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Literary prose and poetry in San Francisco's black newspapers, 1862–1885.

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LITERARY PROSE AND POETRY IN SAN FRANCISCO'S BLACK NEWSPAPERS,
1862-1885

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English and Comparative Literature

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

By

Jan Batiste Adkins

December 2009

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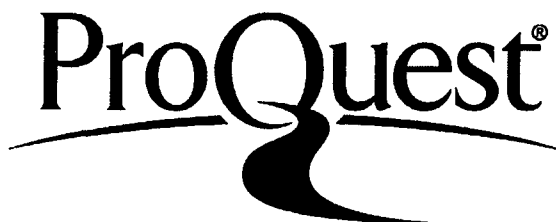
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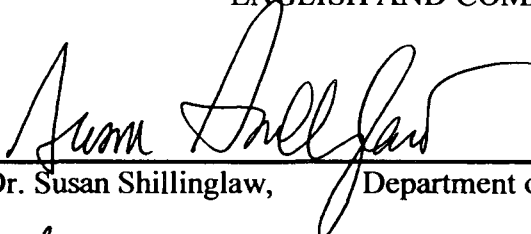

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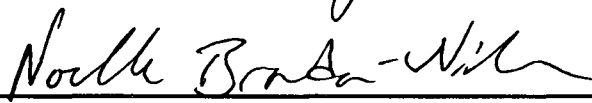
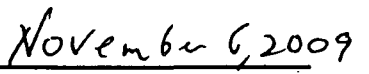
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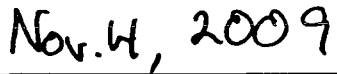
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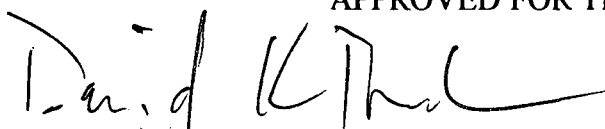

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ABSTRACT

LITERARY PROSE AND POETRY IN SAN FRANCISCO'S BLACK NEWSPAPERS, 1862-1885

by Jan Batiste Adkins

This thesis addresses the topic of literature of poetry, short stories, travel narratives, and didactic narratives published in the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* newspapers of San Francisco during 1862-1885. Many of the literary writings published in these newspapers were written by residents of San Francisco's African American communities and also residents of other communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. This research not only documents the imaginative writings by African American writers and others interested in the issues facing African American citizens, but it analyzes the trends, structure, tone, themes, imagery, language, and issues during the initial year of each newspaper's operation, 1862 and 1865, and then examines the trends in the years 1875 and 1885.

Research on this subject documents at least fifty poems, short stories, and narratives from early black newspapers to add to the collection of California literature. Many of the poems address the personal, emotional, and cultural issues facing African Americans living in the Bay Area, which can apply to life in any Western American community during this time. This study also provides information about African American writers whose works are published in San Francisco's black newspapers as well as information about the *Pacific Appeal* and *Elevator* newspapers. The examination and analysis of the literary writings published in the early black newspapers reveal the expressed heartfelt issues and voices of San Francisco's black writers and communities.

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My master's thesis is the result of many individuals who encouraged me to research the existence of literary writings by San Francisco's early African American writers who published in San Francisco's black newspapers of 1862-1885. First, I must thank Dr. Susan Shillinglaw, my thesis director, mentor, and friend, for the many hours she has spent discussing the issues with me, and time spent reviewing and editing my work. Without her continued support and guidance, this thesis would not have been possible. Second, I also thank the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Noelle Brada-Williams for her many hours spent analyzing this work, and Dr. Paul Douglass for his timely remarks on the final version. Third, but most important, I must thank my husband, Walt Adkins, for his continued encouragement during those moments when I became discouraged, as well as my immediate family members: Jittaun, Chris, Christina, Farid, and Karis for their continued encouragement, support, and technical help.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Alvin and Rosalie Batiste, who have passed on before the completion of my work and had during the first year of research encouraged me to pursue my dream of examining the voices of the many writers whose works lie within the pages of San Francisco's two early black newspapers. I must also thank God for faith to continue writing during those moments of discouragement.

