

# David Walker and the Political Power of the Appeal

Political Theory

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## Abstract

David Walker's famous 1829 *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* expresses a puzzle at the very outset. What are we to make of the use of "Citizens" in the title given the denial of political rights to African Americans? This essay argues that the pamphlet relies on the cultural and linguistic norms associated with the term appeal in order to call into existence the political standing of black folks. Walker's use of citizen does not need to rely on a recognitive legal relationship precisely because it is the practice of judging that illuminates one's political, indeed, citizenly standing. Properly understood, the *Appeal* aspires to transform blacks and whites, and when it informs the prophetic dimension of the text, it tilts the entire pamphlet in a democratic direction. This is the political power of the pamphlet; it exemplifies the call-and-response logic of democratic self-governance.

## Keywords

David Walker, rhetoric, judgment, democracy, appeal, authority

David Walker's famous 1829 pamphlet immediately confronts the reader with a problem. Consider the title in its entirety: *Appeal, In Four Articles; Together with A Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America.*<sup>1</sup> How

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are we to understand the phrase “citizens” in this title? By the late 1820s we see a diminution or removal of the rights otherwise extended to black men in northern states, calling into question the accuracy of the attribution of “citizens” to “colored” individuals.<sup>2</sup> As suggested by Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the term citizen refers to “a freeman of a city; not a foreigner; not a slave” (although we can find a similar definition in Antiquity).<sup>3</sup> To be a citizen is to enjoy a legal status of duties, rights, and privileges constitutive of belonging to a city and to be taken by that city as having that status. This stands in contrast to persons that are legally outside the community (as in a foreigner) or legally at the will of another (as in a slave). Citizenship, at least as suggested by Johnson’s definition, is dependent on what we might call a recognitive legal relationship.<sup>4</sup> The problem then is for Walker to show that one need not rely on legal recognition to underwrite one’s status as a citizen. How he is able to do this, I argue, is connected to the other important term in the title—the word, “appeal”—and the way it reflects a capacity that the practice of rhetorical engagement foregrounds.<sup>5</sup>

Framing my inquiry as Walker’s problem (rather than “our” problem) locates him squarely within his historical and political moment; it poses a challenge regarding the political status of African Americans to which the pamphlet responds. This is not to claim that defining citizenship is his only concern. Rather, I mean to argue that Walker’s text engages the dominant ideas regarding the presumed cognitive deficiencies of African Americans that were used as obstacles to their citizenship by calling them to perform their political standing. To use “citizen” to address “colored” folks at a time when those two terms were increasingly seen as incompatible calls out a form of political activity that is not itself dependent on the juridical framework from which blacks were excluded. His use of key terms—citizen and appeal—exemplify the ways blacks constituted themselves as political actors at the very moment their ability to do so was called into question or denied. The use of those terms, I contend, brings into sharp relief a presupposition of democratic politics—namely, that ordinary individuals are capable of judging their social world—to which he means to awaken his audience, especially his African American audience.

This essay explores the presupposition of democratic politics implicit in Walker’s deployment of the term “appeal.” My claim is that *appealing to* is a bidirectional rhetorical practice that affirms the political standing of the claimant and the one to whom the appeal is directed.<sup>6</sup> As we shall see, the word “appeal” is not idiosyncratic; it captures a way of thinking about one’s political standing that is not itself dependent on constitutional recognition. In fact, this is the same logic that the American revolutionary generation

employed to contest monarchical domination and which African Americans, particularly Walker, used to contest white supremacy. “When people use particular words,” writes Mary Bilder, “they choose among different cultural scripts—they select and create meaning” of possibility in which they embed themselves and the recipients of those words.<sup>7</sup>

Although I shall only gesture to this throughout, Walker’s approach is of broader significance given that most contemporary reflections tend to define “citizenship” as a form of “legal status.”<sup>8</sup> This need not be at odds with the obvious point that historically excluded groups such as African Americans have demanded inclusion over much of the history of the United States. But connecting citizenship exclusively to legal status will blind us to the fact that through activities of contestation African Americans have sought to model a vision of citizenship alongside their plea for inclusion. Although it may well be the case that, as Rogers Smith suggest, “through most of U.S. history, lawmakers pervasively and unapologetically structured U.S. citizenship in terms of illiberal and undemocratic racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchies,” we should not interpret this as exhausting the meaning of citizenship in American moral and political practice.<sup>9</sup> Using “colored citizens,” then, directs our attention to a kind of activity—namely, the activity of judging that precedes and contests practices of exclusion that were (and remain) part of the fraught discussion about what it is to be a citizen. Who among us would deny that the practice of judging helps create conditions for realizing the civil, political, and social rights famously identified by T. H. Marshall?<sup>10</sup> Appealing to one’s fellows, as Walker does, is a rhetorical move to be sure, but it is one that serves an important political function—a way of capturing citizenship as an activity.

Few scholars have attended to what I am here calling the rhetorical quality of Walker’s appeal and few have attended to the implicit political power of the practice of appealing—its desire to call into existence a political status that is otherwise denied. More often, the *Appeal* is read as espousing a militant form of black nationalism with its emphasis on violent resistance.<sup>11</sup> Still others read it as continuous with the American Jeremiadic tradition, even as this tradition is seen as being tied to a hierarchical and elite based vision of leadership.<sup>12</sup> This second approach is troubling precisely because it is susceptible to the criticisms of custodial black politics waged by scholars as diverse as Adolph Reed, Wilson Moses, Kevin Gaines, Rom Coles, and Robert Gooding-Williams.<sup>13</sup> But if the practice of the appeal entails a commitment to engage the judgment of the audience, as I contend, then situating the pamphlet in this *specific* rendering of the Jeremiadic tradition and the custodial politics that it entails will be a nonstarter.

