course" of study, which may have included "Reading, Writing, Spelling...Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography...Rhetoric, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy...Astronomy, Theology."¹²⁷ It is plausible that his education contributed to his oratorical and persuasive skills on stage.

Like other African Free School students, Aldridge's employment options in New York City were limited after leaving school in 1822. Per McCune Smith, Aldridge attempted to start working on a ship and sailed south to North Carolina, where he "attracted the attention of a slave-dealer, who offered the captain five hundred dollars for him."¹²⁸ Though life at sea was not considered the type of skilled work that aligned with Aldridge's education, seafaring was a popular profession for Black men between 1800 and 1825 that sometimes resulted in receiving the same wages as white sailors.¹²⁹ After returning to New York, Aldridge was likely discouraged by the interaction with the slave-dealer and hesitant to continue a career at sea. Aldridge's experience of potentially being enslaved as a result of pursuing a gainful employment opportunity reflects a systemic racial barrier to building a steady career.

Though it is unclear exactly how Aldridge's theater career began, in the early 1820s, Aldridge and his brother began acting at the African Grove Theater. The African Grove was founded by William Alexander Brown, a Black man born in St. Vincent, who

¹²⁶ Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge*, 25.

¹²⁷ Lindfors, 24–25.

¹²⁸ "Ira Aldridge," 29.

¹²⁹ Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge*, 28–29.

previously worked as a ship steward.¹³⁰ This theater was the first theater in the United States “owned and operated” by Black Americans.¹³¹ Aldridge’s recitation abilities likely attracted him to this profession. Upon learning of their involvement in acting, Aldridge’s father “took them away from the theater.”¹³² Aldridge’s father likely did not consider acting to be a dignified profession because American theaters at this time were regarded as dishonorable places where money was spent on superficial things.¹³³ His father also wanted him to mirror his path and become a minister.¹³⁴ Between 1824 and 1825, while still a teenager, Aldridge left New York for Liverpool, England, where he began a highly successful career as an actor and never returned to the United States.¹³⁵

Decision to leave the United States

Though Aldridge did not leave behind a letter, speech, or memoir documenting exactly why he left the United States to build his acting career, there are several hints about why he would do so. As Aldridge showed strong declamation skills as a student, the tension between his affinity for theater and his father’s disapproval of acting could have been a contributing factor to his move.¹³⁶ His experience of nearly being kidnapped into enslavement while trying to work as a seaman may have also dissuaded Aldridge from remaining in the United States. Aldridge’s teacher, Charles C. Andrews, also held

¹³⁰ David N. Gellman, “African Grove Theater” (Oxford University Press, December 1, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.44520>; Desha Osborne, “Brown, William Alexander,” in *Oxford African American Studies Center* (Oxford University Press, September 30, 2016), <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-50944>.

¹³¹ Gellman, “African Grove Theater.”

¹³² “Ira Aldridge,” 29.

¹³³ Bolden, *Maritcha*, 16; Rebhorn, “Introduction,” 390.

¹³⁴ Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge*, 18, 23.

¹³⁵ Lindfors, 4; Hazel Waters, “Ira Aldridge and the Battlefield of Race,” *Race & Class* 45, no. 1 (July 1, 2003): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396803045001001>.

¹³⁶ *Memoir and Theatrical Career of Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius*, 10; “Ira Aldridge,” 29.

the sentiment that his students were unlikely to be able to leverage their education to find gainful employment in New York:

After a boy has spent five or six years in the school, and is deservedly encouraged by the teachers and the trustees, and...is spoken of in terms of high approbation by respectable visitors, for his manifest talent and superior intellect, he leaves school, with every avenue closed against him which is open to the white boy, for honorable and respectable rank in society¹³⁷

It is possible that his teacher's hopeless outlook for his future in New York influenced his decision to leave. Regardless of the exact reasoning behind his choice, Aldridge exercising his agency to move to a foreign continent opened a world of professional opportunities for him.

Reception in Europe

Though Aldridge was able to find paid work as an actor abroad, his success did not come easily and was met with skepticism from both Europeans and Americans. Luckily for Aldridge, from the beginning of his career in England, many local publications greatly exaggerated his acting experience in New York and incorrectly portrayed him as a massively famous performer in the United States theater scene.¹³⁸ In 1827, about three years after arriving in England, Aldridge was already being introduced in playbills as the "African Roscius," which alludes to Quintus Roscius Gallus, a famous

¹³⁷ Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, 117–18.

¹³⁸ "Mr. Keene The African Roscius" (Theatre-Royal, March 12, 1827), Box 4, Scrapbook, Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; "Playbill Advertising Ira Aldridge's Appearance as Othello in Northampton, 1831" (Northampton Theatre, September 21, 1831), BOX 2, Ira Frederick Aldridge letter to J. Cole, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/playbill-advertising-ira-aldrigges-appearance-as-othello-in-northampton-1831>.

Roman Actor.¹³⁹ An 1831 playbill claimed, “his success in New York and the principal Theater of the United States has induced him to visit England professionally.”¹⁴⁰ While lofty descriptions such as “known throughout America by the appellation of the African Roscius” do not fully align with his relatively brief experiences at the African Grove Theater, misinformation printed about his time in New York helped him establish a positive reputation in England early on.¹⁴¹

While Aldridge was well-known for his roles in Shakespearean plays such as *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, he also successfully played roles in *Oroonoko* and *The Padlock*.¹⁴² Though he often played characters of color, including Othello, Zanga in *The Revenge*, and *Mungo* in *Padlock*, he also portrayed Macbeth.¹⁴³ Aldridge performed alongside white actors, and one audience was shocked by his proximity to a white woman:

“In a Dresden theatre, not long since Ira Aldridge...was acting ‘Othello,’ when ‘Desdemona’ appeared in the last scene in a real bed, having on real night clothes. The ladies were greatly shocked, some cried, some fainted, some left the theatre, others looked up with becoming loyalty to the royal

¹³⁹ “Mr. Keene the African Roscius” (Theatre-Royal, March 12, 1827), Box 3, Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Bernth Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge: The Early Years, 1807-1833*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 5, https://key-idp.iam.harvard.edu/idp/profile/SAML2/POST/SSO?execution=e1s1&_eventId_proceed=1. Note: At the beginning of Aldridge’s career, he briefly used the last name “Keene” as stage his name. The reasons for this are unclear. For more context, see Lindfors’ *Ira Aldridge: The Early Years 1807 - 1833*, page 65.

¹⁴⁰ “Playbill Advertising Ira Aldridge’s Appearance as Othello in Northampton, 1831.”

¹⁴¹ “Playbill Advertising Ira Aldridge’s Appearance as Othello in Northampton, 1831”; “The Coburg Theatre,” *The Times*, October 11, 1825, <https://go-gale-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ps/i.do?p=TTDA&u=camb55135&id=GALE|CS35410251&v=2.1&it=r&sid=bookmark-TTDA&asid=17c3b1f4>.

¹⁴² Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, “List Showing the Theatres and Plays in Various European Cities Where Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius Acted during the Years 1824-1867/ Compiled by Arthur A. Schomburg, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library,” n.d., August 12, 2023, <https://digitalcollections.library.harvard.edu/catalog/990069496980203941>; “Ira Aldridge as King Lear,” NYPL Digital Collections, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/bbaea7b7-dce9-9018-e040-e00a18067704>.

¹⁴³ Schomburg, “List Showing the Theatres and Plays in Various European Cities Where Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius Acted during the Years 1824-1867/ Compiled by Arthur A. Schomburg, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library,” 9–10.

box, and seeing that Her Gracious Majesty never took off her eyes from the interesting negro, they followed her example.¹⁴⁴

As this performance took place in a prestigious theatre and was attended by royalty, the cast and production were likely the best Germany had to offer during this era. The production was able to create a realistic enough bedroom scene for some audience members to cringe at the idea of an interracial relationship. Despite the provocative nature of this scene, Aldridge's talent was able to hold the attention of the theater's most esteemed guest. It is worth emphasizing that some audience members watched the "royal box" for cues on how to respond to Aldridge, and the respect "Her Gracious Majesty" showed for his performance influenced others to do the same.¹⁴⁵ Patronage from a royal person benefitted Aldridge's career because it encouraged attentiveness to his performance and earned him publicity from a local newspaper.

Throughout his career, Aldridge received constant praise from local and national publications for his "elocutionary powers," "clear and flexible voice," ability to use "great judgement" on the stage, and effective conveying of "expression and feeling."¹⁴⁶ On at least one occasion, he created such an "extraordinary sensation" and drew such a large audience that the production remained open for "four nights" longer than planned.¹⁴⁷ Aldridge received enough patronage and support throughout the European continent to perform at prestigious theaters across four decades, earn numerous accolades, including an expensive gift from General Governor of the Last Provinces of

¹⁴⁴ "August 03, 1853," *Daily Evening Star*, August 3, 1853, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045461/1853-08-03/ed-1/seq-4/>.

¹⁴⁵ "August 03, 1853."

¹⁴⁶ "The African Roscius," *The Morning Post*, March 21, 1848, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/402156197/>; "Surrey Theatre," *The Observer*, March 26, 1848, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/258955711/>.

¹⁴⁷ "Theatre Royal Ipswich," *The Ipswich Journal*, February 8, 1851, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/390386289/>.

Russia Prince Suvaroff, attain sufficient material wealth to buy property in an affluent suburb of London, and ultimately be granted “all the rights and capacities of a natural born British Subject.”¹⁴⁸ Aldridge became a naturalized British citizen in January 1864.¹⁴⁹ He was pleased to brag about his professional success, especially his “unparalleled success in Russia” across “seventy-one representations” that earned him “extraordinary honors.”¹⁵⁰

While audiences in most European cities embraced Aldridge, London was an exception. Despite the positive press he received in the 1820s from other British cities, London’s reception of Aldridge reflected the belief that a Black actor could not effectively portray complex characters, resulting in him being “kept off the London stage.”¹⁵¹ A *Times* critic of his 1825 performance in *Oroonoko* at the Coburg Theatre in London began his review by analyzing Aldridge’s facial features: “The African Roscius, who last evening made his first appearance before an enlightened audience at the Coburg Theatre...is in complexion of the colour of a new halfpenny, barring the brightness; his hair is woolly, and his features, although they possess much of the African character, are considerably humanized.”¹⁵² The critic has an intense focus on Aldridge’s complexion and hair texture. Before addressing Aldridge’s performance or talent, the *Times* critic was

¹⁴⁸ Schomburg, “List Showing the Theatres and Plays in Various European Cities Where Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius Acted during the Years 1824-1867/ Compiled by Arthur A. Schomburg, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library”; Ira Aldridge, “Letter from Ira Aldridge to the Editor of the Athenaeum,” November 2, 1858, Box 2, Miscellaneous 1956-1964, Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Aldridge, “Letter from Ira Aldridge”; “Ira Aldridge | Actor | Blue Plaques,” English Heritage, accessed July 30, 2023, <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/aldrige-ira/>; England’s Secretary of State’s Office, “Ira Aldridge Naturalized British Citizen Certificate,” January 1864, Box 4, Scrapbook, Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

¹⁴⁹ England’s Secretary of State’s Office, “Ira Aldridge Naturalized British Citizen Certificate.”

¹⁵⁰ Aldridge, “Letter from Ira Aldridge.”

¹⁵¹ Bernth Lindfors, “‘Mislike Me Not for My Complexion...’: Ira Aldridge in Whiteface,” *African American Review* 50, no. 4 (2017): 1008, <https://doi.org/10.1353/afa.2017.0155>.

¹⁵² “The Coburg Theatre.”

eager to draw conclusions about his humanity based on his appearance. The critic also declared that “the shape of his lips” renders it “utterly impossible for him to pronounce English in such a manner as to satisfy even the unfastidious ears of the gallery.”¹⁵³ This critic’s commentary is rooted in the idea that Black people are inherently different and inferior. The racist judgment of Aldridge’s 1825 performance insinuates that the best part of his representation was its ending: “The audience wondered and laughed at him all throughout the play... but it was not until he killed himself that their delight grew outrageous. Then, indeed, they seemed perfectly delighted.”¹⁵⁴ The critic implies that the audience was mocking Aldridge’s representation, disliked his acting, and was happy to see him leave the stage.

The commentary from this critic is rooted in the type of scientific racism that some people used during this era to justify why Black people should be excluded from certain professions. Drawing connections between one’s facial features and one’s intellectual capacity and humanity aligns with the facial angle theory that held that different races had different facial angles; anatomists such as George Cuvier used this theory in the nineteenth century to promote the idea that one’s intelligence could be determined by one’s facial angle.¹⁵⁵ Cuvier argued that the facial angle of the Black race most closely resembled that of an animal and the angle of the white race least resembled animals; this argument helped to justify the stereotype that it was scientifically impossible for Black people to have the same intellectual capacity as white people.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ “The Coburg Theatre.”

¹⁵⁴ “The Coburg Theatre.”

¹⁵⁵ Ann Hui Ching, Gavin Chun Wui Kang, and Gale Jue Shuang Lim, “Craniofacial Measurements: A History of Scientific Racism, Rethinking Anthropometric Norms,” *The Journal of Craniofacial Surgery* 32, no. 3 (2021): 825, <https://doi.org/10.1097/SCS.00000000000007266>.

¹⁵⁶ Ching, Kang, and Lim, 825.

These racist ideas created a systemic barrier to Aldridge being judged fairly in London throughout his career.

Interestingly, despite the obstacles faced trying to establish himself in London, Aldridge chose to purchase a home in this city and continued pursuing professional opportunities there.¹⁵⁷ As late as three decades into his career, he still sought opportunities to gain positive publicity in London. In 1858, Aldridge wrote a letter to the editor of the London-based journal, *The Athenaeum*, to inform the editor of his progress in Russia and request that the editor give “slight notice” of his success in an upcoming publication as this would “materially serve” Aldridge.¹⁵⁸ This gentle plea for support from an influential person reflects a modest form of resistance against London excluding him from the theater scene. His method of objecting to rejection aligned with the standards of behavior that were considered appropriate for Black people during this era.

New York’s Response to Aldridge’s Success Abroad

News of Aldridge’s impact and accomplishments abroad reached the United States via newspapers. He was celebrated in Black-owned publications such as the *Anglo-African* for “drawing large audiences” in Europe and “winning golden opinions from the press.”¹⁵⁹ His positive European press reviews were reprinted in mainstream publications like the *New York Times*, where it was acknowledged that the “utmost attention of the auditors” was “fixed upon him” and he “answered perfectly to his renown as an eminent

¹⁵⁷ “Ira Aldridge | Actor | Blue Plaques.”

¹⁵⁸ Aldridge, “Letter from Ira Aldridge to the Editor of the Athenaeum.”

¹⁵⁹ “Ira Aldridge,” 29.

artist.”¹⁶⁰ The positive publicity Aldridge received helped to raise his profile in the United States and likely contributed to some Americans having a favorable perception of his success in a profession that did not conform with notions of respectability.