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Introduction

Very little is known about the lives of African Americans living in San Francisco during the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, based on anthologies of California literature, one might think that African American literary writings of the mid-nineteenth century simply do not exist. There is, however, a rich source of African American writings rarely explored: San Francisco's black newspapers. This study documents a variety of literary writings in black newspapers published in California's most prosperous city, San Francisco, during the years after the gold rush, specifically 1862-1885. My research is based upon the only two extant black newspapers, the *Pacific Appeal* and *Elevator*, published in San Francisco during this period. Other successful African American newspapers were established later, including the *Vindicator* of 1887, the San Francisco *Sentinel* of 1890, the *Western Outlook* of 1900, and at least two others published earlier, both short lived: the *Mirror of the Times* in 1855 and the *Lunar Visitor*, first published in 1862, although few copies exist today. For this study, the most successful newspapers published at the beginning of the Civil War through the years of Reconstruction to 1885 were selected. Black residents living in other cities surrounding San Francisco did not establish black newspapers and used the *Elevator* and *Pacific Appeal* for reporting news about their communities in the San Francisco black press.

While these newspapers tell the story of African Americans through a variety of literary genres, I will focus primarily on poetry, short stories, didactic essays, as well as travel and biographical narratives. This study analyzes how these literary writings depict

key cultural issues of African Americans living in the San Francisco Bay area. Henry L. Gates Jr. observes in “The Trope of the Talking Book,” a chapter of his groundbreaking study, *The Signifying Monkey*, that “In the black tradition, writing became the visible sign, the commodity of exchange, the text and technology of reason,” which explains the importance of the black press to African Americans living in San Francisco and throughout America during this time (Kaplan 702). Within the free state of California during the mid-nineteenth century, African American communities had a rich history, characterized by a struggle for identity and for their very existence. The *Pacific Appeal* and *Elevator* document this cultural moment. Despite the fact that California was a free state, a climate of racism and discrimination existed, and literary writers expressed the heartfelt issues of survival facing African Americans. Certainly many African American newspapers throughout the country illuminated mid-century social issues through a variety of literary genres. These diverse newspapers were both an inspiration to western journalists as well as a rich resource for California’s writers and editors who wished to illustrate the conditions and issues facing black Californians. Black newspapers and publications were the only source for publishing the rich history and voice of the early African American pioneers. According to Henry Louis Gates, black writers “were frequently denied a forum in white-owned magazines, newspapers and publishing houses,” and “African-American writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found a market for their work in their neighborhood black periodicals, which printed an overwhelming majority of those stories, short novels, and poems written by blacks...”(qtd in Dankey x). This certainly applies to African American writers in

California during the 1860s-1880s. The black news publications of San Francisco became the publishing house for the African American community.

After 1849, blacks and whites alike considered San Francisco a desirable city, given its proximity to the gold mines 110 miles to the east in the Sierra foothills. Hundreds of African Americans traveled to California and San Francisco, either alone, with families, or with slaveholders. As early as 1855, a black newspaper, *Mirror of the Times*, documented the community of these early San Francisco pioneers. It lasted only three years, however, and is not included in this study because few editions are available for review, and those are of poor reading quality. The *Pacific Appeal*, which began in 1862 and ran until 1879, evolved out of the expressed need for a black news publication for San Francisco's black communities. This study examines this early, long running publication, as well as another successful paper, the *Elevator*, which was first published in 1865 and ran until approximately 1890. I discuss literary prose published during the first year of publication for each newspaper, 1862 and 1865, and then analyze literary writings in these publications at two ten-year intervals, 1875 and 1885. My purpose is to identify salient characteristics of literary writings in these newspapers and show how the imaginative literature reflects shifting cultural concerns in San Francisco's black community over three decades, 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s.