I focus on the practice of appealing that frames the pamphlet in an effort to reject these claims, but more importantly to illuminate the “principle of demotic rationality.”<sup>14</sup> On my reading of Walker’s *Appeal*, demotic rationality sits at the heart of his thinking—a principle that honors the reflective agency of his audience regardless of their station in life or racial designation. There is an important connection among the constellation of concepts thus far employed—appeal, citizen, and demotic rationality—that must be kept in view to orient the reader to Walker’s pamphlet. *The practice of “appealing to” does not merely affirm the political standing of claimant and recipient (as embodied in Walker’s use of the word “citizens”), but it presumes the equal capacity of actors to judge (the principle of demotic rationality).* The horizontal standing of persons becomes the basis for vertical relationships of authority that we hear echoed in thinkers such as John Schaar, George Shulman, and in a different philosophical register, Jason Frank.<sup>15</sup>

In arguing that Walker’s position entails the principle of demotic rationality, I mean to say two things, the second of which explicitly recasts the meaning of the prophetic stance and aligns it with the practice of the appeal. First, for him, African Americans did not need a prophet to whom they should *blindly* defer. Rather they needed a community willing to confront practices of domination, capable of responding to their grievances, and susceptible to transcending America’s narrow ethical and political horizon. In other words, the American Jeremiad appropriates the prophetic form (although not necessarily substance) of the Hebrew tradition in order to awaken Americans to its failure to live up to its commitments much akin to the way Jeremiah sought to awaken his fellows for falling away from the righteous path of God.<sup>16</sup> Second, in appealing to his readers, I join Shulman and Eddie Glaude in arguing that prophecy functions as a position or “office” to be authorized by those to whom the prophet speaks.<sup>17</sup> The prophetic intervention is one that seeks to awaken a spirit of what Walker calls “inquiry and investigation,” and it awaits a response that might unify in public life the visions of the prophet and the audience.<sup>18</sup>

To tease out the implicit political power of Walker’s pamphlet, I explain the cultural and linguistic practice associated with the term “appeal.” In doing so I explore what people typically meant in the nineteenth century and earlier when they used the word appeal. I maintain that these meanings are in the background for Walker, finding institutional support in the emerging Northern black institutions such as the first African American newspaper *Freedom’s Journal*. This will allow us to see in *Parts I-III* of the essay how the term is associated with a larger rhetorical tradition, how it is capable of calling into existence a political status otherwise denied to African Americans, and how that status affirms the equality between claimant and recipient apart from legal recognition.

With this settled, I argue in *Part IV* that the practice of the appeal clarifies the democratic character of Walker's prophetic stance. Just as "appealing to" illuminates and honors the judgment of the audience, so too does the prophetic stance depend on endorsement from those to whom the prophet speaks, disrupting any commitment to what Moses calls the "messianic leader."<sup>19</sup> This reading of prophetic speech acts as depending on and affirming demotic rationality helps us resist the subtle alignment between prophecy as hierarchical rule and custodial black politics.

One final note before I turn to the substance of the argument. For reasons of both scope and economy, I do not systematically pursue Walker's rhetorical engagement with his white audience—an audience he most certainly sought to transform—and I will only reference his engagement with his white audience to the extent that it maps onto the preceding arguments. After all, to the extent white Americans engaged the *Appeal*, they ironically reinforced Walker's thought that African Americans readily make judgments about their political world. Notwithstanding my circumscribed discussion of Walker's engagement with his white audience, this should not lead the reader to conclude that the text is written exclusively for black folks. Walker intends for his white reader, whom he also refers to as "my observer," to occupy a standpoint in which they see and feel the horror of black domination.<sup>20</sup> He aggressively engages his white readers to move them to a position of moral rectitude—a form of fiery protestation that marks a transformation in the black pamphleteering tradition.<sup>21</sup> Both his engagement with his white audience and the intensity of it emerge from a belief that democracy is fundamentally tied to offering judgments regarding the social and political world we inhabit—judgments that may very well envision American democracy in more inclusive terms.

## **To Appeal: Rhetorical Posture and Demotic Rationality**

Walker was born legally free in 1796 to an enslaved father and free mother in Wilmington, North Carolina. During his early years, Walker travelled throughout the South where he witnessed first-hand the horrors of black life. By 1825 he moved to Boston with the aim of addressing racial domination. He was a respected member of the Boston community not merely because of his business as a second-hand clothing dealer but also because of his leadership role in the Massachusetts General Colored Association (MGCA), an organization that sought to unite African Americans and combat domination, because of his membership in the African Masonic Lodge, and because of his work as an agent for the newly established black newspaper, *Freedom's*

*Journal*. His famous 1829 pamphlet published in Boston, travelled along the eastern seaboard through a loose interracial network, emboldening some and sparking the indignation of others. The pamphlet travelled well into Georgia and as far west as Louisiana. Because of the earlier foiled insurrectionist plot by Denmark Vesey in 1822 and the nature of Walker's text that called for rebellion if the nation did not reform, Georgia and North Carolina (among other states) banned incendiary documents. Violation of those laws came with harsh penalties.<sup>22</sup> Of course, Walker anticipated this response, writing in the "Preamble" of the *Appeal*: "I am fully aware, in making this appeal to my much afflicted and suffering brethren, that I shall not only be assailed by those whose greatest earthly desires are, to keep us in abject ignorance . . . and who are of the firm conviction that Heaven has designed us and our children to be slaves."<sup>23</sup>

Because of the actions and emotions it sparked on both sides the text remains a powerful work in the tradition of American pamphleteering aimed at addressing the physical and mental slavery of black Americans. Similar to the American and African American pamphleteer tradition, Walker knew the importance of the oppressed assuming a public voice. For Walker's part, this did not prohibit cooperation with whites. In his 1828 address to the MGCA, he encouraged blacks to "cooperate with them [referring to white Americans] as far as we are able by uniting and cultivating a spirit of friendship and of love among us."<sup>24</sup> Still, assuming a public voice, he argued, served as the vehicle through which blacks might perform their freedom and thereby lay claim to it more firmly. The *Appeal* is a rhetorical performance—seeking to call out and honor the demotic capacity of his black fellows.

This connection between rhetoric and demotic rationality has achieved renewed interest among philosophers of democracy.<sup>25</sup> It makes sense; the art of persuasion abounds in contemporary democratic society no less than in America's past. The battle for America's soul—whether it would extend freedom and equality and tighten the nation's grip on justice or flaunt its articulated principles—was and continues to be waged through the following question: Who among us will be more persuasive? We can understand rhetoric in simple terms. Rhetoric is a practice of speaking and writing that seeks to persuade one's audience; it relies on the audience to judge the content of what is being offered. As Ronald Beiner explains, rhetoric reveals the faculty of judging "by which we situate ourselves in the political world. . . . [It] open[s] up a space of deliberation. In respect of this faculty, the dignity of the common citizen suffers no derogation."<sup>26</sup>

Rhetoric does important work. To say that rhetoric situates us in the political world is another way of capturing the idea that authority is answerable to our judgment quite independent of and prior to legal recognition. That rhetoric foregrounds demotic rationality as central to the practice of legitimizing

authority points to a philosophical and institutional alignment at the heart of the modern notion of politics—namely, that politics should offer its members a means to direct the forces that guide their lives. When Thomas Jefferson, for example, remarked in 1824, “in a republican nation, whose citizens are to be led by persuasion and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance,” we should understand Jefferson as acknowledging this alignment rather than asserting that the practice of judging emerges because one is legally endowed with standing.<sup>27</sup> In just this way, historians and literary scholars of the antebellum period rightly highlight rhetoric’s role as a political art form through which the public voice of African Americans emerged. Through their public voice they reimagined themselves as a political community, affirmed their equal standing, and offered trenchant criticism of American society.<sup>28</sup> This begins to illuminate how Walker’s title can refer to “colored citizens.” For him, it is from the perspective of judging that our citizenly status emerges. And what invites the judgment of the reader—what elicits their citizenly status—is Walker’s appeal to them.