As expected, not every media outlet responded positively to the accolades Aldridge received abroad. An 1867 New York *Herald* article claimed that Black people’s ability to mimic behaviors, combined with Europe’s fascination with the Black race, was the sole cause of his popularity overseas: “The radical organs are all beginning to make a fuss about a theatrical negro... But to whatever degree he may have carried the unquestioned imitative faculties of his race, he cannot have made a greater sensation in Europe than many another negro. In Europe folks always go wild over a negro.”¹⁶¹ This criticism reflects the belief that Aldridge could not possess actual talent. Similarly, when discussing his planned performance in New York, an 1867 *New York Times* article described him as a “full-blooded negro with crinkly wool, flat nose, thick lips and skin of the blackest hue” and showcased curiosity about his potential “reception” in the United States.¹⁶² Before he was able to return to the United States to perform, Aldridge died suddenly on August 7, 1867, of a lung-related health issue at age sixty in Lodz, Poland.¹⁶³ Aldridge’s awareness of how he was represented in various publications likely impacted

¹⁶⁰ “Musical and Dramatic.,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 1853, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1853/03/25/archives/musical-and-dramatic.html>.

¹⁶¹ “A Theatrical Negro,” *The New York Herald*, August 10, 1867, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1867-08-10/ed-1/seq-4/>.

¹⁶² “MINOR TOPICS.,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 1867, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1867/08/06/archives/minor-topics.html>.

¹⁶³ “Translation of the Death Certificate of Ira Aldridge,” August 8, 1867, Box 2, Aldridge Family Documents (Copies) 1864-1869; 1893; 1915; 1933; 1956, Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Waters, “Ira Aldridge and the Battlefield of Race,” 21.

his choice not to arrange a performance in the United States until four decades into his career.¹⁶⁴

The Impact of Individual Agency and Patronage

While Aldridge's access to a basic education via the African Free School provided him with the foundation to effectively recite Shakespeare as a teenager, lack of extensive family and community support and limited work within his chosen profession impacted his ability to succeed in New York City. The only consistent forum for Aldridge to act in New York was the African Grove Theater, which was often harassed by local whites, and his father disapproved of his involvement with plays.¹⁶⁵ Aldridge's choice to move to Europe made it possible for him to gain work, be judged fairly in most cities, and build a lucrative career. His effective use of individual agency enabled him to perform in locations that had hospitable patrons. Evidence of the impact of his decision to move to Europe includes countless positive reviews describing him as playing his role "excellently," show dates being expanded due to popular demand, and continuous opportunities to perform throughout the European continent for over forty years.¹⁶⁶ Aldridge overcame the limited roles available to Black actors in Europe by traveling from city to city based on the availability of work.¹⁶⁷ It is worth noting that James Hewlett and Ira Aldridge are often regarded as the most prominent Black American actors of the first

¹⁶⁴ Aldridge, "Letter from Ira Aldridge."

¹⁶⁵ Gellman, "African Grove Theater"; Aldridge, "Letter from Ira Aldridge."

¹⁶⁶ "Mr. Ira Aldridge, The African Roscius" (Royal Shakespearean Theatre, Stratford, April 28, 1851), Box 4, Scrapbook, Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Schomburg, "List Showing the Theatres and Plays in Various European Cities Where Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius Acted during the Years 1824-1867/ Compiled by Arthur A. Schomburg, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library"; "Theatre Royal Ipswich."

¹⁶⁷ Lindfors, "Mislike Me Not for My Complexion...," 1005-6.

half of the nineteenth century; as Hewlett's career ended with the closing of the African Grove Theater in the 1820s, Aldridge was by far the most successful Black American actor of his time.¹⁶⁸

The differences in opportunities for Aldridge in Europe versus the United States raise the question of why he was better received abroad. One of Aldridge's biographers, Bernth Lindfors, argues that he was able to "depend on his novelty value to draw people to the theater."¹⁶⁹ In European playbills and articles, he has been described as an "unprecedented novelty" or "great novelty."¹⁷⁰ As there was often misinformation printed about Aldridge, many Europeans believed that he was born to a prince from Senegal who was wealthy enough to send him to Schenectady College in New York for a proper education; it was also printed that after becoming hugely famous in the United States, he traveled to England to further his career.¹⁷¹ While this story varies significantly from Aldridge's documented life in New York City, this reputation helped him to distinguish himself and gain a following in Europe. The idea that Aldridge had a prestigious background helped him to secure sufficient patrons to sustain his career.

Another factor that likely contributed to Aldridge's career success in Europe is some Europeans' disapproval of the extreme racial prejudice in the United States. In 1851, *The Hampshire Advertiser* published a memoir about Aldridge that ended with a statement declaring that his race should not limit his professional advancement:

The African tragedian has made this country the land of his adoption; and we sincerely trust that no ungenerous prejudice against his colour or his

¹⁶⁸ Yvonne Shafer, "BLACK ACTORS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN THEATRE," *CLA Journal* 20, no. 3 (1977): 387,

https://hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/1mdq5o5/TN_cdi_proquest_journals_1304147821.

¹⁶⁹ Lindfors, "Mislike Me Not for My Complexion...," 1005.

¹⁷⁰ "Mr. Ira Aldridge, The African Roscius"; "The African Roscius."

¹⁷¹ "Playbill Advertising Ira Aldridge's Appearance as Othello in Northampton, 1831."

race may be permitted to interfere with his professional progress, or to rob him of one leaf of that histrionic laurel which, we believe, he is destined to enjoy. Genius is not confined to any one race or country: it is of all complexions and of all climes; and its mission is uniformly beneficial or elevating to humanity. Be its recipient white or black, let none dare to despise it.¹⁷²

This article reflects the open-minded and progressive sentiment held by many of Aldridge's European patrons. There is also a sense of satisfaction that Aldridge chose England as his permanent home, and it is clear some Europeans wanted him to succeed.

Though the London stage was minimally receptive to Aldridge, several days after his death, the British publication *The Era* printed an article about him that acknowledged the racism in the United States and boasted about his achievements in Europe.¹⁷³ The article claimed: "The prejudice against a 'coloured' actor ran at that time very strong in New York against the *debutant*...Deprived of other means of obtaining a subsistence, Mr. Ira Aldridge was compelled to accept the position of servant."¹⁷⁴ The writer's tone shows a level of sympathy for the prejudice against Aldridge in his home country. The article ultimately celebrated his success in Europe: "In Cologne, Brussels, Paris, Belgium, Pesth [*sic*], and Vienna, he was uniformly successful, and in Russia particularly he was warmly received, obtaining some recognitions from the Emperor."¹⁷⁵ It is possible that some Europeans were motivated to support Aldridge's career because they were aware of and disagreed with the prejudices Black actors faced in the United States.

While Aldridge's education at the African Free School and raw talent as an actor provided a foundation for him to begin his career, it was his effective use of personal

¹⁷² "Mr. Ira Aldridge," *The Hampshire Advertiser*, August 9, 1851, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/410026502/>.

¹⁷³ "Death of Mr. Ira Aldridge," *The Era*, August 28, 1867, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/386997539/>.

¹⁷⁴ "Death of Mr. Ira Aldridge."

¹⁷⁵ "Death of Mr. Ira Aldridge."

agency to move abroad and travel continuously for work that earned him the patronage required to excel in a profession that was not widely accessible to Black people. His reputation also benefited from the positive responses of prestigious audience members who showed respect for his representations or even rewarded him with expensive gifts. Aldridge was also proactive at humbly engaging in self-promotion by documenting his progress in letters with the hopes that the content would be published. Though acting was not a typical career for Black elites during this era, the reality that Aldridge was celebrated in Black-owned newspapers during his lifetime and mentioned in W.E.B. Du Bois' "The Talented Tenth" essay as an example of success reflects that the significance of his accomplishments earned him respectability within his home community.¹⁷⁶ Aldridge's decision to focus most of his professional efforts on cities where he could be judged fairly solidified his place in history as an exceptional actor.

Ira Aldridge had a fascinating journey with respectability politics. His early life experiences attending the African Free School and then briefly pursuing a career at sea were entirely in line with the expectations for honorable Black men in nineteenth-century New York City. However, his passion for theater and acting was associated with wickedness in this era and diverged from the standards held by his father and his community. Interestingly, Aldridge's classmate James McCune Smith, who intensely aligned all aspects of his life with respectability politics, supported Aldridge and remained connected to him throughout his journey. As part of James McCune Smith's commitment to dignified conduct, he embraced everyone regardless of race, education, or profession.

¹⁷⁶ "Ira Aldridge," 29; Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*, 7.

Chapter III.

James McCune Smith

I feel myself less...to anything that I have done or can accomplish, than to the principles by which I have striven to guide my conduct. These principles are, to obtain education at every sacrifice and every hazard, and to apply such education to the good of our common country. – James McCune Smith¹⁷⁷

In 1824, eleven-year-old James McCune Smith, who was legally enslaved, was awarded the opportunity to speak before the world-renowned military leader Marquis de Lafayette.¹⁷⁸ McCune Smith's academic talents earned him this rare moment, and he used it to express how pleased he would be to call the war hero a friend of emancipation.¹⁷⁹ The respectful yet firm and intentional nature of his appeal is one of the earliest indications of McCune Smith's ability to productively advocate for a change to the status quo and effectively resist the conventional expectations of his race.

James McCune Smith, born on April 18, 1813, in New York City, was the child of a self-emancipated enslaved mother and an unidentified white father.¹⁸⁰ Though McCune Smith had the status of a bondman until New York state's blanket emancipation in July of 1827 and had to be mindful of slavecatchers, he spent his childhood trying to be the best student possible.¹⁸¹ His experiences at the African Free School were the

¹⁷⁷ "Reception of Dr. Smith," *The Colored American*, October 28, 1837, Accessible.com.

¹⁷⁸ James McCune Smith, "James McCune Smith, Address to the Marquis de Lafayette, 1824," in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, ed. John Stauffer (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁷⁹ Smith, 7.

¹⁸⁰ John Stauffer, ed., "Introduction," in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), xiii, xix.

¹⁸¹ Stauffer, xx; Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 18, 13.

beginning of his path to becoming a renowned physician, abolitionist, educator, and writer.¹⁸² As McCune Smith never published a memoir and many of his essays lacked “popular appeal,” context about his life and impact can be traced back to his schoolwork at the African Free School saved by Charles C. Andrews and his publications about equality, medicine, climate, real estate, and labor.¹⁸³

Accounting for three of twelve entries in Charles C. Andrews’ 1828 compilation of outstanding work, McCune Smith’s assignments appear more frequently than any other pupil.¹⁸⁴ His navigation work is described as a “remarkably neat production,” and his address to the French aristocrat and military leader General Lafayette is also featured in this collection.¹⁸⁵ In his address to General Lafayette, McCune Smith showed exceptional gratitude for the General and requested his support with emancipation:

In [*sic*] behalf of myself and fellow-schoolmates may I be permitted to express our sincere and respectful gratitude to you for the condescension you have manifested this day in visiting this institution...Here, sir, you behold hundreds of the poor children of Africa sharing with those of a lighter hue in the blessings of education; and while it will be our pleasure to remember the great deeds you have done for America, it will be our delight also to cherish the memory of General Lafayette as a friend to African emancipation, and as a member of this institution.¹⁸⁶

McCune Smith intentionally acknowledged how extraordinary it was for General Lafayette to visit the school. He was also deliberate in recognizing the General’s previous efforts to secure freedom for people in the United States. McCune Smith used his personal agency to gently but directly request that the General aid Black Americans in achieving liberty. This productive challenge to the status quo received a bow and a

¹⁸² Stauffer, “Introduction,” xiii, xx.

¹⁸³ Stauffer, xiii, xvi; Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 13; Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, 60–61.

¹⁸⁵ Smith, “James McCune Smith, Address to the Marquis de Lafayette, 1824,” 5–7; Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, 61.

¹⁸⁶ Smith, “James McCune Smith, Address to the Marquis de Lafayette, 1824,” 7.

“thank you, my dear child” from General Lafayette.¹⁸⁷ McCune Smith’s ability to make his desires known to influential people while showcasing the utmost regard for their position enabled him to inspire educators and community members to invest in him early on. Even as a child, McCune Smith was adept at navigating politics of respectability. McCune Smith recited the speech again weeks later while on a boat to Philadelphia and received a small amount of change from passengers, which he sent to his mother.¹⁸⁸ He learned at the age of eleven that his words were effective enough to captivate others and generate income.¹⁸⁹

McCune Smith had high regard for the education he received at the African Free School and its leader, Charles C. Andrews. He described Andrews as having “versatile talents,” being “a good disciplinarian,” and “in true sympathy with his scholars’ desire to advance.”¹⁹⁰ While he acknowledged Andrews was not “an abolitionist” “in the modern sense,” McCune Smith regarded Andrews as a sufficient advocate for the abilities of Black students: “In spelling, penmanship, grammar, geography, and astronomy, he rightly boasted that his boys were equal, if not superior, to any like number of scholars in the city, and freely challenged competition at his Annual Examinations.”¹⁹¹ He also complimented Andrews’ willingness to hire “more competent teachers at his own expense” to educate African Free School students in subjects he was less familiar with such as “Natural Philosophy” and “Navigation.”¹⁹² When reflecting on Andrews’

¹⁸⁷ Smith and Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith*, 7.

¹⁸⁸ Smith and Stauffer, 5.

¹⁸⁹ Smith and Stauffer, 5.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, “Introduction,” 21.

¹⁹¹ Smith, 21–22.

¹⁹² Smith, 21.

“removal” from AFS for his “colonization views,” McCune Smith described the “attachment” students had to Andrews as “firm and ardent.”¹⁹³

Higher Education Abroad

After McCune Smith graduated from the African Free School in 1828, he worked as a blacksmith six days a week while preparing for higher education.¹⁹⁴ He likely remained in this profession for four years after graduating from AFS because being a blacksmith was considered skilled work and held more prestige than unskilled work as a laborer, waiter, or servant.¹⁹⁵ Andrews notes that only some students found work as “Sail Makers, Shoe Makers, Tin Workers, Tailors, Carpenters, Blacksmiths.”¹⁹⁶ Though working as a blacksmith did not match McCune Smith’s academic ability, it was a better fit and more respectable than unskilled labor.

While Andrews created a classroom environment that allowed McCune Smith to receive a basic education, post-graduation McCune Smith was also mentored and supported by AFS alumnus Reverend Peter Williams.¹⁹⁷ Williams tutored McCune Smith in languages and helped him raise funds to further his education abroad.¹⁹⁸ He eventually became “fluent in Greek, Latin, and French and proficient in German, Spanish, Italian, and Hebrew.”¹⁹⁹ When McCune Smith was abroad, it was Williams who informed the

¹⁹³ Smith, 23.

¹⁹⁴ Stauffer, “Introduction,” xx.

¹⁹⁵ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 30; Harris, 231.

¹⁹⁶ Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, 122.

¹⁹⁷ Stauffer, “Introduction,” xx.

¹⁹⁸ Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 22; Stauffer, “Introduction,” xx.

¹⁹⁹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Foreword,” in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), x.