Background

The population in California grew steadily after the gold rush years, as whites, blacks, and other groups sought wealth and a new beginning in California. According to Douglas Henry Daniels, author of *Pioneer Urbanite: A Social and Cultural History of*

Black San Francisco, the total population of San Francisco in 1852 reached 34,776, of which 464 were African American citizens. By 1860, San Francisco's black population grew to 1,176 (Degraff, Mulroy and Taylor 13) out of a total population of 56,776 and by 1870 had grown to 1,330 (Montesano 12). The total population of blacks in California grew steadily as well, equaling 4,086 by 1860, although still representing less than one percent of the state's total population (Degraff, Mulroy and Taylor 106). The population of African Americans living in San Francisco continued to grow after the gold rush years.

African Americans in San Francisco lived in six communities or wards in mostly integrated communities. According to Francis Lortie's *San Francisco's Black Community 1870-90: Dilemmas in the Struggle for Equality*, many African Americans lived in a fourteen block area bounded by Broadway on the north, Pine on the south, Powell on the west, and Dupont on the east. Others lived in Wards 4 and 6 between Bush and Vallejo, others lived in neighborhoods adjacent to Embarcadero African American churches, newspaper offices, the "Colored" school, and social organizations were scattered throughout the six wards.

As evidenced by the census data and research by Penelope Bullock, author of *The Afro-American Periodical Press 1838-1909*, San Francisco had the largest black population in California during that time. Even though California was a free state before the Civil War, many white slave owners brought black men, women, and children to California to work on farms and in factories; however, most African Americans who resettled in California were not slaves. Given the climate of racial injustice before the Civil War, many blacks continued migrating to the state throughout the 1860s. Growth

was not steady, however: “Discouraged by discrimination, hundreds of Negroes in the state migrated during the late 1850’s and early 1860’s to British Columbia and the Victoria Colony in Canada when gold was discovered in those regions” (Bullock 22). After the Civil War, westward movement to California continued for African Americans: “During the post-Reconstruction era, political and economic reverses prompted some Negroes to join the westward migration of Americans seeking better fortunes in the frontier lands” (Bullock 10).

As the population grew in San Francisco, many African Americans found life difficult, yet many stayed to build communities and achieve the American dream. “Even though free Negroes formed their own communities within the larger society,” notes Penelope Bullock in her study of nineteenth century black periodicals, “their ultimate objective was full participation in American life” (6). They came to San Francisco for a variety of reasons: Some came because it was the most populated city in northern California during the gold rush; some were in search of gold in the gold mines of northern California; others came as sailors and maritime workers from the West Indies (Daniels 14). In addition to a few slaves and gold seekers, many expected a range of opportunities for jobs and businesses; others came in the early 1860s as entertainers and showmen in horse shows.

After the Civil War, blacks moved to San Francisco as service workers and labored in households, hotels, and restaurants. Later in the century, many moved west to establish musical establishments, as Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton did in the 1890’s. Black professionals also found San Francisco attractive. Throughout this period, black

newspapers printed letters to the editor from African Americans in eastern and southern cities seeking to relocate in San Francisco. A typical letter from black attorney Louis Reynolds of Holly Springs Mississippi appears in an 1875 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*: “I am thinking strongly of coming to your state for the purpose of engaging in the practice of my profession, though I don’t know how they would look upon a man of color in that particular” (*Pacific Appeal* May 1, 1875). The editor responds, “Don’t think about your color but be prepared to compete with legal talent. It is talent, gentility, and an honesty of purpose which passes current here—at least more so than a man’s color, whether it be white or black” (*Pacific Appeal* May 1, 1875).