Rhetoric is at work in another equally important sense that reflects the complex discursive field of answerability. Appealing to someone is crucially about giving and asking for reasons for what we do or the beliefs we hold. The idea is that we are subjects of normative evaluation, not merely the one who is making the appeal but also the one to whom it is directed. It is precisely this idea that stimulates Walker’s engagement with his African American audience: “Are we Men!!—I ask, O my brethren! Are we MEN?”<sup>29</sup> Or his claim, directed to both blacks and whites, that the “miseries and wretchedness” of African Americans takes place “in this *Republican Land of Liberty!!!!*”<sup>30</sup>

These formulations, especially the use of exclamation marks and declarative sentences, stage a call and response relationship that is both deliberative and combative. “What are we really,” his African American reader and listener is forced to consider, given how we comport ourselves in the face of domination? Is this truly a “*Republican Land of Liberty*” both blacks and whites are urged to question, given the practices of domination at work? Italics, capitalizations, and exclamation marks throughout the pamphlet register the emotional gravity of the issue. They prompt the recipient to linger and probe—to probe their own actions and inactions and the surrounding social and political context. As Walker says, I offer my reflections and questions for you to “digest.”<sup>31</sup>

Readers and listeners are forced, then, to grapple with these considerations because the impassioned and accusatory tone of the text is directed to issues that matter to the recipient. The pamphlet relies on our deliberative capacities through a process of questioning that seeks to induce reflective consideration.

And the text uses compositional practices that stage argumentative exchanges in an agonistic spirit. Taken together they form one mode of rhetorical engagement. But this is part of the practice of giving and asking for reasons: provide an account, Walker is asking, of *why* one should think we “are men” or *why* one should believe we live in a “*Republican Land of Liberty*.” To say they must provide an account is to treat the recipient as one from whom reasons can issue—one capable of judging.

Precisely because citizenship and judgment are connected through the principle of demotic rationality, Walker intends his pamphlet not merely to be read *by* educated blacks but also to be read *to* uneducated and often illiterate black folks as well. He therefore discourages his audience from connecting the civic significance of the *Appeal* to a literate public, despite the importance he accords literacy in a context where African Americans’ reasoning capacities were constantly under assault.<sup>32</sup> Hence he says at the very outset of the *Appeal*: “It is expected that all colored men, women and children, of every nation, language and tongue under heaven, will try to procure a copy of this Appeal and read it, or get someone to read it to them.”<sup>33</sup> In this remark, he offers a compelling way of understanding his *Appeal*; it is a tool to vivify one’s political standing. As a journalist confirms in the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* of 1830 regarding the impact of the *Appeal* and the transformed self-conception that developed in its wake: “It is evident they have read this pamphlet, nay, we know that the larger portion of them have read it, or heard it read, and that they glory in its principles, as if it were a star in the east, *guiding them to freedom and emancipation*.”<sup>34</sup> Focusing on the linguistic and cultural norms associated with the practice of appealing will help us get clearer about the status it calls into existence and its demotic character. As we shall see, there is an alignment between the practice of appealing and Walker’s prophetic stance.

## Norms of an Appeal

The term “appeal” was commonly used in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as part of the petitionary genre and carried a distinct meaning. Some of the more famous texts of this genre, although not exhaustive, include Samuel Adams’s “An Appeal to the World or a Vindication of the Town of Boston” (1769), Isaac Backus’s “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty” (1773), Moses Mather’s “America’s Appeal to the Impartial World” (1775), James Lowell’s “An Appeal to the People on the Causes and Consequences of a War with Great Britain” (1811), Robert Purvis’s “Appeal to Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania” (1837), and Angelina Grimke’s “Appeal to Christian Women

of the South” (1838). It should not be surprising that the last two people, Robert Purvis an African American abolitionist and Angelina Grimke a woman’s rights advocate and abolitionist, are members of historically excluded groups. In citing these texts, I do not mean to take up the substance of the arguments they advance. Rather, I mean to direct attention to the shared aim of enlisting the judgment of their audience, understood in various ways as a locally defined community or larger collectivity such as “people” or “impartial world.”

Central to the petitionary genre of the day, these documents presuppose an authority whose judgment is capable of deciding the matter at issue. As Susan Zaeske explains, “At its core a petition is a request for redress of grievances sent from a subordinate (whether an individual or a group) to a superior (whether a ruler or a representative).”<sup>35</sup> This way of understanding a petition is folded into the appeal itself. In John Cowell’s 1607 legal dictionary, *The Interpreter*, for example, we find the following definition: “appeal is used in our common law . . . as it is taken in the civil law: which is a removing of a cause from an inferior judge to a superior.”<sup>36</sup> More than a century after Cowell’s description, Johnson defines appeal as “a provocation from an inferior to a superior judge, whereby the jurisdiction of the inferior judge is . . . suspended, in respect of the cause.”<sup>37</sup> I will say a word about the legalistic dimension of these definitions in a moment as well as their hierarchical character that seemingly endangers the democratic quality of Walker’s *Appeal*.

What should initially be observed is the shared sense that some issue is to be reheard or retried. When Walker says in the prefatory paragraphs added to the 1830 edition of the *Appeal*, “all I ask is for a candid and careful perusal of this third and last edition,” he too, means to have a retrying of the issue.<sup>38</sup> When he recapitulates the tragic facts of black subordination (Article I), restates what he perceives as Jefferson’s demeaning descriptions of blacks and their complicity in their subordination (Articles I and II), details the role of preachers in sustaining slavery (Article III), and levels criticism against the presumed legitimacy of various colonization plans to remove blacks from American soil (Article IV), he should be read as re-presenting facts that might be heard anew.

No place was this more clearly on display than in *Freedom’s Journal*—the first African American periodical with which Walker was closely associated and that emerged only two years before the original publication of the *Appeal*. “We wish to plead our own cause,” wrote editors Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm to their patrons in the first issue of the paper in 1827. “Too long has the publick been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us.”<sup>39</sup> Replicating Cornish’s and Russwurm’s approach, Walker prods black folks: “We, and the world wish to see the charges of Mr. Jefferson refuted by

the blacks *themselves*, according to their chance; for we must remember that what the whites have written respecting this subject, is other men's labors, and did not emanate from the blacks."<sup>40</sup> The practice of an appeal—both its implicit use by Cornish and Russwurm and explicit invocation by Walker—was a “second chance to cry injustice,” and, importantly, to have it properly redressed.<sup>41</sup> This practice served, crucially, as a method for forging a collective identity against misrepresentations in circulation.