New York community of his university graduation and his planned return home.²⁰⁰

Support from the Black community in New York City was instrumental to his preparation to attend university abroad.

It is worth noting that McCune Smith did attempt to obtain a higher education in New York City and applied to “Columbia College, but was not allowed to enter, on account of his complexion.”²⁰¹ Upon returning home from earning three university degrees abroad, he admits to still feeling discontent about being required to leave the country: “I was forced to seek in another country, whose opportunities of improvement which were denied me here, and separated from you during the past five years. The cause of our separation...pained me then and grieves me now.”²⁰² His inability to earn a higher education in his home country exemplifies a systemic racial barrier to educational attainment. Though the separation was painful, McCune Smith’s choice to study abroad created significant opportunities for him.

After joining the University of Glasgow in Scotland in 1832, McCune Smith was “admitted to a free and equal participation in all its honors and privileges.”²⁰³ In addition to being a standout student, he was deeply involved in the Glasgow community and was incredibly well-received. Evidence of McCune Smith’s positive experience in Glasgow can be found in *Colored American* articles that reprinted the well wishes McCune Smith

²⁰⁰ “‘The Nuisances.’” *The Liberator*, May 26, 1837, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/34584821/>.

²⁰¹ “Dr. J. [McCune] Smith,” *The Colored American*, June 9, 1838, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive, <https://link-gale-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/apps/doc/GB2500079987/SAS?u=camb55135&sid=bookmark-SAS&xid=3cc43e7a>; Stauffer, “Introduction,” xxi.

²⁰² “Reception of Dr. Smith.”

²⁰³ “Dr. J. [McCune] Smith”; James McCune Smith, “Extract 1, *Colored American*, November 11, 1837,” in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, ed. John Stauffer (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

received before returning to the United States. He joined the Anti-Slavery Committee in Glasgow, and upon the completion of his studies, the secretaries of the Committee of the Glasgow Emancipation Society wrote him a glowing farewell letter.²⁰⁴ The letter opens by addressing McCune Smith as “Dear Friend and Brother” and admits to initially feeling sympathy for him.²⁰⁵

When you first appeared among us, the circumstance was in a high degree calculated to excite our sympathy on your behalf, that a young man should be found seeking, in the Institutions of Scotland, those intellectual accomplishments which he was refused an opportunity of acquiring in those of his native land, on account of his complexion not suiting the taste of a prevailing party of his countrymen.²⁰⁶

Despite the circumstances of traveling to Scotland for higher education, McCune Smith’s “virtues” and “intellectual powers” were quickly appreciated.²⁰⁷ The secretaries complimented his “scholar’s taste,” “orator’s eloquence,” “patriot’s zeal,” and “gentleman’s courtesy” as he supported the committee’s initiatives.²⁰⁸ The group was also keen to wish McCune Smith well in both his “profession as a physician” and his “patriotic efforts for the deliverance” of Black people in the United States.²⁰⁹ This community was clearly very supportive of McCune Smith during his time abroad and recognized the systemic racial barriers he dealt with in his home country. The tone of this letter reflects a strong sense of gratitude for McCune Smith’s contributions while taking pride in the reality that Glasgow was able to offer him opportunities that he would not have had in the United States.

²⁰⁴ John Murray and William Smeal, “Letter from the Committee of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, June 15th, 1837,” *The Colored American*, February 17, 1838, 2, Accessible.com.

²⁰⁵ Murray and Smeal, 2.

²⁰⁶ Murray and Smeal, 2.

²⁰⁷ Murray and Smeal, 2.

²⁰⁸ Murray and Smeal, 2.

²⁰⁹ Murray and Smeal, 2.

When McCune Smith's classmates and friends from the university held a farewell dinner for him, which was discussed in an 1837 *Glasgow Chronicle* article, the writer did not hesitate to criticize the United States for its treatment of Black people. The writer affirms, "it is highly gratifying to observe that these paltry and ungenerous prejudices which bring disgrace and discredit on the American character, and are so much opposed to the genius of a constitution...do not obtain in this country."²¹⁰ Like the articles that celebrated Ira Aldridge's achievements in Europe, the farewell notes to McCune Smith showcase the satisfaction some Europeans felt about being able to offer an environment for Black Americans to flourish in the nineteenth century. By the end of his five years abroad, McCune Smith earned a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and Doctor of Medicine; he was one of the best-educated people of his time, regardless of his race, socioeconomic background, or country of birth.²¹¹ Exercising personal agency to attend university abroad positioned McCune Smith to receive optimal training in his field, benefit from the community support of the university, and participate in social justice efforts. These experiences were essential to his ability to establish himself as a leading physician and abolitionist in nineteenth-century New York City.

Establishing a Career in New York City

Unlike Aldridge, McCune Smith was eager to return to New York City despite achieving success abroad. His motivation to return home in 1837 may have been rooted in his keenness to use his education to improve the United States.²¹² Upon returning

²¹⁰ "Farewell Dinner to Dr. James McCune Smith, A.M, From the Glasgow Chronicle of June 21st," *The Colored American*, September 9, 1837, 3, Accessible.com.

²¹¹ Gates Jr., "Foreword," x.

²¹² "Reception of Dr. Smith."

home, McCune Smith's achievements as a student and activist were already well-known and highly regarded in the Black community.²¹³ During his welcome home reception, organized by the Colored Citizens of New York, he was met with "unbounded applause from all parts of the house," and the chairman wished him well: "I congratulate you on the cheering prospects held out to you since your return to your native land; and sincerely hope that your most sanguine expectations may be more than realized; and that you may be amply compensated for all your toil, and receive the full reward of all your labors."²¹⁴ While still in his twenties he was described in the *Colored American* as "one of our most worthy and beloved young brethren" and praised for his "eminent talents and moral worth."²¹⁵ The high regard McCune Smith received upon returning home reflects the prominent roles education, civic engagement, and respectability played in determining one's status among Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century.²¹⁶

In the same year of his return to New York City, McCune Smith already had advertisements in the *Colored American* highlighting the "medical consultations" he offered at his "93 West Broadway" office for "medical cures of every description."²¹⁷ Like Aldridge, McCune Smith was proactive about using publicity to build his career and establish patrons. This prestigious downtown address was in the modern-day Tribeca neighborhood of Manhattan and served multiple purposes for McCune Smith and the New York City community. As Maritcha Remond Lyons explains in her unpublished memoir, the location was a drug store but also had a "back...which became historical.

²¹³ Smith, "Introduction," xxii; "Reception of Dr. Smith."

²¹⁴ "Reception of Dr. Smith."

²¹⁵ Smith, "Extract 1, Colored American, November 11, 1837," 9.

²¹⁶ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 8–9; Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 1003.

²¹⁷ "Medical Consultations," *The Colored American*, November 11, 1837, Accessible.com.

The doctor was visited daily by men young and old, not only by the most intelligent colored [residents] but [locals]. This room was a rallying centre; it had its library and in there were held discussions and debates on all the topics of the day.”²¹⁸ Lyons’ description implies that McCune Smith was visited by more than just the elite Black community.

McCune Smith’s workplace was a space for him to practice medicine and hold public discourse about working toward the betterment of oppressed people. This space allowed him to pursue his personal mission to “spare no effort, and withhold no sacrifice in the doing all that [he] can for the elevation of the American people - of the whole people, without regard to caste or condition.”²¹⁹ Lyons’ observation that he was able to influence “more by indirection than by mandate” is evidence of the gracious demeanor he was known for throughout his life.²²⁰ His default to treating everyone with dignity and respect aligns with the “strict adherence to a code of respectability” associated with elite status and notions of success among Black New Yorkers during this time.²²¹ Though McCune Smith was dedicated to improving opportunities for Black people, the way he went about resisting the status quo was honorable and earned him regard and support from Black and white people; his method of rebellion allowed him to flourish professionally.

McCune Smith’s effectiveness as an abolitionist offers a robust illustration of respectable opposition to racial oppression. To advocate for liberation, McCune Smith chose to combat theories of racial inferiority with science. He used data to argue that free

²¹⁸ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 81.

²¹⁹ “Reception of Dr. Smith,” 5.

²²⁰ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 82.

²²¹ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 162.

Black Americans in the North were not in a worse position than enslaved people in the South.²²²

in 1830, Emerson's medical statistics show the deaths among the people of color to have been one in every twenty-one per annum; whilst the city inspector's report for the past year shows that among our people the deaths have been one in every thirty-four persons. (NOTE, this fact is a sufficient answer to those calumniators who have asserted that the free colored inhabitants of the northern cities are plunged into hopeless degradation.)²²³

This is an excerpt from an 1843 speech to the Philomathean Society, a collection of free middle-class Black men who provided literary resources to members and participated in civil rights efforts.²²⁴ McCune Smith's data aimed to refute the scientifically racist claim that Black people could not succeed in the North due to the cold climate.²²⁵ His statistical research on the impact of slavery on Black people's health and lifespan impressed prominent physician and statistician Edward Jarvis, who shared McCune Smith's outcomes with the "Boylston Medical Community at Harvard."²²⁶ The way McCune Smith chose to position his resistance to theories of racial inferiority earned him support from his professional community; this contributed to his broader career success by increasing his credibility.

Another example of McCune Smith admirably opposing racial oppression was through his service as head physician of the Colored Orphan Asylum.²²⁷ In the Colored

²²² James McCune Smith, "Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans (1844)," in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63.

²²³ James McCune Smith, "The Destiny of the People of Color. A Lecture Delivered Before the Philomathean Society and Hamilton Lyceum in January, 1841, By James McCune Smith, M.D. Li New-York, Published by Request, 1843.," in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 58.

²²⁴ Eric Gardner, "Early African American Print Culture" (Oxford University Press, n.d.), 11, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.283>; Smith, "The Destiny of the People of Color," 48.

²²⁵ Smith, "The Destiny of the People of Color," 58.

²²⁶ Smith and Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith*, 61.

²²⁷ Smith and Stauffer, 77; Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 81.

Orphan section of the 1851 annual report of the Governors of the Alms House, it is mentioned that diseases such as measles and small-pox were present at the orphanage and McCune Smith provided “unabated care” to the children as he had done for “eight successive years.”²²⁸ McCune Smith provided the highest quality of medical services to children who would not otherwise have access.

In addition to providing direct care, McCune Smith raised money for the orphanage by giving lectures on contemporary topics and charging an entry fee.²²⁹ One of his most well-known fundraisers was his 1841 “Lecture on the Haytien revolutions,” where he discussed the catalyst and impact of the Haitian Revolution, celebrated Toussaint Louverture’s influence, and showcased that the orphanage existed to “obviate the evils” of Black children being discriminated against.²³⁰ Along with raising money for the orphanage, McCune Smith used his speech to inspire Black Americans to continue fighting for their own liberation. By using his individual agency to provide the Colored Orphan Asylum residents with direct medical care and participating in fundraising through political speeches, McCune Smith increased his reputation as both a physician and an abolitionist, thus elevating his professional status.

²²⁸ Office of the Board of Governors of the Alms House, *Third Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms House, New York, for the Year 1851* (New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., printers Nassau Street, 1852), 83–84, <http://docs.newsbank.com/select/AFAMER/7077>.

²²⁹ Smith and Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith*, 25.

²³⁰ James McCune Smith, “Lecture on the Haytien Revolutions: With a Sketch of the Character of Toussaint L’Ouverture. Delivered at the Stuyvesant Institute, (for the Benefit of the Colored Orphan Asylum), February 26, 1841,” in *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45–47.

Reflections on McCune Smith's Achievements

Like Ira Aldridge, McCune Smith realized some level of financial prosperity in addition to earning the admiration of many. Evidence of McCune Smith's material wealth includes his ability to build and own a home in Manhattan.²³¹ Near the end of his life, he sold his Manhattan home and moved his family to Brooklyn to remain safe from the Draft Riots of 1863.²³² Having the resources to relocate and rebuild his life is reflective of his financial stability. He spent the rest of his life living in Brooklyn and died of heart failure on November 17, 1865, at fifty-two years old.²³³

While extraordinary personal ability and foundational education at the African Free School made it possible for McCune Smith to pursue a career in medicine, his success as a doctor and abolitionist was the result of the personal sacrifice he made to attend university abroad, his ability to garner community support, and his intentionality about challenging the status quo in a manner that aligned with the environment he lived in. From his youth, he was regarded as having "talent of a superior order," and throughout his life, he was praised for his "modesty of demeanor."²³⁴ His "intellectual capacity" was even used as a counterargument to the concept of racial inferiority in an article for a white audience advocating for universal liberty.²³⁵ Like Ira Aldridge, McCune Smith also received an exceptional amount of positive press throughout his career, which bolstered his reputation and popularity.

²³¹ Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 193.

²³² Duane, 193.

²³³ "DIED.," *The New York Times*, November 18, 1865, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1865/11/18/90523509.html?pageNumber=4>; Stauffer, "Introduction," xxviii.

²³⁴ "Reception of Dr. Smith."

²³⁵ *The Free Soil Courier and Liberty Gazette*, March 11, 1847, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/404775344/>.

McCune Smith's default attitude of showing regard for everyone exemplified the "staid" temperament and "adherence to the rules" Carla Peterson's *Black Gotham* and Anna Mae Duane's *Educated for Freedom* associated with achieving success as a Black New Yorker during this era.²³⁶ His unpretentious disposition, coupled with his brilliance, allowed him to connect with both poor children in the Colored Orphan Asylum and his professional peers. His medical practice, pharmacy, and research reached a wide range of people, regardless of class, education, or race.²³⁷ McCune Smith's reputation as a published scientist likely aided him in attracting patients and sustaining a medical practice and pharmacy.²³⁸ Duane also argues that McCune Smith "flourished by cultivating a certain clinical detachment from sentiment."²³⁹ To effectively serve sick, underprivileged children and fight the uphill battle for racial equality, he did not allow himself to become emotionally involved with his work. This form of self-regulation contributed to his productivity when fighting for social change. While McCune Smith's primary education experiences offered him a strong foundation, attaining a university-level education, gaining sponsorship and support from Black and white Americans, and respectfully rebelling against societal norms allowed him to thrive in nineteenth-century New York City as a physician and abolitionist.

While it cannot be underscored enough that McCune Smith existed in total alignment with the respectability politics of nineteenth-century New York City, it is worth highlighting that the microhistories of individuals within this community reveal

²³⁶ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, loc. 109; Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 114.

²³⁷ Stauffer, "Introduction," xiv; Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 81; Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 35.

²³⁸ Stauffer, "Introduction," xiv.

²³⁹ Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 114.

that there was some room to deviate from these norms and still be held in high regard. Ira Aldridge was celebrated by the Black community despite the morality of his profession being questionable. McCune Smith's goddaughter, Maritcha Remond Lyons, was well respected for her professional achievements even though she did not meet the societal expectation of starting a family.

Chapter IV.