Like Mr. Reynolds, many of San Francisco’s black immigrants could read, and many of those who came west created wealth for themselves in San Francisco. According to Douglas Henry Daniels, author of *Pioneer Urbanites*, blacks were “frequently literate, although this is difficult to gauge precisely. The ability to start three newspapers and maintain two in the first fifteen years suggests an unusual degree of literacy” (19). He notes that “west coast Negroes had lower illiteracy rates than Afro-Americans in other parts of the nation” (19) and economically “San Francisco’s blacks were in the vanguard” (23). In fact, based on an article in the *Pacific Appeal* June 21, 1862, “ Afro-San Franciscans owned a significant amount of real estate and personal property, and listed their total assets at \$300,000, most of it in real estate” (25). With the continuing growth of literate black communities in America throughout the nineteenth century, black newspapers became increasingly important, both in the east and in the west. San Francisco’s black newspapers published literary works, which expressed the

status of Afro Americans not only in San Francisco but also in America and the world at large. Newspapers drew on a number of writers, both local and international. In 1862, the publishing houses in Europe were a resource, as were the works of black writers and abolitionists living abroad, such as the internationally acclaimed French writer of mixed heritage, Alexander Dumas. Indeed, like black newspapers around the country, San Francisco's *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* desired to eventually become international in news and distribution. The *Pacific Appeal* proclaimed its intention in the first issue, on April 5, 1862: "We shall not confine ourselves particularly to California, nor to the States and Territories of the American government, but we include within the sphere of our duties the British Possessions. Wherever there is a Colored man, there we claim to have a brother" (12).

Throughout the United States, the works of several African American writers ran in black and abolitionist newspapers—the first, *Freedom's Journal*, was issued in 1827 in New York City. Often the subject of articles was the plight of slaves. Stories, poems, narratives, song lyrics, speeches, and essays focused on issues of slavery, as well as freedom, love, nature, and instructions for better living. Newspapers published narrative excerpts and essays written by former slaves: George Moses Horton, Sojourner Truth, Martin Delaney, Frederick Douglas, and Harriet Jacobs. Abolitionists like Harriet Beecher Stowe and John Greenleaf Whittier also wrote for the black press. But nineteenth-century black newspapers also strove for inclusive social contexts; papers reprinted articles by and about poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow or published essays on the works of William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer, thus keeping black citizens

who had an interest in literature aware of great works of literature. In the 1860s, the two San Francisco black newspapers covered the world tour of Alexander Dumas and wrote about the worldwide recognition given to a mulatto writer. Inclusion of classic writers indicates the intellectual development of many blacks, in spite of slavery and illiteracy. Newspapers were, in short, both informative and educational.

Beginning in 1862, literary arts were one of the primary focuses of the two prominent San Francisco black newspapers, the *Pacific Appeal* and *Elevator*. One reason for the importance of literary content in these papers was because of the papers' unusually gifted editor, Philip A. Bell. In 1862, Bell was selected by local leaders as editor of the *Pacific Appeal*, given his east coast experience in the 1830s with New York City's *Colored American* newspaper. He had a keen interest in the arts. According to the *Pacific Appeal*, before establishing the *Pacific Appeal*, he performed dramatic readings in a San Francisco church basement to small audiences of literary enthusiasts. Under Bell, the *Pacific Appeal* included poetry and short stories with other journalistic pieces. In 1865, Bell left the newspaper and established San Francisco's second black news publication, the *Elevator*. This paper, like the *Pacific Appeal*, included literary work of both local and national writers. According to *A History of the Black Press* by Armstead Pride and Clint Wilson II, under Bell, the *Elevator* "devoted its pages to science, art, and literature" (68).

What kind of literature was most appealing to Bell? First and foremost, poetry and short stories. A poem was included in nearly every issue of both papers in the 1860s. In addition, imaginative writings by both black and white writers focused on issues of

concern to the citizens of black communities in northern California. The black press published a rich literature about nature's beauty, the glory of California's cities and towns, love relationships, as well as local, national, and in some cases international concerns about the future of black citizens before and after slavery. This literature is characteristic of the nineteenth century; it is often sentimental, expressing emotions about life, and love, and experiences in other places. Included in these pages are poems, short stories, travel narratives, didactic short essays, biographical writings, political essays, speeches, and letters, all expressing common emotions of love, hopes, longings, and future dreams.