To retry the issue brings to mind the term's jurisprudential associations. But we conclude too quickly if we confine our thinking in this way, and, in turn, obscure what Walker is doing. Both *Freedom's Journal* and the *Appeal* move within the public rather than legal sphere. As Bilder argues, the term “appeal” is inseparable from colloquial—that is, publically familiar—usage that transcends legal recognition, informs a discursive community, and frame their understanding.<sup>42</sup> This endows the conduct and experiences of individuals with significance and intelligibility not reducible to a legalistic framework. The legal definitions above rely on, but do not fully capture, this background culture.

We can see the more capacious usage of the appeal among the American revolutionary generation and the way it extends beyond the legal domain. Consider, for example, when Congregational minister Moses Mather “appeals to the impartial world” or when African American abolitionist James Forten “appeal[s] to the heart.”<sup>43</sup> Their appeals are obviously directed to perceived authorities. This is especially so in Forten's case. His *Letters from a Man of Color* of 1813 speak directly to a proposed state law in Pennsylvania that, if passed, would abridge the rights of African Americans. Forten addresses himself most immediately to the Pennsylvania General Assembly. But the reach of authority, as suggested by Mather's term “impartial world” or Forten's language of “heart,” is not properly captured through a narrow jurisprudential lens—that is, both seek to mobilize a wider public. The most famous of these appeals is obviously the Declaration of Independence: “We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in general Congress assembled, appealing to the supreme judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions.”<sup>44</sup> Similar to *Freedom's Journal* and Walker's *Appeal*, Mather, Jefferson, and Forten intend to capture the attention of a broader audience than one would find enshrined in a legal framework.

From the perspective of the American and African American pamphleteer tradition, the term “appeal” carries an expansive vision of political power. The term is also emblematic of an underlying political reorientation. Regarding the first of these, both the American colonists and the antebellum African American activists are united by the experience of having their political standing denied. But ironically, to petition involves performing a status

that is not legally recognized.<sup>45</sup> To petition is to see oneself as an agent, a person for whom something is at stake and in need of attention. The action and attitude of the addresser (i.e., appellant) does not merely function in the subjective “I-mode,” in which *mere* performance by an individual brings that role into existence; rather, the cultural and linguistic norms denote the background presence of a “we-mode” (i.e., thinking and acting in light of a shared understanding).<sup>46</sup> The reason why “*mere* performance” is inadequate to capture the meaning of petitioning is that it obscures the normative backdrop that renders the practice intelligible. It also ignores the broadly social preconditions for the assertion of agency that is at work when one petitions. To petition is always already to proceed from a social practice suffused with shared norms and expectations about what one is doing when one petitions.<sup>47</sup> In this case, the shared understanding is that to petition or appeal means seeking redress from an authority regarding one’s grievances. To petition tacitly reflects a normative attitude *about* oneself, but also *about* one’s social and political world—that is, as being capable of responding appropriately to the claims being advanced.

This carries political implications for those who found themselves alienated from power to give direction to their lives (e.g., the American colonists) and was of crucial importance for historically excluded peoples (e.g., African Americans). By virtue of appealing to “colored citizens,” Walker combined a designation that marked exclusion (colored) with one that denoted inclusion (citizens), both criticizing the American polity for its horrific treatment of blacks while endowing those same individuals with a political status otherwise denied. Whereas laws of citizenship, as embodied in the federal Naturalization Act of 1790, for example, sought to tether citizenship to “white persons,”<sup>48</sup> Walker returned his audience to the presupposition—namely, the capacity to judge—upon which American citizenly activity was based in the first instance. This emphasis on the activity of persons (rather than legal recognition) was a way to short-circuit formal denials of citizenship. The term “colored citizen” took advantage of a capacity that even Walker’s white fellows assumed in order to make sense of their own activity against the British Crown. And with that presumption came the entailments of judgment—that is, the power to assess one’s actions, the actions of others, and the rules by which one would live one’s life. Unsurprisingly, this view informed the salutation of Walker’s “Preamble”—“My dearly beloved Brethren and *Fellow Citizens*”—framing the pamphlet as a submission to the judgment of the audience.<sup>49</sup> It is no wonder that upon reading the pamphlet or hearing it read, as suggested by the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, African Americans felt liberated and empowered.

The status Walker’s text means to elicit from blacks—that they are judgment-making beings and to that extent citizens—is strikingly reinforced by

the responses the text elicited from whites. Since Walker offers the text for the “inspection” of the reader, it is no wonder that his accusations and queries generated an equally strident set of disavowals and responses. As one commentator, simply named Leo, remarks in his letter of 1831 to William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *The Liberator*: I am “opposed to [the production of the *Appeal*] not because he is a man of color, but because I do not believe that he wrote it.”<sup>50</sup> The letter intends to refute not the claims advanced, but that they could have come from an African American. Later that year, Garrison published a review of the *Appeal*. In the review by an author simply identified as V, obviously a white male given the overall substance of his reflections, we find the following remark regarding his transformed self-understanding:

I have often heard, and constantly believed, that *Walker's Appeal* was the incoherent rhapsody of a blood-thirsty, but vulgar and very ignorant fanatic, and have therefore felt no little astonishment that it should have created so much alarm in the slaveholding states. . . . It has been represented to me as being . . . worthy of contempt. I have now read the book and my opinions are changed. . . . It is vain to call him incendiary, ruffian, or exciter of sedition. Let those who hold him such, imagine the circumstances of the two classes of our people reversed, and those who now rise up and call him cursed will build him a monument, and cry hosanna to the patriot, the herald of freedom.<sup>51</sup>

Still others sought to fortify slaveholding states by passing legislation that would ban the circulation of the text.