Maritcha Remond Lyons

I advise all the youthful and aspiring, to get learning, book learning by all means, but to have that book learning closely allied with culture. A book learned person lacking culture ...is a mental distortion and a moral menace. – Maritcha Remond Lyons²⁴⁰

While access to education was a privilege for any Black child in nineteenth-century New York City, opportunities for young women to receive a thorough liberal arts education were even more restricted. Maritcha Remond Lyons' childhood educational attainment was also negatively impacted by her becoming physically disabled from an illness that required her to remain home from school while receiving medical care. In defiance of this obstacle and the societal expectations of women, she continued to study and master basic reading, spelling, and multiplication during her time away from school. Lyons' dedication to academics, despite challenges, was essential to her resuming formal education and establishing herself as a distinguished educator.

Maritcha Remond Lyons was born in New York City on May 23, 1848.²⁴¹ Her father was an entrepreneur who owned and operated various successful businesses during his lifetime, including a seaman's home and a store that sold goods to seamen; her mother was a hairdresser.²⁴² As her maternal grandmother was "a poor white of English descent," and her paternal grandmother was Dutch, and Indian Lyons was mixed race.²⁴³ Though

²⁴⁰ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 22.

²⁴¹ K. Wise Whitehead, "Lyons, Maritcha R.," in *Oxford African American Studies Center* (Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013), <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-37403>.

²⁴² Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 6; Whitehead, "Lyons, Maritcha R."

²⁴³ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 4.

her parents “attained neither wealth” nor “fame,” they were able to provide Lyons with a comfortable middle-class childhood that included a thorough education, a piano in the home, which was considered a “[luxury] in those times,” and sufficient medical care when Lyons was ill.²⁴⁴ Her parents also engaged in activism by supporting the Underground Railroad. Lyons recalls: “Father’s connection with the [underground] railroad brought many strange faces to our house, for it was semi-public and persons could go in and out without attracting special attention. Under mother’s vigilant eye, refugees were kept long enough to be fed and to have disguises changed.”²⁴⁵ This level of involvement in helping the broader Black community achieve liberty was consistent with being a part of the Black middle class.

Childhood Health Challenges

Though Lyons faced several obstacles attending primary and secondary school, she was surrounded by adults who were fully committed to her educational attainment. She credits her father for enabling her to attain a “liberal education for a woman” “at the cost of personal sacrifice.”²⁴⁶ Lyons began her formal education at “Public School No. 19” in Brooklyn but was only enrolled for a short period of time before falling ill.²⁴⁷ When her primary education was interrupted by physical disability related to spinal health issues, it was her godfather and physician, Dr. James McCune Smith, who helped to restore her health.²⁴⁸ Lyons described herself as a “sickly, peevish child,” and though

²⁴⁴ Lyons, 1–8.

²⁴⁵ Lyons, 50.

²⁴⁶ Lyons, 1.

²⁴⁷ Lyons, 7.

²⁴⁸ Lyons, 7.

she was too ill to attend school, she managed to master “simple reading and spelling” and “could ‘cipher’ through multiplication.”²⁴⁹ Despite her efforts to stay abreast of her studies, Lyons was behind in school and recalled: “I [could] not write my name legibly nor ‘do a sum in long division’” at the age of thirteen.²⁵⁰ It would later take a substantial and deliberate effort to grow into an outstanding student.

In 1861, once Lyons was well enough to attend school again, her lifelong friend Charles L. Reason, Principal of Manhattan Colored School No. 3, ensured she received a proper education.²⁵¹ She was around thirteen years old at the time. Lyons walked “several miles every day” to attend school and progressed through the course of study in a relatively short amount of time.²⁵² She credits the efficacy of Reason’s teaching methods for her academic progress in elementary school. As part of her primary education, she studied “geography and history...at home under supervision” and focused on arithmetic and grammar during classroom instruction.²⁵³ Lyons’ academic progress rendered her eligible to participate in “supplementary annex” coursework, which included reading Caesar and Virgil and learning algebra through quadratics.²⁵⁴ She also completed short courses in natural and physical science at home.²⁵⁵ Lyons recalls relying on her “industry and ambition” to “sink or swim.”²⁵⁶ She made the personal choice to prioritize taking full advantage of the education that was available to her.

²⁴⁹ Lyons, 7.

²⁵⁰ Lyons, 8.

²⁵¹ Lyons, 9; Bolden, *Maritcha*, 19.

²⁵² Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 9.

²⁵³ Lyons, 9.

²⁵⁴ Lyons, 10.

²⁵⁵ Lyons, 10.

²⁵⁶ Lyons, 10.

Fleeing New York City

Lyons' tenure at Manhattan Colored School No. 3 was not without notable obstacles. In 1863, her studies were interrupted again as the Draft Riots terrorized the Black community and their allies in July. By July of this year, there was heavy inflation in New York City, the Union Army did not have enough soldiers, and the country's first conscription act had been passed.²⁵⁷ The Conscription Act required "all male American citizens between the ages of twenty and forty-five" to enroll in the draft.²⁵⁸ Though there were exemptions for disabilities, sole caregivers to elderly parents or children, or those who could pay a \$300 commutation fee (\$7,255 in 2023), most working-class white men were eligible for the draft.²⁵⁹ Black men were not considered citizens and thus were not eligible for the draft; this further fueled white rage.²⁶⁰

The four days of riots culminated in over seventy deaths and an estimated five million worth (\$121 million in 2023) of damage to governmental buildings, homes of white allies, Black-owned residences and businesses, as well as the obliteration of the Colored Orphan Asylum.²⁶¹ Included in this destruction was an estimated \$2000 (\$48,365 in 2023) worth of damage to the Lyons family home.²⁶² The Lyons family initially fled to Salem, Massachusetts, to stay with family friends and then briefly returned to New York

²⁵⁷ Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 50, <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/37530>.

²⁵⁸ Cook, 50.

²⁵⁹ Cook, 50–51; "\$300 in 1863 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator," accessed October 22, 2023, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=300>.

²⁶⁰ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 280.

²⁶¹ Harris, 280–86; Kevin McGruder, "A Fair and Open Field: The Responses of Black New Yorkers to the Draft Riots," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 37, no. 2 (2013): 13, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1428042026?accountid=11311&parentSessionId=W4gPzUaMtM3OJkRuMpIUP4hLzZ7nA68A5v4U4hSI%2F%2Bw%3D&pq-origsite=primo>; "\$5,000,000 in 1863 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator," accessed October 22, 2023, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?endYear=2023&amount=5000000>.

²⁶² Bolden, *Maritcha*, 31; "\$2,000 in 1863 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator," accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?endYear=2023&amount=2000>.

City in 1864.²⁶³ Exhibiting her usual tenacity and affinity for education, Lyons graduated from Manhattan Colored School No. 3 in 1864.²⁶⁴ The unsafe conditions for Black people in New York City interrupted her schooling and exemplified a systemic racial barrier to educational attainment. The Black population in New York City ultimately decreased after the Draft Riots from 12,414 in 1860 to an estimated 9,945 in 1865; the Lyons family was among those who decided to leave.²⁶⁵ Lyons' parents chose to settle and purchase a "comfortable cottage" in Providence, Rhode Island, due to the city's reputation for offering a good education.²⁶⁶

Upon trying to continue her education in Rhode Island, Lyons was "not accepted because the law prohibited taking a colored child into the high school."²⁶⁷ Lyons' siblings were also denied entry to local schools because there were segregated schools available to them.²⁶⁸ The Lyons children being refused access to schools in the district near their home became a well-known local controversy: "This elicited a protest and a protracted discussion followed. This controversy lasted for months; members of the Board of Education, ministers and laymen, persons of all grades of importance and of all shades of opinion, male and female, white and colored, contributed arguments pro and con."²⁶⁹ The issue of whether Black children could attend the schools closest to where they lived was of interest to more than just parents and students. People who engaged in arguments about this were likely concerned about the long-term implications of formally

²⁶³ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 13; Lyons, 9.

²⁶⁴ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 9.

²⁶⁵ McGruder, "A Fair and Open Field," 36.

²⁶⁶ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 14.

²⁶⁷ Lyons, 16.

²⁶⁸ Lyons, 16.

²⁶⁹ Lyons, 16.

disallowing or allowing the Lyons children to attend historically white schools. This represents another systemic racial barrier to her educational attainment.

Similar to her godfather, James McCune Smith, Lyons was able to garner support from people within the local community to receive the best education available to her. Providence community members, including a school trustee and a clergyman, joined the Lyons family in the fight for their children to attend school.²⁷⁰ Lyons' mother wrote the Rhode Island governor and argued that "this denial is contrary to the laws of the state...as well as a shameful oppression of innocent children."²⁷¹ She was concerned about both the practical impact of her children being denied an equal education and the emotional toll this would have on them. In her powerful address, Mary Joseph Lyons explained that she was advised that the law guarantees her children equal access to education, and thus, she is appealing to the governor to intervene.²⁷² She also asserted her desire to request an "alteration of the laws" if the law does not grant her children the right to attend school.²⁷³ This issue was ultimately argued before the Rhode Island State legislature, and Maritcha Remond Lyons testified convincingly: "I, but sixteen years old, made my maiden speech and, in a trembling voice plead for the opening of the door of opportunity. My ingenuous attempt was heartily endorsed by a clergyman named Swan, by the Hon. Horace Binney and other prominent persons. The die hards howled, the liberal element cheered; but the decision was in favor of right and justice."²⁷⁴ Though the exact content of Lyons' speech

²⁷⁰ Lyons, 16.

²⁷¹ Lyons, 17.

²⁷² Lyons, 17.

²⁷³ Lyons, 17–18.

²⁷⁴ Lyons, 16.

is not documented in her memoir or local news sources, her courageous address, in combination with community support, implored the legislature to treat her fairly.

Though the legislature agreed Lyons should be able to attend high school, she faced additional obstacles enrolling. She was not considered qualified to enter Providence High School: “My New York graduation certificate was disallowed on the ground that it had been issued by a caste school. After other obstructions had been met and demolished, my admission to the high school was withheld because I was not a Rhode Island graduate.”²⁷⁵ The high school was able to prevent Lyons from enrolling because her primary school education was from out of state. Lyons proactively defied this rejection by choosing to enter a grammar school and preparing for the examination to attend high school.²⁷⁶ After passing the required examination, Lyons was able to begin high school in Rhode Island in 1865; she was around seventeen years old at the time.²⁷⁷ Her overall experience attempting to enter high school in Rhode Island vividly depicts her lived experience with systemic racial barriers to educational attainment. Because Lyons had a long-term goal of attaining the best possible education and was eager to make a “name and a place” for herself, she chose to resist exclusion from high school through legislative action and completing pre-requisite studies.²⁷⁸ The family and community support she received were pivotal to her ability to resist the status quo in a manner that aligned with respectability politics, won her allies, and ultimately enabled her to graduate from high school.

²⁷⁵ Lyons, 10.

²⁷⁶ Lyons, 10.

²⁷⁷ Bolden, *Maritcha*, 36.

²⁷⁸ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 20.

Like McCune Smith, Lyons was disappointed in the racism she faced while trying to attain an education. Lyons recalled: “The iron had entered my soul. I never forgot that [I] had to sue, for a privilege which any but a colored girl could [have] without asking.”²⁷⁹ Navigating this systemic racial barrier took a personal toll on her. Differently than McCune Smith’s overwhelmingly positive experience with white classmates in Scotland, Lyons describes her classmates as “more or less friendly” in Rhode Island: “During the first year I occupied one [seat], at a double desk, the other having been left vacant... The second year the only desk with a single seat was assigned to me. This I held for a month only...A student, sitting directly behind me invited me to share her bench, thus, obviating for me any embarrassment.”²⁸⁰ Though Lyons’ seating arrangements seemed to intentionally limit her proximity to other students, at least one classmate sought to mitigate her discomfort.

Lyons implied that some classmates questioned whether she belonged in high school: “If any girl tried to put ‘on airs’ I simply found a way to inform her of my class record. As I never had less than the highest marks, to flaunt my superiority in scholarship was never a hard matter.”²⁸¹ Rather than developing hostile relationships with disapproving peers or becoming discouraged, Lyons responded to naysayers with the irrefutable fact that she is a competent student. Similar to McCune Smith, Lyons used her individual agency to respectfully oppose commonly held ideas about her being inferior because of her race.

²⁷⁹ Lyons, 19.

²⁸⁰ Lyons, 18–19.

²⁸¹ Lyons, 19.

In addition to being an extraordinary student, relying on community support to increase educational attainment, and being able to effectively oppose doubters, Lyons also resembles McCune Smith in that her commitment to civil rights can be traced back to her school compositions about race. Her writings about the challenges Black people faced captured the attention of her peers and teacher:

During the final year, my composition themes were usually' chosen from a list of race topics; and as I wrote out of the fullness of my heart, they rarely failed to create a sensation. They were frequently read in class...My sketches of the riots of '63; the Underground Railroad; of [episodes] on southern plantations; of freedmen and incidents of the Civil War, never failed to elicit comment. Sometimes the teacher would question me privately: 'Is what you wrote really true, or have you been letting loose your imagination?' My reply was invariably: 'The half has never been told.'²⁸²

Lyons, like her godfather, learned at an early age that her words could impact the way that people think. While attending high school alone was an act of rebellion for a young Black woman in the nineteenth century, using her writing to educate a lukewarm audience of white peers and educators about the injustices Black Americans were suffering reflects an exceptional use of personal agency. In 1869, Maritcha Remond Lyons became the first Black student to graduate from Providence High School in Rhode Island and was selected to read one of her essays on graduation day; she was around twenty-one-years-old.²⁸³

A Leading Educator

Lyons' outstanding achievements as a student resulted in her receiving support from her school in starting her career. Her teacher, Sarah E. Doyle, a white woman who

²⁸² Lyons, 19.

²⁸³ Bolden, *Maritcha*, 39; Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 19.

became a well-known educator and education reformer, wrote Lyons a letter of recommendation for “teaching positions, which praised her ‘high standing...for excellent scholarship and deportment.’”²⁸⁴ Lyons began her teaching career in Brooklyn in 1869, the same year she graduated high school.²⁸⁵ When reflecting on her decision to enter her profession without completing additional education, Lyons recalled choosing to go directly to work because there were limited teacher training schools available to Black women, and she was hesitant about attending a college like Oberlin that was far away from home.²⁸⁶

After dedicating her entire youth to attaining an education, Lyons was eager to begin working and making an impact on her community. Careers in education were popular among nineteenth-century women because the field offered skilled roles that allowed women to greatly contribute to their communities and participate in the nineteenth-century’s “culture of benevolence.”²⁸⁷ Though teacher training schools existed, many of these schools did not admit Black women, reflecting another systemic racial barrier to educational attainment and career advancement. Thus, Lyons chose to start a career as a teacher immediately after graduating high school, as this was the strongest option for achieving her professional goals.

Lyons was convinced that Brooklyn was the best place for her to begin teaching. She asserted: “Brooklyn, as far back as I can recall, has [offered] superior educational

²⁸⁴ Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*, 169; Linda Eisenmann, “Doyle, Sarah Elizabeth (1830-1922), Educator and Activist,” in *American National Biography* (Oxford University Press), accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.anb.org/display/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-c-0900236>.