In conclusion, this study examines literary writing from the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* to show how these papers document the crucial years before and after the Civil War. Literary expression reveals how a significant western community responded to the pressures of slavery, emancipation, community building, and civil rights. The main focus of this analysis of literary works will show how the changing content of these newspapers over three decades reflects significant shifts in San Francisco's African American community. These two newspapers document the voice of a people far from the Civil War but acutely aware of its importance. This study traces changes primarily by examining the starting year of each newspaper and the examining ten-year increments, 1862, 1865, 1875 and 1885 (when only the *Elevator* existed) to show the changes in literary writings and the shift in concerns and interests of the city's black communities.

The challenge in the twenty-first century is to document, examine, and recognize as a contribution to the body of California literature the best of African American literary

writing, work that has been consistently omitted since before the 1893 anthology of Ella Sterling Cummins titled *The Story of the Files a Review of Californian Writers and Literature*. Through reading the literary writings of the early black community, students of literature can better understand the lives and thoughts of black pioneers living in San Francisco and its surrounding cities during the mid nineteenth century.

Chapter 1: Literary Focus of the *Pacific Appeal* in its Initial Year, 1862

Introduction

In April 1862, San Francisco's *Pacific Appeal* published its first edition. During its first year, this new publication was distributed through agents to communities throughout northern California such as Stockton, Grass Valley, Marysville, Banks, San Jose, Oakland, and in the Nevada cities of Carson City and Reno, as well as cities of the northwest and Vancouver B.C. The first page of the paper often noted what cities carried the publication. Consistent with news publications of other cities, the *Appeal's* mission was to express the varied agendas of black communities, primarily in San Francisco and the Bay Area, and in a larger regional context when possible. The *Appeal* would prove to be a far more successful operation than the earlier and short-lived *Mirror of the Times*, primarily because of the *Appeal's* superior organizational structure, experienced editors, and broad focus. The African American residents of San Francisco in the early 1860's viewed the newspaper as an instrument for addressing the problems of their newly formed community. According to Henry Suggs, the newspaper followed the model established by the earlier San Francisco black paper, *Mirror of the Times*, by adopting the motto, "We wish to plead our cause. Too long have others spoken for us" (Suggs 1).

The *Pacific Appeal's* most prevalent concerns were to address the political issues of the time; to publish the works of black writers of poetry, prose, and essays; and to communicate issues of community interest to its readers. The intellectual advancement of black readers was a goal of the newspaper and was accomplished through both

journalistic and literary writings. The newspaper was composed of straight news--essays, transcripts of speeches, articles about current events, community interest stories, and announcements--as well as literary writings--poetry, short stories, travel narratives, didactic short essays, and biographical narratives. This study focuses on the latter, arguing that imaginative literature reflects the concerns of the community, of the nation. Journalistic literature is not included in this study, except only when useful for providing information about the community and the trends of the newspaper.

It is important to note that in 1862 the *Pacific Appeal* was not the only black publication in the city with the goal of nurturing the intellectual development of San Francisco's black residents. Penelope Bullock notes that the *Lunar Visitor*, a periodical, was also first published in 1862. Like the *Appeal*, it "encouraged self-improvement among the Negroes and urged them to take advantage of educational opportunities" (Bullock 10). There were very few editions of the *Lunar Visitor* produced, so few are available for review; furthermore, it was a magazine, not a newspaper. Therefore, the analysis of the following literary writings published in the black press during 1862 will focus only on the writings of the *Pacific Appeal* during its initial year and evaluate the characteristics, cultural concerns, and nature of the writings.

Background of the 1862 *Pacific Appeal*

In 1862, two newsmen, one a Californian, Peter Anderson, and one an easterner, Philip Bell, decided to establish a newspaper in San Francisco. Bell had extensive experience with Frederick Douglass's New York paper, the *Colored American*. In the 5 April 1862 edition, Bell wrote in a letter to readers entitled "Our Name" where he

declares that the paper will “*Appeal* for the rights of the Colored Citizens of this state.”¹ Bell established a salutatory message stating the paper’s dedication to the service of humanity and to the special interest of colored people (Pride, Wilson 68). The *Appeal* followed the typical structure of newspapers during this time, stating on the top line the name of the paper, and on the next line: “A Weekly Journal Devoted to the Interest of the People of Color.” According the Delilah Beasley in *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, the newspaper is described as “a sprightly looking sheet, a six column folio and attractively printed (252). Beasley claims to have copies in her possession.