All these responses are not without irony. As Walker says, “they [referring to whites] beat us inhumanely, sometimes almost to death, for attempting to inform ourselves . . . and at the same time tell us, that we are beings void of intellect!!!! How admirably their practices agree with their professions in this case.”<sup>52</sup> As Frederick Douglass would do only two decades later in his famous “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Walker baits his white reader. The general inconsistency that Walker identifies above is specifically emphasized throughout his pamphlet. Either African Americans are devoid of rational powers that make them judgment-making beings (in which case the pamphlet requires no response at all) or they have the very capacity that is otherwise denied (in which case their claims regarding their status must be addressed). Herein lies the rub: taking the pamphlet to be a site of evaluation regarding the reasons and arguments offered (as white Americans did), holding, in other words, the text responsible for the claims advanced, is to treat the author as not merely *something* (*à la* property, for example). Rather, it is to treat the author as a judgment-making being, and, to that extent, one who enjoys equal standing—who is like *us*.<sup>53</sup>

## An Appeal as a Horizontal Relationship

Yet describing his pamphlet as an appeal seems a strange thing to do, especially given that he means to challenge the domination of African Americans. Why, for example, use a term that is historically located in a tradition of hierarchy as suggested by the legal definitions? Why work out of a genre that, as historian Edmund Morgan explains, involves “supplication” and reinforces “subjection”? Morgan’s analysis sees the petitionary genre as emerging most clearly “from the days when authority rested in the hands of God’s lieutenants” such as popes and kings.<sup>54</sup> Correspondingly, the legal definitions associated with the “appeal” carry this hierarchical imprint.

Yet we move too quickly if we conclude in this way and miss the underlying political reorientation to which the larger petitionary genre as well as the practice of the appeal belongs. The logic of the hierarchical imprint functions in a very different way than suggested by Morgan. By the eighteenth century, the petitionary genre emerges out of a political culture that views the source of political power as no longer emanating from the figure of the king, but as emerging from those over whom power will be exercised. Authorizing power, at least theoretically, is no longer secured from outside.<sup>55</sup> The king, as it were, can no longer command blind deference. Rather, authorization is tied to reflective assent.

Of course, this logic fuels the American Revolution (that is, legitimate power must be underwritten by reflective assent), as well as the petitionary genre to which Walker’s pamphlet belongs. To appeal does not refer to a social practice of supplication—a subordinate position of being *merely* ruled. Instead, the practice of an appeal presupposes a relationship among equals—Aristotle’s ruling and being ruled in turn. To appeal denotes not only the rhetorical posture of speaking to, but it is that posture that authorizes another, seeking a judgment regarding the issue at hand.

The hierarchical imprint remains, but its logic is transformed in light of this other, more democratic orientation. The horizontal standing among persons (i.e., addresser and addressee) frames how vertical relations of authority emerge. Walker’s salutation is appropriately directed to “fellow citizens” because he means to signal that individuals enjoy equal status and he must therefore, as Schaar and Shulman note, “elicit [their] assent.”<sup>56</sup> This is the hallmark of demotic rationality—that each of us can reflectively engage the important decisions of our political world. We can state this in a more formulaic manner:

- A. The appeal affirms the political standing of claimant and recipient.
- B. Citizenship is a designation of that political standing.

- C. The principle of demotic rationality equalizes the standing between claimant and recipient.
- D. This equal standing becomes the basis for vertical relations of authority.

Walker authorizes his audience, and he, in turn, must await their judgment regarding the claims advanced. The reason, to cite Shulman, is that “the capacity of persons, ideas, or institutions to elicit assent is always at risk, always in need of recommitment.”<sup>57</sup> The logic of “being ruled” most certainly reflects a posture of submitting oneself to a higher authority, but it is a higher authority that alternates between the collective judgment of black folks and the wisdom of those who claim to lead. This point is evident in the “Preamble” when Walker describes his role vis-à-vis his fellow citizens as one who seeks to “awaken a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness . . . !”<sup>58</sup> In this, he takes it upon himself to assume a position of authority, but one always in need of recommitment. The ability and authority to arouse his audience point to the significance of their role in bringing about long-lasting social and political transformation.

Walker does not intend his audience to alienate their judgment to him. Nor does he intend to alienate his judgment to them. Instead, he asks readers to put the capacity for judgment to work. Recalling the passage from the third edition where he requests a “candid and careful perusal” of the text, importantly Walker adds, that in closely considering his pamphlet the “world may see” the harms done to “Colored People.”<sup>59</sup> That they “may see” denotes his quest to persuade as much as it reflects the possibility of refusal by his audience. As I argued elsewhere, this is a rhetorical move that W. E. B. Du Bois invokes decades later in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 in order to indicate his lack of authorial control. “Herein lie buried,” he explains, “many things which if read with patience *may* show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century.”<sup>60</sup> What Beiner rightly said of the rhetorician’s audience might well be said of Walker’s: “the dignity of the common citizen suffers no derogation.”

## Aligning Prophecy and the Practice of Appealing

Thus far I have explained the cultural and linguistic norms associated with the term “appeal” and the way Walker relies on them to call into existence the political status of African Americans. That political status is tied to the practice of judging. Citizenship turns out to be a designation of that status—a status that is intelligible even when shorn of legal recognition. I have further maintained that appealing to the judgment of the audience reflects a

horizontal relationship of equality—demotic rationality—that legitimizes vertical relationships of authority.

The account thus far troubles those arguments regarding the hierarchical quality of the African American prophetic tradition that seemingly runs roughshod over democratic commitments. As Wilson Moses writes in his reflections on this tradition:

An authoritarian collectivist ideal was evolved, a belief that all black people could and should act unanimously under the leadership of one powerful man or group of men, who would guide the race by virtue of superior knowledge or divine authority towards the goal of civilization. . . . *Racial obligation was an important theme in the writing of black nationalist pamphleteers, Robert Young and David Walker, who urged subordination to the worthy messianic leader who they assumed was to come.*<sup>61</sup>

Although Walker is not the primary target of this description (after all, Moses is defining an entire tradition), he is nonetheless considered to be part of it. For Moses, the meaning of black nationalism is consolidated through the political vision of a leader that occupies a position of authority either because of intellectual expertise or divine endorsement.

As I read Moses, the religious inflection of the *Appeal*, for example, assumes the force that it does for Walker precisely because it has been anointed by God. I say religious inflection because throughout the *Appeal*, Walker often describes himself as speaking the word of God. The prophetic stance, on Moses's view, is largely defined by what the prophet does to his followers, rather than what the prophet does in concert with those he seeks to guide. The logic of authorization seemingly shifts from the people to something that stands outside of them, ultimately making the relationship between the prophet and black folks, in Adolph Reed's felicitous phrase, "custodial."<sup>62</sup>

My reference to Reed captures a trend in scholarship on African American political thought and already at work in Moses's reading of Walker. Reed views this custodial vision of politics as consolidating in the wake of the Civil War, and Robert Gooding-Williams, for example, sees in Du Bois its greatest spokesperson.<sup>63</sup> The logic of custodial politics is that blacks are in the care of a leader largely because they are unable to give direction to their political lives. We hear a similar concern as it bears on the prophetic tradition in Rom Coles's criticism of Martin Luther King Jr. who, he remarks, "barely grasped" the "receptive relational practices" of democratic politics. By "receptive relational practices," Coles means attunement to and reception of those ordinary everyday black folks who will be the subject of political decisions when made.<sup>64</sup> Such figures swing free of accountability, establishing vertical relations that do not proceed from the horizontal standing among equals. It is

precisely this logic at work in Moses when he latches on to the following passage from the *Appeal* to secure the truth of his reading of the messianic and elitist tendencies in Walker: “The Lord our God . . . will give you a Hannibal, and when the Lord shall have raised him up, and given him to you for your possession, O my suffering brethren! Remember the divisions and consequent sufferings of Carthage and of Hayti [*sic*].”<sup>65</sup> If correctly attributed to Walker, it undermines the practice of the appeal thus far laid out. We need to attend to the prophetic in the American tradition and how it is exemplified in Walker’s text before returning to Moses’s worry. But attentiveness to these matters, although framed through an engagement with Moses on Walker, may yet serve to generate suspicion of (not yet displacement of) this more popular trend in thinking about African American political thought.