²⁸⁵ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 19.

²⁸⁶ Lyons, 20.

²⁸⁷ Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*, 84.

advantages. The Teachers' Association, Public Library, the Institute, all were accessible and furnished every facility [for] information, instruction, research, and recreation of the varied and valuable sort."²⁸⁸ Though some scholars such as Sandra Roff argue that "large segments of the Black population were not serviced" by Brooklyn's library resources at this time, Lyons was pleased with the resources available to her.²⁸⁹

In lieu of completing formal higher education, Lyons was fiercely dedicated to self-study: "During the [school] terms, I devoted four or five evenings weekly to the study of both literacy and professional subjects... Teachers were expected to subscribe to such as related to teaching."²⁹⁰ Like McCune Smith, Lyons leaned into every opportunity to maximize her professional effectiveness and positive impact on her community. She believed that "the real test of a complete education is" whether "it [develops] mental alertness combined with [a keen] sense of duty."²⁹¹ Her motivations reflected the "call to do good" that "permeated American life" during this era.²⁹² Her choice to use all the resources available to her to hone her skills as an educator resulted in her being highly effective in her profession.

Lyons' commitment to professional excellence did not stop at lifelong learning.

She was intentional about taking formal steps to advance professionally:

In time I felt ready to apply for a license above the ordinary 'A', then the highest granted to a class teacher. Ten of us took the 'Head of Department' examination, [four] of us passing; I, perhaps, was the only

²⁸⁸ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 21.

²⁸⁹ Sandra Roff, "The Accessibility of Libraries to Blacks in Nineteenth Century Brooklyn, New York," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 5, no. 2 (1981): 2, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/219951351?pq-origsite=primo&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>.

²⁹⁰ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 21.

²⁹¹ Lyons, 22.

²⁹² Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*, 84.

one who never had technical drill outside the practical drilling given by [supervisors] in the school room, and instructors of private classes.²⁹³

Lyons was determined not to allow her lack of formal higher education to limit her career possibilities. She was also fortunate to have begun her career working under Principal Charles A. Dorsey, a friend of her father.²⁹⁴ Dorsey was a member of Brooklyn's Black elite and was known for being an outstanding leader of Public School 67.²⁹⁵ Dorsey gave Lyons "every chance to familiarize [herself] with the class requirements."²⁹⁶ Dorsey served as a community support in the form of sponsorship. Lyons also "sought and secured a chance to work in the various grades," advancing "step by step" until she "reached the graduating class, which [she] taught for ten years."²⁹⁷ Lyons' exercise of individual agency to increase her knowledge and formally apply for career advancement, combined with sponsorship from a family friend, enabled her to progress in her career.

Though not discussed in her memoir, Lyons helped to build the Women's Loyal Union (WLU), which was established in 1892.²⁹⁸ The WLU was one of the United States' earliest "women's rights and racial justice organizations;" these women challenged societal norms through their "antilynching work" and by serving as a launchpad to the creation of the National Association of Colored Women.²⁹⁹ The WLU was comprised of "relatively privileged" Black women, some of whom advocated for educators' rights and school integration.³⁰⁰ Once members of this group and a broader community of activists achieved the victory of having the segregated schools merge with the public schools, all

²⁹³ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 22.

²⁹⁴ Lyons, 23.

²⁹⁵ Peterson, *Black Gotham*, locs. 5477–5800.

²⁹⁶ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 23.

²⁹⁷ Lyons, 23.

²⁹⁸ Johnson, "The Half Has Never Been Told," 835.

²⁹⁹ Johnson, 836.

³⁰⁰ Johnson, 838.

educators were “retained and placed according to merit;” Lyons was assigned the position of “Assistant Principal in Public School No. 83” around 1898.³⁰¹ As an assistant principal, Lyons worked under Frank F. Harding, a man she described as “a gentleman who was an American and a citizen without reproach.”³⁰² Though Lyons does not explicitly state his race, as Public School No. 83 was initially a school for white students, the man she worked under was likely white.³⁰³ Lyons credits him for helping her “to become useful and efficient.”³⁰⁴ Lyons’ career trajectory benefited from the community support of WLU and the professional support of Harding.

By the end of her forty-eight-and-a-half-year career as an educator, Lyons had spent twenty-eight years as a classroom teacher across “each of the elementary school grades” and twenty years as an Assistant Principal, also known as Head of Department.³⁰⁵ Upon her retirement in 1918, at age seventy, Lyons was “showered with tokens of appreciation,” including a gold watch, a table lamp, and “overwhelming...congratulations and good wishes.”³⁰⁶ Similar to other highly influential Black women educators in nineteenth-century New York City, Lyons remained “unmarried and wholly devoted to her educational work.”³⁰⁷ While not marrying reflected resistance to the status quo and “marginalized her” from the familial “aspects of Black respectability,” during the nineteenth century, Brooklyn Public Schools required women to resign from their

³⁰¹ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 24; Johnson, ““The Half Has Never Been Told,”” 842–43.

³⁰² Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 24.

³⁰³ Johnson, ““The Half Has Never Been Told,”” 841.

³⁰⁴ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 24.

³⁰⁵ “48 Years P.S. Teach Miss Lyons Retires; In Schools Long Time,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 26, 1918, sec. Page 7, <https://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/54538671/>; Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 23.

³⁰⁶ “48 Years P.S. Teach Miss Lyons Retires; In Schools Long Time.”

³⁰⁷ Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*, 84.

teaching roles once married, and this remained controversial “well into the twentieth century.”³⁰⁸ Lyons made a choice to remain committed to her career.

It is worth highlighting that Lyons was well-appreciated for her work outside of the classroom. Shortly after her death on January 28, 1929, at age eighty, an article was published in *The New York Age* describing her as “active in all movements for racial good and for emancipation of women.”³⁰⁹ The article mentioned that she once “defended the purity of Negro womanhood against the vicious attacks of a Princeton University professor” at an event held at the Academy of Music.³¹⁰ Lyons was respected enough to be trusted to represent Black women in prestigious forums. When Lyons discussed this 1901 event in her memoir, she described it as a “protest” and recalled: “I was deeply incensed at such a libelous [attack] in cold blood upon our women... So, an invitation to take up in their [defense] was eagerly accepted.”³¹¹ Though Lyons does not detail the content of her speech in her memoir, she reflected on being advised by her niece to “give more than the usual attention to [her] personal appearance.”³¹² This was likely to ensure that the combination of Lyons’ eloquent speech and polished appearance rendered it difficult for her adversary to dismiss her intelligence or her respectability.

Similarly, a *New York Amsterdam* article that reported on a posthumous tribute to Lyons saluted her “vigorous fight on prejudice and proscription of the Negro; upholding the chastity of Negro womanhood, her fight for woman’s [*sic*] rights, and her activity in

³⁰⁸ Johnson, “‘The Half Has Never Been Told,’” 838; Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*, 94.

³⁰⁹ “Miss Maritcha Lyons, For 48 Years A Teacher in Brooklyn Schools, And A Militant Fighter For Women, Is Dead,” *The New York Age*, February 2, 1929, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/40788737/>; Bolden, *Maritcha*, 43.

³¹⁰ “Miss Maritcha Lyons, For 48 Years A Teacher in Brooklyn Schools, And A Militant Fighter For Women, Is Dead.”

³¹¹ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 38.

³¹² Lyons, 38.

building up women's organizations."³¹³ Lyons' social justice activities outside of the classroom indicate that she was keenly aware of and in opposition to the intersectional oppression resulting from racism and sexism. Both articles praise her involvement in defending Black women's dignity and pursuing a better reality for this marginalized group. This context is crucial because it shows how proactively yet effectively, Lyons resisted the notion that Black women were not worthy of respect and equality. Like when she was a teenager, in her adult life, Lyons challenged the status quo in a manner that was respectful and, therefore, celebrated by her community.

Lyons' commendable professional outcomes can be attributed to the support she received from her family and local community in attaining an education, her commitment to lifelong learning, her pursuit of a career that was accessible to Black women, and sponsorship from bosses who wanted her to succeed. Lyons effectively overcame the obstacles that could have hindered her professional attainment. Her determination, combined with her parents' resources, allowed her to complete elementary school and high school despite sickness, the Draft Riots, and racial discrimination. Lyons' ability to consistently earn the "highest marks" in her coursework and her dedication to self-study throughout her entire life is indicative of her ambition and her intellectual capacity.³¹⁴ Lyons was also fortunate to have parents who were able to purchase a home based on the quality of schools available to their children.

After completing school, her family's connection to leading educator Charles Reason allowed her to begin her career in a supportive environment, working for a family

³¹³ "Tributes Paid Departed Sunday: Memorial Services for Late Brooklynites Packed Local Church," *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)*, February 27, 1929, sec. Brooklyn and Long Island, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/226383117/abstract/33F80EC2B3814EC0PQ/2>.

³¹⁴ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 19.

friend.³¹⁵ She also had support and gained respect from both Black and white professionals throughout her career. She recalls positive work experiences with people “representing all the...[nationalities] to be found in a cosmopolitan city.”³¹⁶ Lyons’ exercise of individual agency to remain dedicated to her profession and abandon the societal norm of starting a family was crucial to her success; though this choice did not align with respectability politics, the reality that she was well celebrated upon her retirement indicates that she still had strong social status within her community. Maritcha Remond Lyons’ achievements as a leading educator in nineteenth and early twentieth-century New York City are the result of her tenacity, family resources, educational attainment, and ability to gain community support and professional sponsorship.

While Lyons’ dedication to career over starting her own family did not banish her from the Black elite community, there were still very clear and strict limitations for how far Black New Yorkers could veer from respectability and still experience positive outcomes. Differently from Lyons’ slight deviation from honorability, Austin Reed lived most of his life in defiance of behaviors that were considered appropriate. Like Lyons, Reed had a relatively privileged early childhood and a passion for learning. Unfortunately, his academic abilities and job skills were overshadowed by his lack of conformity with respectability.

³¹⁵ Lyons, 9.

³¹⁶ Lyons, 24.

Chapter V.

Austin Reed

One year rolled away, and I found myself the master of a pen and the reader of a book, and a conqueror of arithmetic...I had such a greedy appetite for reading that I was called up before Mr. Williams the school teacher one day and laid across the stool, where I got fifteen cuts with the rattan for having more than one book in my desk.

– *Austin Reed*³¹⁷

When Austin Reed was a child, no older than ten, his mother gave him fifty cents to purchase sugar. Reed took the fifty cents to the bank and changed it for pennies so that he could join some local boys in a gambling game. Reed used his gambling earnings to buy the sugar and returned home much later than his mother expected. When Reed arrived home, his mother told him to remain seated and not leave the house for the rest of the day. As soon as his mother was no longer watching him, he escaped from the home and wandered the streets until nighttime. Reed's mother was the first of many authority figures in his life to establish rules that he simply would not comply with. His lack of alignment with the structures he lived within was the foundation of his entanglement with the legal justice system.

Austin Reed was born to a middle-class family in upstate New York between 1823 and 1825.³¹⁸ His exact birth date has not been confirmed by the census or prison records; Reed even wrote a letter to the New York House of Refuge sixty years after his

³¹⁷ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, 25.

³¹⁸ Reed and Smith, xx, xxi.

stay there and inquired about his age at the time of entry.³¹⁹ His father owned the family home they lived in, and Reed had his own bedroom on the second floor.³²⁰ Reed was of mixed race as he had both African and European ancestry: historical records referred to his family as “mulatto” or “colored.”³²¹ Reed’s early childhood reflected notable financial stability for a Black family in the 1820s.³²² Unfortunately, upon the death of Reed’s father in 1828, the family lost their source of income and were left in debt.³²³ Reed’s mother did “laundry and piecework” to help the family survive.³²⁴ His mother struggled to provide for her five children, and Reed’s behavior caused her “a great deal of trouble” after her husband passed away.³²⁵

Reed’s commitment to resisting authority began as a child. Under his mother’s care, Reed was disobedient and would often leave the home without permission: “My mother...order[ed] me to be seated in one corner of the room and not to leave the House again during the day. While she went out to the well to draw a pail of water, I slip[ped] out of the back door and made my way to the city, a loitering round the street until night overtook me.”³²⁶ Reed was discontent with the rules and structure around him. He also participated in mischief with other children: “we jump[ed] over into a man’s orchard and cut down several of his fruit trees and made our way for the city.”³²⁷ Though Reed did not explain why he refused to obey his mother or sought to damage someone’s property, he did admit to breaking through the “restraints” of his mother and falling “victim to vice

³¹⁹ Reed and Smith, xx, 232.

³²⁰ Reed and Smith, xxi.

³²¹ Reed and Smith, xx.

³²² Reed and Smith, xxi.

³²³ Reed and Smith, xxi.

³²⁴ Reed and Smith, xxi.

³²⁵ Reed and Smith, xxiv, 5.

³²⁶ Reed and Smith, 4.

³²⁷ Reed and Smith, 5.

and crime” at an early age.³²⁸ As Reed’s aversion to authority and affinity for troublemaking began after losing his father, his behavior may have represented his objection to the irrepressible misfortune that overwhelmed his family.³²⁹

Indentured Servitude

Reed’s mother began to feel hopeless about his future. As a response to his poor behavior, she arranged for him to be an indentured servant: “My mother bursted out in a full flood of tears and predicted that if I went on in this way...that I would one day or another become the felon of a cell, and that it would be better for me if I was laying in my grave aside of my father.”³³⁰ Placing Reed in an indentured servitude arrangement reduced the number of children his mother needed to care for and could have potentially resulted in Reed learning a trade and gaining an education.³³¹ These arrangements were typical in the early nineteenth century and often resulted in masters providing indentured servants with a home, food, and education.³³² For boys, education included training in manual labor, basic reading, and arithmetic.³³³ While families with resources were able to send their children to apprenticeships that could benefit them in the long term, poor Black children of widows, like Reed, found themselves in grim situations.³³⁴ Indentured servant contracts for Black children were also markedly inferior to those of white children.³³⁵ The harsh conditions of indentured servitude arrangements for Black children functioned

³²⁸ Reed and Smith, 4.

³²⁹ Reed and Smith, 5.

³³⁰ Reed and Smith, 5.

³³¹ Reed and Smith, xxv.

³³² Reed and Smith, xxv.

³³³ Reed and Smith, xxv.

³³⁴ Reed and Smith, xxv.

³³⁵ Reed and Smith, xxv.

similarly to slavery post-emancipation; masters could demand that children work long hours under harsh conditions and beat them if they did not comply.³³⁶

Reed was between eight and ten when his mother planned to send him to work on a farm owned by the Ladds, a well-off family in upstate New York.³³⁷ As there was still an illegal slave trade post-emancipation, it was possible for free Black children to be kidnapped into slavery.³³⁸ Reed's siblings were keen on ensuring the Ladds were not enslavers: "Unless that man can prove before me by good and substantial witnesses that he is no slave holder,' said my brother, 'he can't go one step with him."³³⁹ Reed's brother wanted definitive attestation that Reed would not be at risk of enslavement. Reed's sister went on to assert her concerns with her mother's lack of due diligence: "I think it proper,' said my sister, 'that we should know where he is goin' and into whose hands he is goin' into, and I think my mother has taken a very improper course in this matter, and I think it my duty as a sister to interfere into this matter before our brother is torn from his Home."³⁴⁰ The fact that his mother agreed to this potentially dangerous arrangement without thoroughly investigating the life Reed would have as an indentured servant for the Ladds illustrates how desperate she was to secure an alternative living arrangement for him.