The American jeremiad embodies the prophetic tradition. As David Howard Pitney explains, it is “rhetoric of indignation, expressing deep dissatisfaction and urgently challenging the nation to reform.”<sup>66</sup> There are three elements at work. First, the jeremiad presupposes a promise, as for example that all men shall be respected as equals, that the nation has failed to keep. This is the source of indignation. Second, failure to keep the promise results in warnings of moral deterioration and divine retribution. Third, and importantly, warnings denote possibilities yet to be realized, rather than the foreclosure of transformation altogether. At the very moment criticism seems to register a point of no return, awareness of deterioration opens up the possibility that the community may yet pull itself back from the precipice. The prophetic intervention occupies the imagination of the audience, projecting from a world now in ruins a future yet to be realized. Prophecy always functions, then, in the aspirational mode. This *form* is most clearly at work in the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah. To be sure Jeremiah laments the Israelites’ rejection of the Covenant God made with Abraham. But God encourages him to hope for the emergence of a new land: “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.”<sup>67</sup> This form—promise, failure to keep the promise, and redemption—suffuses American moral and political discourse.

When we overlay this form on Walker’s pamphlet, we see the following. First, the background promise for Walker is the Declaration of Independence, allowing him to say to his white counterparts in a confrontational mode: “Compare your own language above, extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and yourselves on our fathers and on us—men who have never given your fathers or you the least provocation!!!!!!”<sup>68</sup> Secondly, Walker criticizes the nation for inviting God’s vengeance, but more significantly a vengeance that bespeaks the moral decay of the nation as

exemplified in slavery. Although the American jeremiad highlights a divine offense, it does so by directing us inward to reflect on our relationship to ourselves that either exemplifies our adherence to or rejection of God's law. Walker not only says to his white counterparts, "do you understand your own language" as found in the Declaration, but he strongly counsels black folks to "look into our freedom and happiness, and see of what kind they are composed."<sup>69</sup> In both instances, he means for whites and blacks to consider their relation to themselves in the light of their failure to honor the logic of the Declaration or respond effectively to the fragility of their presumed freedom. This internal failure—a failure of character—marks a tragic departure from God's law. For Walker, only in properly honoring who we are in our treatment of others and ourselves do we fulfill God's expectation of human existence.<sup>70</sup> Third, and relatedly, criticism opens up an interpretative space regarding what may heal the wounds of the nation. If white Americans, for instance, properly understand the Declaration they will find resources therein for addressing the suffering of blacks. If black Americans, specifically those in the north, carefully examine their freedom, they may see how uncertain their grasp on it is.

I hasten to qualify this point. Because Walker's criticism is directed to the inner domain of the self, the call is not merely about honoring the Declaration in an anachronistic sense.<sup>71</sup> As Bryan Garsten writes of persuasion: "When we try to persuade, we use the arguments, images, and emotions most likely to appeal to the particular audience in front of us."<sup>72</sup> Walker's *Appeal* is about being open to becoming a new self and nation for which there is no historical precedent. It seeks, as Jeremiah did, to build and to plant. To appropriate the Declaration is to work with a symbol that the audience would have been readily familiar, but with the explicit aim to expand what that symbol could mean.

Using the Declaration sets the stage for a reinterpretation of its ethical and political reach, what Shulman refers to as a reconstitution of the document white Americans "seem to invoke."<sup>73</sup> This is a standard American motif. "Do you understand your own language" is a question of interpretative investigation, opening up the possibility that the language might mean something other than what one has thought. No one better than Abraham Lincoln exploited the reinterpretative possibilities surrounding the Declaration, remarking in his 1857 speech, that the question at the heart of the notorious Dred Scott decision was not yet "a settled doctrine for the country." For the matter turned on retrying what the Declaration might mean. Lincoln appeals, as does Walker, to the public—that wider source of authority beyond the law: "And now I appeal to all," says Lincoln, ". . . are you really willing that the Declaration shall be thus frittered away?—thus left no more at most, than an interesting memorial of the dead past? Thus shorn of its vitality . . . and left

without the *germ* or even the *suggestion* of the individual rights of man in it?"<sup>74</sup> Invoking the Declaration, as Walker does, is not to channel it as it was—a memorial of the dead past, as Lincoln says—but as it may yet be understood, thus laying claim to its vitality.

Let us now return to the Preamble of the *Appeal* and Moses's reading of the prophetic tradition. Of course it makes sense that Moses would read the prophetic as containing a hierarchical imprint. After all the Hebrew prophets are chosen or called not by the people, but by God. They stand above the people, demanding only that they submit to the vision offered; for when one submits, one is submitting not to the prophet, but to the word of God. Obviously this way of understanding the prophet is not conducive to democratic conversation or honoring the judgment of the audience.

But by working in the genre of the appeal, Walker locates himself among equals, making his status as well as the full meaning of his vision dependent on those to whom he speaks. He speaks in the prophetic voice, but it is framed by the principle of demotic rationality. The meaning of the appeal and the prophetic achieve alignment, grafting the horizontal relationship of the former onto the latter. Emphasizing the agency of his audience, even amid his claims of God's assistance, he writes: "It is not to be understood here, that I mean for us to wait until God shall take us by the hair of our heads and drag us out of abject wretchedness and slavery."<sup>75</sup> For him, African Americans must decide their own fate, just as white Americans must decide if they will transform.

At issue here is an important truth about the African American condition in the 1820s and the logic of leadership that condition gave life to that troubles imputed connections between the prophetic tradition and custodial black politics. African Americans were struggling for freedom. It would be an odd occurrence if, given this background, African American leaders made their case for freedom by counseling blind subordination, even if to one's darker counterparts. It is true that Walker envisions an important role for the black educated elite. He says explicitly in Article II of the *Appeal*, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of Ignorance": "Men of color, who are also of sense, for you particularly is my APPEAL designed. Our more ignorant brethren are not able to penetrate its value."<sup>76</sup> He literally means they are unable to penetrate its value because they are unable to read its words. Walker did not make the mistake, however, of believing that those who were illiterate lacked the ability to judge; remember his insistence that the pamphlet be read by and to black folks. The pamphlet is particularly for the educated, but not exclusively so. Hence he says: "I call upon you therefore to cast your eyes upon the wretchedness of your brethren, and to do your utmost to enlighten them."<sup>77</sup>

Walker's text uses the prophetic form to enlighten his audience, but it is tilted in a democratic direction. His orientation toward his audience rejects custodial black politics, and does so as a precondition for the expression of agency by black folks in the first instance. Walker's prophetic stance means to educate black individuals, so that they may act and judge appropriately. The prophet, like the rhetorician, sets the "audience, to whom the words are addressed, before the choice and decision. The future is not something already fixed in this present hour, it is dependent upon the real decision, that is to say the decision in which *man takes part in this hour*."<sup>78</sup> The full meaning of the future depends on the choices the people make for themselves, even if the prophet is a co-participant in helping them see those choices. If the prophet occupies the imagination of the audience, what, if not the actions of the audience (the full audience), can bring that vision to fruition? The prophet's role, no less than the educated elite's, is to enable them to see and hear the vision more clearly.

This is precisely the logic at work in Walker's invocation of the Carthaginian commander and statesman Hannibal. When he speaks of God sending a leader, it is in the context of imploring his fellows to lay claim to the figure. Presumably, this extends to the prophetic intervention Walker himself represents—an intervention that intends to redound to the benefit of the community. He aims to provide reasons, then, for why one would submit to a leader. After all, Hannibal is described in Article II as engaging a "cruel and barbarous" Rome. Similarly, any leader sent to black folks must be assessed based on the goal of engaging what Walker refers to as the "barbarous cruelties" of the nation.<sup>79</sup> Importantly, Article I lays out the depth of the cruelty of American slavery in comparison to the historical domination of other peoples. His aim, as he says, is to

demonstrate to the satisfaction of the most incredulous, that we, (colored people of these United States of America) are the *most wretched, degraded* and abject set of beings that *ever lived* since the world began, and that the white Americans having reduced us to the wretched state of *slavery*, treat us in that condition *more cruel* (they being an enlightened and Christian people,) than any heathen nation did any people whom it had reduced to our condition.<sup>80</sup>

When Article I and II are taken together, Walker recounts the intensity of black domination and the story of Hannibal in order to enlighten his audience regarding what is in their best interest. Given his use of "incredulous," he thinks the facts will be so forceful that they will penetrate a mind that was otherwise unwilling to believe. The meaning of submission looks radically different on this view. If the people are to submit, it must be a free submission

consistent with the spirit of inquiry and investigation that Walker seeks to stimulate in the first instance.

## Conclusion

David Walker's *Appeal* should be located within a larger rhetorical framework that does important political work. The pamphlet relies on the cultural and linguistic norms associated with the term "appeal" in order to call out the political standing of black folks. Walker need not rely on a recognitive legal relationship to do this simply because it is the practice of judging that illuminates one's political, indeed, citizenly standing. I have suggested that when we attend to the *Appeal* in this way we are able to see that it aspires to transform blacks and whites, and that when it aligns itself with the prophetic tradition, it tilts the entire pamphlet in a democratic direction. That is, appealing to the audience, in the way the prophet speaks to the audience, honors the judgment of the recipients. This is the political power of this pamphlet—it exemplifies the logic of self-governance. For when we try to persuade our fellows, we are ultimately dependent on them finally saying that they are persuaded. And when they say they are persuaded, they are not telling us something that the rhetorician or prophet has done to them, but rather what they have done for themselves. They will have used their judgment. For Walker, it is in the deployment of their judgment where their political standing finds expression. Perhaps the logic tells us a great deal about the democratic norms informing not only Walker's text, but the larger tradition of African American political thought to which he belongs.

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## Notes

1. David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter Hinks (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1829/2000). Two things to note. First, I have Americanized the term “coloured” to “colored” in the body of the paper. Second, this edition of the *Appeal* incorporates the changes Walker made between 1829 and 1830 when he issued three different editions.
2. See Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Blacks in the Urban America, 1800-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), ch. 1; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 320; Stephen Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).
3. Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary: Selections from the 1755 Work that Defined the English Language*, ed. Jack Lynch (New York: Leventer Press, 1755/2003), 109; Peter Risenberg, *Citizenship in the Western Tradition: Plato to Rousseau* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
4. Aristotle provides the classic approach to thinking about citizenship in light of constitutional norms (see Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. Carnes Lord [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], Book 3, ch. 1, ch. 3; Book IV, ch. 1).
5. I share Stephan Marshall’s puzzlement by Walker’s use of the word “citizen,” but I part ways in rejecting the claim that this is merely a utopian assertion (see Marshall, *The City on the Hill from Below: The Crisis of Prophetic Black Politics* [Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011], 28).
6. There is a strong affinity between the political power I associate with the practice of appealing in the nineteenth century and Elizabeth Wingrove’s reflection on letter writing in eighteenth-century France. See Wingrove, “Sovereign Address,” *Political Theory* 40, no. 2 (2012): 138.
7. Mary Sarah Bilder, “The Origins of the Appeal in America,” *Hastings Law Journal* 48 (1997): 922.
8. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory,” *Ethics* 104, no. 2 (1994): 352–81, at 353. For this emphasis on citizenship as legal status in the American case, see Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U. S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).
9. Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 1.
10. T. H. Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class,” in *Citizenship and Social Class*, ed. Tom Bottomore (London: Pluto Press, 1949/1992), 3–51.
11. Sterling Stuckey, ed., “Introduction,” in *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 1–25; cf. *Slave Culture: Nationalist*

- Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 120. Others do not advance this view precisely because they share, as do I, a sense that Walker envisioned interracial cooperation (see Herbert Aptheker, "Its Setting and Its Meaning," in *One Continual Cry: David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* [New York: Humanities Press, 1965], 1–61; Peter Hinks, *To Awake My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* [University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997], 250).
12. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*, rev. ed. (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1993), 1, 38–46. The exception here is Eddie Glaude, *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 34–43.
  13. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996); Adolph Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Romand Coles, "'To Make This Tradition Articulate': Practiced Receptivity Matters, Or Heading West of West with Cornel West and Ella Baker," in Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between A Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 45–86; Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
  14. Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 63.
  15. John H. Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1981), ch. 1; George Shulman, "Thinking Authority Democratically: Prophetic Practices, White Supremacy, and Democratic Politics," *Political Theory* 36, no. 5 (2008): 708–34; cf. Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), ch. 1.
  16. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); cf. David Howard-Pitney, *The Afro-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990); Shulman, *American Prophecy*; Andrew Murphy, *Prodigal National: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New Englanders to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
  17. This democratic reading of the prophet is echoed in different ways in Shulman, *American Prophecy*; Glaude, "On Prophecy and Critical Intelligence," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (2011): 105–21.
  18. Walker, *Appeal*, 5.