Reed's sister eventually approved of him working for the Ladds under the condition that he be sent home "every three months."³⁴¹ Though the Ladds were not enslavers, Reed was ordered to work in the field "under the hot burning rays of the

³³⁶ Reed and Smith, xxv, 18.

³³⁷ Reed and Smith, xxiv.

³³⁸ Reed and Smith, xxiv.

³³⁹ Reed and Smith, 8.

³⁴⁰ Reed and Smith, 8.

³⁴¹ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, 9.

sun.”³⁴² As Reed was not fortunate enough to be in the type of indentured servitude arrangement that prioritized education, this placement became his first systemic barrier to schooling. When Reed responded “no” when asked to “work and learn to be a farmer,” Mr. Ladd, his master, punished him with a beating.³⁴³ Reed recalled: “I was tied up like a slave and thrash by the rough hand of a farmer who had no business nor no right nor authority to lay a hand on me, and as such reflection came rolling across my mind, my temper burned with rage and anger.”³⁴⁴ Reed attributes being ordered to the field, receiving harsh words from Mr. Ladd, and being whipped to not having a father to protect him.³⁴⁵ Being forced to perform manual labor and then tied up and beaten after refusing is a significant contrast to the comforts of his middle-class early childhood. Reed resisted all components of his indentured servitude arrangement. He refused to work and was greatly opposed to the punishment he received for disobedience.

After Reed was beaten by Mr. Ladd, someone who lived near the Ladd farm assisted Reed in traveling home to visit his family.³⁴⁶ During his few days at home, Reed spent time with his sister, visited his father’s grave, and watched his mother fall into depression.³⁴⁷ Both Reed and his sister were eager to punish Mr. Ladd for treating Reed like he was enslaved. Reed’s sister advised him to “send that curse infernal villain to his long Home, where trouble and cares will pierce his mind no more.”³⁴⁸ His sister was furious and wanted justice. She even supplied Reed with “crackers and cheese” for the

³⁴² Reed and Smith, 11.

³⁴³ Reed and Smith, 10.

³⁴⁴ Reed and Smith, 18.

³⁴⁵ Reed and Smith, 11.

³⁴⁶ Reed and Smith, 11.

³⁴⁷ Reed and Smith, 12–17.

³⁴⁸ Reed and Smith, 17.

twenty-mile walk back to the Ladd farm to seek revenge.³⁴⁹ Upon returning to the Ladd family farm, he chose to set it on fire: “I ascended the top of the kitchen roof, and taking a match from my pocket, I started a blaze. I then went to the barn, and putting a match to the hay, I soon brought it to the ground.”³⁵⁰ Reed was between eight and ten years old when he committed one of the most intense acts of defiance of his entire life. While Reed’s motivation for setting the farm ablaze was to seek redress for how Mr. Ladd treated him, this was ultimately a counterproductive method of rebelling against authority.

Both Reed’s experience with racial injustice and his response to it differ from the experiences of Aldridge, McCune Smith, and Lyons. Reed is the only subject who was placed in an arrangement that resembled enslavement and suffered physical violence. Though McCune Smith had the legal status of being enslaved during his childhood, he does not discuss his experience working as an enslaved person in any of his recovered speeches or essays, and thus, he may not have endured the harsh treatment that Reed did.³⁵¹ While Aldridge had to evade a slavecatcher when working at sea in North Carolina, he was ultimately able to return home to New York City safely.³⁵² Despite the Lyons family home being damaged during the Draft Riots, Lyons’ parents were able to keep her and her siblings safe from harm.³⁵³ Though Reed’s experience with racial subjugation was different, his response to abuse was also drastically distinct. Unlike McCune Smith, Aldridge, and Lyons, who found the resources to leave their native city

³⁴⁹ Reed and Smith, 18–19.

³⁵⁰ Reed and Smith, 19.

³⁵¹ Smith and Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith*, 7.

³⁵² “Ira Aldridge,” 29.

³⁵³ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 11–12.

and escape discrimination, Reed returned to the scene where he was tormented and proactively sought retaliation. It should be highlighted that while Aldridge, McCune Smith, and Lyons had the support of their parents or the local community throughout their experiences with adversity, Reed's mother was too overwhelmed to raise him, and his sister urged him to harm Mr. Ladd. Additionally, Reed's childhood immaturity likely influenced his actions; he was significantly younger than both Aldridge, who faced a slavecatcher at sea, and Lyons, who experienced the Draft Riots in their teen years. Though Reed's use of personal agency and method of rebellion succeeded in causing the Ladd family some distress, this act was the catalyst for him being entangled with New York's criminal justice system for the next thirty years.

After setting the farm on fire, Reed left the Ladd residence on foot and was able to walk about seven miles before he was captured by horsemen and taken to the county jail, where he remained for three months.³⁵⁴ It is worth noting that children burning a master's property was not an uncommon offense in the nineteenth century.³⁵⁵ During this time, the New York State Lunatic Asylum claimed that "incendiarism from homesickness" affected young, indentured servants who were removed from their families.³⁵⁶ In 1833, when he was no older than ten, Reed was tried, convicted of arson, and "sentence[d] to the New York House of Refuge" until he was twenty-one."³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, 20.

³⁵⁵ Reed and Smith, xxvi.

³⁵⁶ Reed and Smith, xxvi.

³⁵⁷ Reed and Smith, 20, xxvi.

New York House of Refuge

Reed entered the New York House of Refuge in 1833 and remained there until 1839.³⁵⁸ In 1839, NYHR arranged for him to be an indentured servant for a farmer in Rockland County, New York, a town thirty minutes north of New York City.³⁵⁹ Reed signed an indentured servant contract indicating his consent to remain on the farm until his twenty-first birthday.³⁶⁰ Reed would have been between fourteen and sixteen years old when he entered this agreement, and he would have remained an indentured servant for five to seven years.

During Reed's six years at NYHR, there were two different superintendents who ran the facility: Nathaniel Hart from 1826 to 1837 and David Terry from 1837 to 1844.³⁶¹ Hart was a former schoolteacher and was regarded by Reed as a "fine venerable old gentleman" and a "good old patriarch."³⁶² When Hart resigned from NYHR, Reed recalled, "tears was seen to flow from every boy's eyes in the room," and he compared Hart's farewell speech to the "very parting words of" his "beloved father."³⁶³ Reed describes David Terry, a former "Presbyterian minister," as being the polar opposite of Hart: "Then, oh then was the worst days that ever I seen... Terry began to rule the boys with a tyrannical hand, and punishing the boys on the bare back every day with the cats

³⁵⁸ Reed and Smith, xxix.

³⁵⁹ Reed and Smith, xxxviii.

³⁶⁰ Reed and Smith, xxxvii–xxxviii.

³⁶¹ Elijah Devoe, *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents* (New York: J.B. M'Gown, 1848), 6, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/F0103344881/MOML?sid=bookmark-MOML&xid=75113986&pg=6>. Note: There are conflicting reports of when the transition between Hart and Terry occurred. Devoe's *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents* and a *New York Times* article from 1860 cite 1837; Caleb Smith cites 1838. See the *New York Times* article; <https://www.nytimes.com/1860/01/23/archives/our-city-charities-the-newyork-house-of-refuge-for-juvenile.html>.

³⁶² Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, 259, 38, 45.

³⁶³ Reed and Smith, 45.

for little things that Mr. Wood wouldn't blow his whistle at."³⁶⁴ Cat is short for "cat of nine tails;" this weapon designed for whipping was "made out of cat gut" and "when the officer strikes, it leaves a deep cut in the back, causing the tender skin to burst"³⁶⁵ Though historical records indicate consistently harsh treatment of children throughout NYHR's history, especially excessive physical discipline, Reed depicts Terry as far worse than Hart.³⁶⁶

Upon entering the House of Refuge, Reed, like all children, was promptly introduced to labor and taught a trade. Reed recalls that on the second day of entering NYHR, he "was sent off to the chair shop, to toil and labor" until he was twenty-one.³⁶⁷ Reed's trade was making chairs. The children worked under strict conditions and were not allowed to "talk in the shop during working hours" and thus relied on "winks" and other non-verbal cues to communicate.³⁶⁸ Their day was structured so that "eight hours in each day are allotted to labor, and the residue of their time to their meals, reading, recreation, and sleep."³⁶⁹ Though it is claimed that the boys being "strictly employed during the hours appointed for labor" was to "teach them some trade, by which they may obtain a livelihood when set at large," the "labor of the children" contributed to the "annual income" of NYHR.³⁷⁰ Businessmen pursued contracts that resulted in children producing "brushes, cane chairs, shoes, wallets;" the children received no compensation

³⁶⁴ Reed and Smith, 46–47.

³⁶⁵ Reed and Smith, 40.

³⁶⁶ Reed and Smith, 259; Devoe, *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents*, 12.

³⁶⁷ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, 22.

³⁶⁸ Reed and Smith, 22.

³⁶⁹ Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge*, 84.

³⁷⁰ Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., 84; Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., 88.

for their work, and the money they generated went to the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents.³⁷¹

Once Reed mastered his work tasks, he was awarded the opportunity to earn an elementary education. It was assistant superintendent Samuel Wood who became invested in Reed receiving an education. Reed described Wood as “a friend...who stuck closer to us than a brother, who sympathized with us in our sorrows, and who felt every heavy wave that came rolling in our bosom.”³⁷² Wood approached Reed and gauged his interest in literacy: “Your foreman says that you have made great improvements since you have been here, and he tells me that you are the smartest boy he has in the shop. Can you read and write, Rob?... I think I shall select some good boy to teach Reed and make a scholar of him.”³⁷³ During this time, NYHR staff would teach the strongest students, and those students would teach young people like Reed who lacked basic literacy.³⁷⁴

Reed was paired with someone he referred to as Jack Kimbell, who used every “spare minute” he had to educate Reed.³⁷⁵ Reed proved to be a quick study:

‘and by the space of nine months I was sitting at the head of the ninth class every night, reading and studying pieces from *The English Reader*.’³⁷⁶ *The English Reader* was a textbook that used literature and history to teach children grammar while also instilling moral values such as advocating against slavery and living a temperate lifestyle.³⁷⁷

Education at NYHR included basic reading, writing, and arithmetic; classes were ranked one through nine, with the ninth class being the most advanced.³⁷⁸ Reed became most

³⁷¹ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xxxii; SenGupta, *From Slavery to Poverty*, 137.

³⁷² Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, 46.

³⁷³ Reed and Smith, 25.

³⁷⁴ Reed and Smith, xxxiii.

³⁷⁵ Reed and Smith, 25.

³⁷⁶ Reed and Smith, 25.

³⁷⁷ Reed and Smith, xxxiii.

³⁷⁸ Reed and Smith, xxxiii.

passionate about reading and history: “Them was the days when I would challenge old England or America to throw down any history before me and let me read it through just once, and I was the boy that would stand before any historian that ever stood between England and America and argue with him on the subject of which I had been reading.”³⁷⁹ He also recalled being “laid across the stool” and receiving “fifteen cuts with the rattan for having more than one book” in his desk.³⁸⁰ The contrast between having interactions with staff members that encouraged intellectual development and being punished for possessing too many books is reflective of how eager NYHR was to control the behavior of its residents.

Reed’s academic ability, proactiveness about educational attainment, and ability to impress the adults in his life with his wit, have similarities to the experiences Ira Aldridge, James McCune Smith, and Maritcha Remond Lyons had during primary education. Like Aldridge, he possessed skills that earned him the favor of his schoolmaster.³⁸¹ Like James McCune Smith and Maritcha Remond Lyons, his academic potential motivated the school leader to become personally invested in him receiving a quality education.³⁸² The similarities between Reed's primary education experiences and the other subjects end there.

The reality that children at NYHR were referred to as “inmates” and required to perform free labor that financially benefitted NYHR renders this educational environment radically different from the African Free School or the Manhattan Colored School.³⁸³

³⁷⁹ Reed and Smith, 25.

³⁸⁰ Reed and Smith, 25.

³⁸¹ “Ira Aldridge,” 29.

³⁸² Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, 61; Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 19.

³⁸³ Hart and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York., *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge*, 23.

Reed's experience of being punished for having too many books is dissimilar to McCune Smith and Aldridge receiving an education under Charles C. Andrews, who would hire more competent teachers than himself at his own expense because he prioritized students having the best possible education.³⁸⁴ Reed, initially being taught by another child, deviates from Lyons having the opportunity to study under a leading educator while in school and learn additional coursework at home with her family.³⁸⁵ While Aldridge, McCune Smith, and Lyons earned a primary education in an environment that gave precedence to intellectual and moral development, Reed's place of primary education prioritized labor. It was not until Reed mastered chair-making that he was allowed access to basic education. NYHR's prioritization of labor over elementary school initially presented a systemic barrier to his educational attainment.

Two years into his stay at NYHR, Reed became increasingly homesick. As he was progressing in school and fulfilling his work duties, Reed was disappointed that there was no discussion of him returning home: "After receiving a good common school education and being away from Home for two years without having the least encouragement either from Mr. Wood or Mr. Heart of ever returning Home...I was determined to try and make my escape."³⁸⁶ It is worth noting that NYHR was a long distance to travel from Rochester, where Reed's family resided, and there is no record of Reed's family visiting him during his six-year stay there.³⁸⁷ Though Reed did successfully escape from the House of Refuge, he was captured and received a physical and psychological punishment for escaping: "I stood firm, without uttering a word or

³⁸⁴ Smith, "Introduction," 21.

³⁸⁵ Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*, 9.

³⁸⁶ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, 26.

³⁸⁷ Reed and Smith, xxxii.

making a groan, until he given me twenty-five. He...told me that I was not to speak a word to no boy for the space of four weeks, and that no boy was to speak to me. If they did, they should pass through the same treatment.”³⁸⁸ Mr. Hart whipped Reed using a “pair of cats” and then socially isolated him from his peers.³⁸⁹ After attempting to escape, Reed was also in “lock up all day on Sundays” and was only allowed “one piece of bread a day” for the four week period of punishment.³⁹⁰ Mr. Hart was seeking to both punish Reed and maintain order in the facility by discouraging other residents from attempting to escape. It is worth noting that Reed claims Mr. Hart had “sympathy” for him during this experience.³⁹¹ Reed’s decision to run away from NYHR reflects a desperate form of resistance that ultimately resulted in him experiencing physical violence, isolation, and insufficient food.

While Reed received his first severe punishment at NYHR for a major infraction, it is important to note that minor infractions were also punished with violence. Examples of minor infractions included talking “in the shop during working hours,” speaking in the cell, not going to bed as soon as the cell door was locked, and looking behind while in the dining hall, school, or church.³⁹² Reed recalls, “if any of these rules was broken, I would get twenty or twenty-five blows on the hand with the rattan, or stand in the middle of the dining room with my hands on my head and go back to the shop with an empty belly.”³⁹³ In 1848, former assistant superintendent Elijah Devoe attempted to expose the cruelties of NYHR by writing a book describing the abuse children endured.³⁹⁴ Devoe worked for

³⁸⁸ Reed and Smith, 39.

³⁸⁹ Reed and Smith, 38.

³⁹⁰ Reed and Smith, 39.

³⁹¹ Reed and Smith, 38.

³⁹² Reed and Smith, 24.

³⁹³ Reed and Smith, 24.

³⁹⁴ Reed and Smith, xxxv.

the institution for over four years and was eventually fired after a dispute with his superintendent “over the management of discipline.”³⁹⁵ His observation that “the discipline and treatment have been physical and mechanical, rather than moral and intellectual. And the ‘bloody cat’ had been a familiar instrument in the hand of the keeper during the whole history of the institution” aligns with Reed’s experience there.³⁹⁶ Devoe argued that the “children often receive punishment with imperturbable indifference, regarding their sufferings.”³⁹⁷ Devoe depicted NYHR as an abusive environment for children.

Life after the New York House of Refuge

By 1840, official NYHR records reported that Reed, who was around sixteen years old, had left his indentured servitude arrangement, and his NYHR record was closed.³⁹⁸ While Reed’s exact reasoning for leaving his placement is not documented, his previous actions show that he had an extreme aversion to oppressive environments. It is likely that Reed left the indentured servant arrangement because he did not want to take orders from a master or work on a farm. Reed did manage to travel back to his hometown of Rochester, New York, and accepted a job as “a bar tender in a saloon;” during this time, he was admittedly “sinking...deeper and deeper in all kinds of crime.”³⁹⁹ In 1840, Reed was convicted of larceny and sent to Auburn State Prison, where he remained on and off until 1858.⁴⁰⁰ Though NYHR asserted that the institution was preparing young

³⁹⁵ Reed and Smith, xxxv; Devoe, *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents*, 12.

³⁹⁶ Devoe, *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents*, 12.

³⁹⁷ Devoe, 18.

³⁹⁸ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xxxviii.

³⁹⁹ Reed and Smith, 119, 125.

⁴⁰⁰ Reed and Smith, xliii.

people to thrive post-exiting, Reed was unable to use his education or chair-making skills for upward mobility.

In the early 1860s, while in Clinton State Prison, Reed was permitted to write letters to influential people to seek help obtaining a pardon for a larceny charge in 1858 that resulted in the loss of his rights as a citizen.⁴⁰¹ It was not uncommon for people convicted of crimes in New York State during this time to petition the governor for a pardon under the reasoning that the “offender had suffered enough;” clemency applications were often drafted by lawyers and contained letters of support from politicians and business leaders.⁴⁰² Reed had the support of both a lawyer and a contractor.⁴⁰³ In 1876, Reed was granted a pardon by the Governor of New York, and his rights were restored.⁴⁰⁴

While there is not much known about his life after 1876, Reed was alive until at least 1895; during this year, he sent two letters to NYHR requesting his case file.⁴⁰⁵ He wanted to know his age when he was sent to NYHR and which judge sentenced him.⁴⁰⁶ He also mentioned how much he struggled after leaving NYHR and shared his various jail sentences: “can it be possible that it has been 60 years ago Since I was a inmate of the refuge. oh my Dear friend if you only knew the troubles and trials I have been through since I left the old reffuge it would make your heart bleed.”⁴⁰⁷ Reed was convicted of larceny six times between 1840 and 1864; his various sentences ranged from

⁴⁰¹ Reed and Smith, lix; Reed and Smith, 227.

⁴⁰² Carolyn Strange, *Discretionary Justice: Pardon and Parole in New York from the Revolution to the Depression* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016), 116, https://hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/1lqd3jo/01HVD_ALMA512280568220003941.

⁴⁰³ Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, lix.

⁴⁰⁴ Reed and Smith, lx.

⁴⁰⁵ Reed and Smith, 232–34.

⁴⁰⁶ Reed and Smith, 232.

⁴⁰⁷ Reed and Smith, 234.

two to five years.⁴⁰⁸ His interest in his sixty-year-old case file detailing his time at NYHR showcases the profound impact the institution had on him. Reed even urged the reader of his 1895 letter to “be like Mr Hart the suptendant of the old reffuge pray and take these you Have under your care and try Hard to reform them. but not like Mr. Terry abuse them and tie them Hand foot and throw the cat of nine tails on them till you could not see a white spot on there poor backs.”⁴⁰⁹ He concludes the second letter by reflecting on his sadness during his time at NYHR: “He is alone in His sorrows with none to condole How sad the regret that embitters His Soul He mourns on the Hours he first went astray and yielded His Heart to the tempters vile sway.”⁴¹⁰ While it was Reed’s method of protesting oppression that landed him in NYHR, the physical and psychological abuse he endured there impacted his life outcomes for the next several decades.

Reed’s outcomes post residing at the New York House of Refuge align with the idea that NYHR did not effectively prepare children for long-term success. His experiences during and after NYHR depicted his lived experience with systemic barriers to gainful employment by showing that the facility designed to rehabilitate him and prepare him to reenter society failed. After spending six years at NYHR, Reed was sent to another indentured servitude arrangement despite the negative experience he had at his original indentured servitude placement.

In his book exposing the horrors of this institution, Devoe highlighted that the “public” did not have true insight into the happenings of NYHR, which allowed the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents to produce annual reports with

⁴⁰⁸ Reed and Smith, 224–27.

⁴⁰⁹ Reed and Smith, 236.

⁴¹⁰ Reed and Smith, 236.

“unqualified” claims of “success.”⁴¹¹ To convince the public and the staff that NYHR was enabling children’s success once they rejoined society, the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents shared letters from former inmates who were doing well after leaving the facility; the authenticity of these letters has been questioned by historians and those who criticize NYHR.⁴¹² Devoe notes: “we are often told of the contentedness of the children in the refuge, but we must not forget that these assertions do not proceed from them.”⁴¹³ Devoe also claims that “tautological eulogies and pompous puffs so often put forth in praise of the institution and its officers, are only the testimony of one party.”⁴¹⁴ It is likely that Reed was one of many children who never fully recovered from their experience at NYHR.

Though the New York House of Refuge provided Reed with housing, food, employable skills, and basic education, the environment proved to be torturous and traumatic. NYHR failed to be a refuge to Reed during his stay there and was ineffective at setting him up to thrive as an adult. It is possible that Reed’s life outcomes would have been different if he had the community support to secure work aligned with his skill set after leaving NYHR instead of being sent back to an indentured servitude arrangement. The methods Reed chose for rebelling against authority, combined with the impact of the violence and homesickness he experienced at NYHR, resulted in his long-term struggle to maintain a job despite his literacy and vocational skills. Unlike Aldridge, McCune

⁴¹¹ Reed and Smith, 12.

⁴¹² Reed and Smith, xxxv.

⁴¹³ Devoe, *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents*, 12; Reed and Smith, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, xxxvi.

⁴¹⁴ Devoe, *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents*, 12.

Smith, and Lyons, Reed lived most of his life in opposition to behaviors that were deemed acceptable.

Chapter VI.

Conclusion

Exploring the professional journeys of Ira Aldridge, James McCune Smith, Maritcha Remond Lyons, and Austin Reed sheds light on the complex relationship between race, education, labor, agency, support, and honorability in nineteenth-century New York City. Each of these individuals' trajectories exposes a unique systemic racial barrier to educational attainment or gainful employment. Reflecting on these distinct educational and career journeys offers insights into the determinants of the efficacy of primary education for Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century. The case studies collectively demonstrate that while elementary education offered a foundation for career success and upward mobility, schooling must be accompanied by effective use of personal agency, community support, and some level of respectability to land its intended impact.

The experiences of the four subjects are united by revelations of structural obstacles to educational access or obtaining employment based on racial discrimination. After Aldridge left the African Free School, he attempted to begin a career at sea but was threatened with the risk of enslavement. This systemic racial barrier to gainful employment in his home country, combined with a lack of family and community support and opportunities to pursue acting, influenced his decision to relocate to Europe permanently. Aldridge's classmate and friend, McCune Smith, was presented with a systemic racial barrier to higher education when he was rejected from Columbia University due to his race. McCune Smith also relocated to Europe to seek the training he needed to succeed in his chosen profession. When McCune Smith was much older, he

found himself relocating again, this time from Manhattan to Brooklyn, as a result of the Draft Riots. His dear friends, the Lyons family, also fled Manhattan to be safe from this racial violence. The Draft Riots created a systemic barrier to Maritcha Remond Lyons' education because she had to stop attending school in New York, and once she relocated to Rhode Island, she was informed that Black students could not attend Providence High School.

Differently, Austin Reed's experience with systemic barriers to education was due to his indentured servitude arrangement and subsequent incarceration. While it was possible for families with means to send their children to indentured servitude arrangements that resulted in basic education or learning a trade, poor Black children, like Reed, were more likely to be confined to performing manual labor. Once Reed was sent to NYHR, he was not given an education until he mastered his job of chair-making, which financially benefitted the institution. After leaving NYHR, Reed was sent back to perform manual labor as an indentured servant. Unlike Aldridge or McCune Smith, who found the means to travel to Europe, or Lyons, whose parents took her to Rhode Island to escape racial violence, Reed was unable to find sufficient refuge.

The case studies are also united by the collective influence of personal choices, communal backing, and respectability having a more substantial impact on life outcomes than mere access to primary education. Though each subject earned a basic education, which served as a foundation for their future endeavors, their career paths diverged. Whereas Aldridge, McCune Smith, and Lyons experienced their peak successes during their adult years, Reed's highest-known point of success was during his youth. While some may not have considered acting to be a dignified career path when Aldridge began

in the 1820s, his use of personal agency and patronage to become internationally renowned was eventually praised by many Americans and Europeans. As McCune Smith's life choices and demeanor fully aligned with expectations of respectability and he was adept at securing communal backing to aid the achievement of his goals, he was held in high regard as a student and flourished as a physician and abolitionist. Although Lyons battled significant disruptions to her education during her youth, and there was tension between her commitment to professional excellence and societal expectations of Black women, the support she garnered for her academic and professional advancement, coupled with her reputation as a leading educator, resulted in her being a celebrated member of her community. Differently, Reed's known peak during his lifetime was when he became effective enough at chair-making at NYHR that he was awarded a basic education and proved to have the academic talent to be a high-performing student in the most advanced class. In addition to the lack of sufficient support to overcome systemic barriers, the differences in Reed's outcomes post-primary school can be attributed to him resisting societal norms in a manner that was predominantly misaligned with standards of respectability.

As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham so accurately articulated, "the politics of respectability emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations."⁴¹⁵ Alignment with respectability played a critical role in the outcomes of the four subjects because they lived in a world that sought to prove or disprove whether the entire Black race was worthy of equality based on the conduct of individual Black

⁴¹⁵ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 187.

people. Aldridge, McCune Smith, and Lyons were glowing examples of the concept that Black people were not inferior to any other race and the only impediment to Black success in the United States is systemic racial oppression.⁴¹⁶ Reed epitomized the type of behaviors and outcomes that Black and white social reformers feared would reflect negatively upon the entire race.

Though Reed lived most of his life in defiance of the “moral perfectionism” that many regarded as required for Black people to experience positive outcomes, over a century after his death, he did become the author of the oldest recorded account of a Black man’s life while incarcerated.⁴¹⁷ He made a tangible contribution to exposing the shortfalls of New York’s nineteenth-century penal system. Despite his efforts not coming to fruition during his lifetime, the years Reed spent writing a prison memoir while imprisoned reflect his most potent form of rebellion against the societal structures and expectations he so vehemently opposed. Ironically, writing a memoir that unveils the gross failures of New York’s juvenile correction system was Reed’s act of resistance that most closely aligned with the respectability politics of his time.

As basic education was regarded as essential for work opportunities, material security, and ultimately freedom from oppression for Black children in nineteenth-century New York City, this research is significant because it identifies three thematic factors that dictated the efficacy of schooling for four individuals in this community. This study deepens the understanding of Black New Yorkers’ experiences during this era by illustrating their strategies for overcoming systemic racial barriers to education and

⁴¹⁶ Du Bois, *The Talented Tenth*, 1.

⁴¹⁷ eRandom House Group, “The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict”; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 173.

employment and by analyzing factors unrelated to education that influenced the impact of their primary schooling. The educational roots and rebellious routes pursued by Aldridge, McCune Smith, Lyons, and Reed clarify that basic schooling served as a preliminary step that, when coupled with individual agency, support from influential people, and some level of societal conformity, could propel Black New Yorkers in the nineteenth century towards prosperous careers and self-sufficiency.

Bibliography

- “\$2,000 in 1863 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator.” Accessed November 12, 2023.
<https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?endYear=2023&amount=2000>.
- “\$5,000,000 in 1863 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator.” Accessed October 22, 2023.
<https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?endYear=2023&amount=5000000>.
- “\$300 in 1863 → 2023 | Inflation Calculator.” Accessed October 22, 2023.
<https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=300>.
- Aldridge, Ira. “Letter from Ira Aldridge.” *The Weekly Anglo-African*, June 23, 1860.
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030179/1860-06-23/ed-1/seq-2/>.
- . “Letter from Ira Aldridge to the Editor of the Athenaeum,” November 2, 1858.
Box 2, Miscellaneous 1956-1964. Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131,
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
- Anbinder, Tyler. *City of Dreams : The 400-Year Epic History of Immigrant New York*.
New York, NY: Boston : Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.
<http://archive.org/details/cityofdreams400y0000anbi>.
- Andrews, Charles C. *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools: From Their
Establishment in 1787, to the Present Time; Embracing a Period of More Than
Forty Years*. New York, NY: Mahlon Day, 1830.
https://books.google.com/books/about/The_History_of_the_New_York_African_Free.html?id=NwpeAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.
- Baumgartner, Kabria. *In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism
in Antebellum America*. Early American Places. New York, NY: New York
University Press, 2019. <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/book/82508>.
- Boese, Thomas. *Public Education in the City of New York: Its History, Condition, and
Statistics: An Official Report to the Board of Education*. New York, NY: Harper
& Bros., 1869.
https://books.google.com/books/about/Public_Education_in_the_City_of_New_York.html?id=kbC-0kxI06gC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.
- Bolden, Tonya. *Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl*. New York, NY: Abrams
Books for Young Readers, 2005.