19. Moses, *Black Nationalism*, 22.
20. Walker, *Appeal*, 24. Walker's use of the term "my observer" or "observer" at the outset of Article II captures the double-voice of the text—that is, the observer to which he refers and is speaking is not internally coherent, but refers to both blacks and whites. What he means for his "observer" to see and feel depends on the position those two audiences occupy. Once again, I shall not take these issues up, though I am sensitive to them.
21. Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, Phillip Lapsansky, eds., "Introduction," in *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1–32.
22. For the full intellectual biography of the *Appeal* see Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*. For the legal implications of the *Appeal* on free speech see Amy Reynolds, "The Impact of Walker's *Appeal* on Northern and Southern Conceptions of Free Speech in the Nineteenth Century," *Communication Law and Policy* 9, no. 1 (2004): 73–100.
23. Walker, *Appeal*, 4.
24. Walker, Document II, Appendix, in *Appeal*, 88.
25. On the revival of rhetoric in democratic theory see Garsten, "The Rhetoric Revival in Political Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 14 (2011): 159–80; cf. Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
26. Ronald Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3.
27. Thomas Jefferson to David Harding, April 20, 1824, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 651.
28. See Thomas J. Davis, "Emancipation Rhetoric, Natural Rights, and Revolutionary New England: A Note on Four Black Petitions in Massachusetts, 1773-1777," *The New England Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1989): 248–63; Newman et al., "Introduction," in *Pamphlets of Protest*, 1–32; Glen McClish, "William G. Allen's 'Orators and Oratory': Inventional Amalgamation, Pathos, and the Characterization of Violence in African-American Abolitionist Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2005): 47–72.
29. Walker, *Appeal*, 18. The reader may be concerned about the gendered language at work in Walker's text. Although I am unable to pursue the matter here, I would maintain that the use of "men" here is deceptive. Walker clearly means for the text to be read by women and appropriated by them. He also provides two central examples in Article II of his text—examples that revolve around the ways in which women and men are complicit in their own domination. Avoiding this complicity requires a changed comportment by both.
30. Walker, *Appeal*, 5.
31. Walker, *Appeal*, 13.

32. See Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), ch. 1.
33. Walker, *Appeal*, 2.
34. *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, September 28, 1830 (emphasis added).
35. Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 3; cf. Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988), 223.
36. John Cowell, *Interpreter: Or Booke, Containing the Signification of Words* (London: 1637).
37. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1 (London: 1755).
38. Walker, *Appeal*, 2.
39. Samuel Cornish and John Brown Russwurm, "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal*, March 16, 1827, 1.
40. Walker, *Appeal*, 17 (original emphasis); cf. 30.
41. Bilder, "The Origins of the Appeal in America," 942.
42. Bilder, "The Origins of the Appeal in America," 920–21; cf. Bilder, *The Transatlantic Constitution: Colonial Legal Culture and the Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), chs. 2–4.
43. Moses Mather, "America's Appeal to the Impartial World" (1775), in *Political Sermons of the American Founding*, vol. 1, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998), 441–92; James Forten, "Series of Letters by a Man of Color" (1813), in *Pamphlets of Protest*, 66–74.
44. Jefferson, Declaration, 23.
45. Cf. Elizabeth R. Foster, "Petitions and the Petition of Right," *Journal of British Studies* 14 (1974), 21–45; Morgan, *Inventing the People*, 223–30; Zaeske, *Signatures*, ch. 1.
46. For an extended reflection on the "I-mode" and "we-mode" that underwrites social practices, see Raimo Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Social Practices: A Collective Acceptance View* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
47. Even in cases when we defy those expectations, we do so in light of norms that are largely shared. The notion of norms being shared is what makes expectations possible.
48. On this point see Smith, *Civic Ideals*, ch. 1 and 7; Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 36.
49. Walker, *Appeal*, 3 (emphasis added).
50. Letter to Editor, *The Liberator*, January 29, 1831
51. V, "Walker's Appeal. No. 1," *The Liberator*, April 30, 1831, Column A.
52. Walker, *Appeal*, 64.
53. Although the point is clearly at work in Walker and Douglass, I am recasting Robert Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.
54. Morgan, *Inventing the People*, 223.

55. I should not be read as suggesting that this way of legitimizing power was materially realized. It was not. Rather I am noting a changed self-understanding internal to modernity that makes talk of popular assent and individual consent intelligible.
56. Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State*, 25; Shulman, "Thinking Authority Democratically," 710.
57. Shulman, "Thinking Authority Democratically," 710.
58. Walker, *Appeal*, 5 (original emphasis).
59. Walker, *Appeal*, 2.
60. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1903/1986), 359 (emphasis added). For an extended treatment of Du Bois and rhetoric, see Melvin L. Rogers, "The People, Rhetoric, and Affect: On the Political Force of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 1 (2012): 188–203.
61. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 22 (emphasis added); cf. Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Tom*, 41.
62. Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug*, 17–20. Obviously, it should be understood that Reed is not making a claim about black politics in the 1830s.
63. Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug*, 18–20; Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, ch. 4 and 6.
64. Coles, "To Make This Tradition Articulate," 51.
65. Walker, *Appeal*, 22.
66. Howard-Pitney, *Afro-American Jeremiad*, 3.
67. Jeremiah, 1:10.
68. Walker, *Appeal*, 78.
69. Walker, *Appeal*, 78, 30–31.
70. Cf. Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Responsibility: David Walker and Ethical Prophecy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 46–48.
71. For this view of the Jeremiad, see Bercovitch, "The Rites of Assent," *The American Self: Myth, Ideology, and Popular Culture*, ed. Sam B. Girgus (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 5–45; cf. *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).
72. Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, 5.
73. Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 6.
74. Abraham Lincoln, "The Dred Scott Decision: Speech at Springfield, Illinois," in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New York: World Publishing Company, 1857/1946), 355 and 362–63 (original emphasis).
75. Walker, *Appeal*, 13n.
76. Walker, *Appeal*, 30.
77. Walker, *Appeal*, 31.
78. Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), 2–3 (emphasis added); cf. Glaude, "On Prophecy and Critical Intelligence," 107.
79. Walker, *Appeal*, 15.
80. Walker, *Appeal*, 9 (original emphasis).

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