- Bourne, William Oland. *History of the Public School Society of the City of New York: With Portraits of the Presidents of the Society*. W. Wood & Company, 1870.
https://books.google.com/books/about/History_of_the_Public_School_Society_of.html?id=vH1OAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.
- The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. “48 Years P.S. Teach Miss Lyons Retires; In Schools Long Time.” July 26, 1918, sec. Page 7.
<https://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/54538671/>.
- “Caleb Smith | English.” Accessed December 21, 2023.
<https://english.yale.edu/people/tenured-and-tenure-track-faculty-professors/caleb-smith>.
- Ching, Ann Hui, Gavin Chun Wui Kang, and Gale Jue Shuang Lim. “Craniofacial Measurements: A History of Scientific Racism, Rethinking Anthropometric Norms.” *The Journal of Craniofacial Surgery* 32, no. 3 (2021): 825–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/SCS.00000000000007266>.
- The Colored American*. “Dr. J. [McCune] Smith.” June 9, 1838. Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive. <https://link-gale-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/apps/doc/GB2500079987/SAS?u=camb55135&sid=bookmark-SAS&xid=3cc43e7a>.
- The Colored American*. “Farewell Dinner to Dr. James McCune Smith, A.M, From the Glasgow Chronicle of June 21st.” September 9, 1837. Accessible.com.
- The Colored American*. “Medical Consultations.” November 11, 1837. Accessible.com.
- The Colored American*. “Reception of Dr. Smith.” October 28, 1837. Accessible.com.
- Cook, Adrian. *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974.
<http://muse.jhu.edu/book/37530>.
- Cools, Amy M. “The Life and Work of James McCune Smith (1813-1865).” The University of Edinburgh, 2021.
https://era.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/38333/CoolsAM_2021.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- Corkery, Caleb A. “Ray, Henrietta Cordelia.” In *Oxford African American Studies Center*. Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013.
<https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-37711>.
- Daily Evening Star*. “August 03, 1853.” August 3, 1853.
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045461/1853-08-03/ed-1/seq-4/>.

- “Definition of DECLAMATION.” In *Merriam-Webster*, October 30, 2023.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/declamation>.
- Devoe, Elijah. *The Refuge System, or, Prison Discipline Applied to Juvenile Delinquents*. New York, NY: J.B. M’Gown, 1848.
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/F0103344881/MOML?sid=bookmark-MOML&xid=75113986&pg=6>.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt). *The Talented Tenth*. [1st electronic ed.]. Black Thought and Culture. New York, NY: James Pott and Company, 1903.
- Duane, Anna Mae. *Educated for Freedom: The Incredible Story of Two Fugitive Schoolboys Who Grew up to Change a Nation*. New York, NY: University Press, 2020. <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/book/83019>.
- Eisenmann, Linda. “Doyle, Sarah Elizabeth (1830-1922), Educator and Activist.” In *American National Biography*. Oxford University Press. Accessed December 20, 2023. <https://www.anb.org/display/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-0900236>.
- England’s Secretary of State’s Office. “Ira Aldridge Naturalized British Citizen Certificate,” January 1864. Box 4, Scrapbook. Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
- English Heritage. “Ira Aldridge | Actor | Blue Plaques.” Accessed July 30, 2023. <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/aldrige-ira/>.
- The Era*. “Death of Mr. Ira Aldridge.” August 28, 1867.
<https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/386997539/>.
- Fairlie, Robert W., and William A. Sundstrom. “The Emergence, Persistence, and Recent Widening of the Racial Unemployment Gap.” *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 52, no. 2 (January 1999): 252–70.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/236359262/abstract/D78D46BF7BB54088PQ/1>.
- Foner, Philip S. *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981*. Reprint edition. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018.
- The Free Soil Courier and Liberty Gazette*. March 11, 1847.
<https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/404775344/>.
- Gardner, Eric. “Early African American Print Culture.” Oxford University Press, n.d. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.283>.
- Gates Jr., Henry Louis. “Foreword.” In *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, vii–xii. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

- Gellman, David N. "African Grove Theater." Oxford University Press, December 1, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.44520>.
- Gibson, Campbell. "Rank by Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places, Listed Alphabetically by State: 1790-1990." U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 15, 1998. <https://www2.census.gov/library/working-papers/1998/demographics/pop-twps0027/tab01.txt>.
- Gibson, Campbell, and Kay Jung. "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places in The United States." U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2005/demo/POP-twps0076.pdf>.
- The Hampshire Advertiser*. "Mr. Ira Aldridge." August 9, 1851. <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/410026502/>.
- Harris, Leslie M. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.06703>.
- Hart, Nathaniel C. and Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York. *Documents Relative to the House of Refuge : Instituted by the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New-York*. New York, NY: N.C. Hart; (Printed by M. Day), 1832. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CY0101984899/SABN?sid=primo&xid=eb7aa1e0&pg=3>.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb00476.0001.001>.
- The Ipswich Journal*. "Theatre Royal Ipswich." February 8, 1851. <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/390386289/>.
- "Ira Aldridge Society Records," 1973 1886. Sc MG 131. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21048>.
- John Stauffer. "John Stauffer." Accessed November 23, 2023. <http://www.johnstauffer.org/>.
- Johnson, Val Marie. "'The Half Has Never Been Told': Maritcha Lyons' Community, Black Women Educators, the Woman's Loyal Union, and 'the Color Line' in Progressive Era Brooklyn and New York." *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 835–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144217692931>.
- The Liberator*. "'The Nuisances.'" May 26, 1837. <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/34584821/>.

- Lindfors, Bernth. *Ira Aldridge: The Early Years, 1807-1833*. Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011. https://key-idp.iam.harvard.edu/idp/profile/SAML2/POST/SSO?execution=els1&_eventId_proceed=1.
- . ““Mislike Me Not for My Complexion...”: Ira Aldridge in Whiteface.” *African American Review* 50, no. 4 (2017): 1005–12. <https://doi.org/10.1353/afa.2017.0155>.
- Lyons, Maritcha Remond. *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was*. New York, NY, 1928. https://search-alexanderstreet-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3338331.
- Mabee, Carleton. *Black Education in New York State: From Colonial to Modern Times*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1979. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9b2x9d>.
- McGruder, Kevin. “A Fair and Open Field: The Responses of Black New Yorkers to the Draft Riots.” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 37, no. 2 (2013): 7–40. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1428042026?accountid=11311&parentSessionId=W4gPzUaMtM3OJkRuMpIUP4hLzZ7nA68A5v4U4hSl%2F%2Bw%3D&pq-origsite=primo>.
- Memoir and Theatrical Career of Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius*. London, England: Onwhyn, Catharine Street, Strand, 1850. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=udel.31741113286852&seq=16>.
- Mitchell, Elise A. “Black and African American.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 43, no. 1 (2023): 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2023.0005>.
- Moreland, Lois Baldwin. “Ray, Charlotte E.” In *Oxford African American Studies Center*. Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013. <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-37710>.
- The Morning Post*. “The African Roscius.” March 21, 1848. <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/402156197/>.
- “Mr. Ira Aldridge, The African Roscius.” Royal Shakespearean Theatre, Stratford, April 28, 1851. Box 4, Scrapbook. Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
- “Mr. Keene The African Roscius.” Theatre-Royal, March 12, 1827. Box 4, Scrapbook. Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

- Murray, John, and William Smeal. "Letter from the Committee of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, June 15th, 1837." *The Colored American*, February 17, 1838. Accessible.com.
- National Center for Education Statistics. "120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait." Edited by Thomas D. Snyder, January 1993, 115. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf>.
- The New York Age*. "Miss Maritcha Lyons, For 48 Years A Teacher in Brooklyn Schools, And A Militant Fighter For Women, Is Dead." February 2, 1929. <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/40788737/>.
- The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938)*. "Tributes Paid Departed Sunday: Memorial Services for Late Brooklynites Packed Local Church." February 27, 1929, sec. Brooklyn and Long Island. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/226383117/abstract/33F80EC2B3814EC0PQ/2>.
- The New York Herald*. "A Theatrical Negro." August 10, 1867. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1867-08-10/ed-1/seq-4/>.
- New York Public Library. "Archives.Nypl.Org -- Ira Aldridge Society Records." Accessed January 3, 2024. <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21048>.
- The New York Times*. "DIED." November 18, 1865. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1865/11/18/90523509.html?pageNumber=4>.
- The New York Times*. "MINOR TOPICS." August 6, 1867, sec. Archives. <https://www.nytimes.com/1867/08/06/archives/minor-topics.html>.
- The New York Times*. "Musical and Dramatic." March 25, 1853, sec. Archives. <https://www.nytimes.com/1853/03/25/archives/musical-and-dramatic.html>.
- NYPL Digital Collections. "Ira Aldridge as King Lear." Accessed August 21, 2023. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/bbaea7b7-dce9-9018-e040-e00a18067704>.
- Office of the Board of Governors of the Alms House. *Third Annual Report of the Governors of the Alms House, New York, for the Year 1851*. New York: Wm. C. Bryant & Co., printers Nassau Street, 1852. <http://docs.newsbank.com/select/AFAMER/7077>.
- Osborne, Desha. "Brown, William Alexander." In *Oxford African American Studies Center*. Oxford University Press, September 30, 2016. <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-50944>.

- The Observer*. "Surrey Theatre." March 26, 1848.
<https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/258955711/>.
- Perrotta, Katherine A., and Tiffany McBean Rainey. "Emphatically Our Battle: A Content Analysis of the African Free School of New York City Curriculum, 1787-1840." *The Journal of Educational Foundations* 35, no. 1 (2022): 148–85.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2690252719/abstract/9987DCFEAC5D4939PQ/1>.
- Peterson, Carla L. *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.
- "Playbill Advertising Ira Aldridge's Appearance as Othello in Northampton, 1831." Northampton Theatre, September 21, 1831. BOX 2. Ira Frederick Aldridge letter to J. Cole, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/playbill-advertising-ira-aldrigges-appearance-as-othello-in-northampton-1831>.
- Random House Group. "The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict." Random House Books, January 2017.
<https://www.randomhousebooks.com/books/241480/>.
- Rebhorn, Matthew. "Introduction: 'Nineteenth-Century' 'American' 'Theater' and 'Performance.'" *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 6, no. 2 (2018): 389–94.
- Reed, Austin, and Caleb Smith. *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*. First edition. New York, NY: Random House, 2016.
- Remond Lyons, Maritcha. "Maritcha Remond Lyons - Letters 1869-1929," 1929 1869. R. 1 b. 2 f. 1. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
<https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21221#detailed>.
- . "Maritcha Remond Lyons - Writings 1869-1917," 1917 1869. R. 1 b. 2 f. 2. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
<https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21221#detailed>.
- Roff, Sandra. "The Accessibility of Libraries to Blacks in Nineteenth Century Brooklyn, New York." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 5, no. 2 (1981): 7–7.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/219951351?pq-origsite=primo&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>.
- Rury, John L. "The New York African Free School, 1827-1836: Conflict over Community Control of Black Education." *Phylon (1960-)* 44, no. 3 (1983): 187–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/274931>.
- Schomburg, Arthur Alfonso. "List Showing the Theatres and Plays in Various European Cities Where Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius Acted during the Years 1824-

1867/ Compiled by Arthur A. Schomburg, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library,” n.d. August 12, 2023.
<https://digitalcollections.library.harvard.edu/catalog/990069496980203941>.

SenGupta, Gunja. *From Slavery to Poverty: The Racial Origins of Welfare in New York, 1840-1918*. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009. <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/book/10744>.

Seraile, William. *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/93/monograph/book/14721>.

Shafer, Yvonne. “BLACK ACTORS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN THEATRE.” *CLA Journal* 20, no. 3 (1977): 387–400.
https://hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/1mdq5o5/TN_cdi_proquest_journals_1304147821.

Smith, James McCune. “Extract 1, Colored American, November 11, 1837.” In *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, edited by John Stauffer, 8–12. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. “Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans (1844).” In *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, 61–65. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. “Introduction.” In *A Memorial Discourse*, 17–68. Washington, D.C., 1865.
<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044010183747?urlappend=%3Bseq=7>.

———. “James McCune Smith, Address to the Marquis de Lafayette, 1824.” In *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, edited by John Stauffer, 5–7. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. “Lecture on the Haytien Revolutions: With a Sketch of the Character of Toussaint L’Ouverture. Delivered at the Stuyvesant Institute, (for the Benefit of the Colored Orphan Asylum), February 26, 1841.” In *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, 25–47. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. “The Destiny of the People of Color. A Lecture Delivered Before the Philomathean Society and Hamilton Lyceum in January, 1841, By James McCune Smith, M.D.Li New-York, Published by Request, 1843.” In *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, 48–60. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Smith, James McCune, and John Stauffer. *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.

- Stauffer, John, ed. "Introduction." In *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, xiii–xlii. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Strange, Carolyn. *Discretionary Justice: Pardon and Parole in New York from the Revolution to the Depression*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016. https://hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/11qd3jo/01HVD_ALMA512280568220003941.
- Swift, David E. "Ray, Charles Bennett." In *Oxford African American Studies Center*. Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013. <https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-35358>.
- The Anglo-African magazine*. Vol. 2, no. 1. "Ira Aldridge." January 1860. Houghton Library - Harvard University.
- "Translation of the Death Certificate of Ira Aldridge," August 8, 1867. Box 2, Aldridge Family Documents (Copies) 1864-1869; 1893; 1915; 1933; 1956. Ira Aldridge Society records, Sc MG 131, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
- The Times*. "The Coburg Theatre." October 11, 1825. <https://go-gale-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ps/i.do?p=TTDA&u=camb55135&id=GALE|CS35410251&v=2.1&it=r&sid=bookmark-TTDA&asid=17c3b1f4>
- Trustees of the New York African Free School. "An Address to the Parents and Guardians of the Children Belonging to the New-York African Free School." Samuel Woods & Sons, 1818. https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/iw-search/we/Evans?p_theme=eai&p_product=EAIX&d_collections=SHAW&d_collectionName=SHAW&p_action=doc&p_topdoc=1&p_docnum=1&d_searchform=customized&p_text_custbase-0=45058&p_field_custbase-0=docnum&p_sort=YMD_date:D&p_nbid=O6BH5CCTMTY2MTI5MjgwNy43MDUxNzY6MToxNToxMjguMTAzLjE0Ny4xNDk&p_docref=
- US Census Bureau. "About the Topic of Race." Census.gov. Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>.
- Waters, Hazel. "Ira Aldridge and the Battlefield of Race." *Race & Class* 45, no. 1 (July 1, 2003): 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396803045001001>.
- Wellman, Judith. *Brooklyn's Promised Land: The Free Black Community of Weeksville, New York*. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014. <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/36078>.
- Wells, Jonathan Daniel. "Inventing White Supremacy: Race, Print Culture, and the Civil War Draft Riots." *Civil War History* 68, no. 1 (2022): 42–80. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwh.2022.0003>.

Whitehead, K. Wise. "Lyons, Maritcha R." In *Oxford African American Studies Center*. Oxford University Press, May 31, 2013.
<https://oxfordaasc.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-37403>.

Wilder, Craig Steven. "The Rise and Influence of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, 1808-1865." *Afro - Americans in New York Life and History* 22, no. 2 (July 31, 1998): 7.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/200974786/abstract/8C25638F5DC84D6CPQ/1>.