The first issue established the format for all subsequent editions, with columns numbered at the top of pages throughout the five-page newspaper. The paper consisted of nineteen columns in the first number, more columns in subsequent editions: Column 1 included the statement of terms, cost for advertisements, a table of contents, and the “wanted” ads. Columns 2, 3, and 4—perhaps running to column 5--were devoted to the “Salutatory” that expressed the editors’ views. Typically, column 5 included an essay on a major topic of the day--in this first issue “Government.” Columns 6 through 8 were devoted to current events--in the first “The Events of the Day,” “Mockery of Justice,” “The Rights of Testimony” and other articles that address the unjust treatment of African Americans in California and other states. Columns 9 or 10 were devoted to announcements. In the April 1862 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*, the editors announce that the new monthly periodical the *Lunar Visitor* is available to San Francisco readers.

¹ All newspaper quotes in this chapter are from the *Pacific Appeal*. The page numbers are not decipherable on the microfilms available for review; therefore, only the date is noted.

Columns 10 through 12 included special notices, advertisements, meeting announcements, marriages, and death announcements. Column 13 was usually dedicated to poetry, and columns 14 and 15 included domestic information and summaries of national and international news. In addition, columns 16 through 19 included miscellaneous information and advertisements. A review of many editions determined that all follow this general format.

This newspaper emerged during a time when black citizens of California faced great social and political oppression. Indeed, one of the central aims of this publication was political. Even though California was a free state, it had established Testimony and Witness laws that prohibited black citizens from testifying in court against white citizens. These laws protected whites from prosecution when they perpetrated crimes against blacks. The newspaper's editorials and essays were used as a strategy in its campaign to influence the Senate to repeal California's Testimony and Witness Laws, which were, in fact, repealed in 1863. In 1862, the newspaper also promoted the second Colored Convention of California that was held in 1865 to discuss issues and propose strategies for addressing injustices and the civil rights of blacks in California. Certainly political essays and speeches were the most common writings published in the *Pacific Appeal*. Many of these essays addressed issues of the abolishment of slavery, repealing unjust laws in free states, the plight of black men and women in America, and local issues confronting the community of San Francisco. At this time, the major political movement was abolishing slavery, repealing unjust laws, and obtaining civil rights for the

emancipated slaves. This movement was also expressed, of course, in many of the literary pieces.

Furthermore, in order to accomplish greater literacy—one of the paper’s chief aims--the *Appeal* became a proponent of education, since education was a major concern of black leaders both nationally and locally. In the September 27 edition, for example, the paper published articles about a school district hearing requested by African American parents to discuss concerns about the deplorable physical conditions and inadequate books and materials of the Colored School established for black children by the school district. The *Appeal* thus helped black parents insure educational success of their children. Literature and literacy worked hand in hand, as the newspaper also promoted literacy through education by sponsoring a local writing contest for students. The *Appeal*, like other newspapers around the country, appealed to literate African Americans who lived as free men and women and were possibly educated in east coast schools. But other users were illiterate; they may have traveled to California as slaves or were escaped slaves and were taught few reading skills. According to Frances Foster, author of “A narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Development of African-American Print Culture,” newspapers were often read aloud in public halls for those who could not read. These readings took place throughout the community so that many African Americans could hear news from other geographic regions of America and from around the world. In addition, the 1862 newspaper provided a connection between the immediate community of readers and the broader issues of the Civil War, slavery, and emancipation. Newspapers also promoted a sense of

community through many articles that informed its readers of literary events, special readings, and announcements of upcoming literary activities, such as a book drive for the community library or the meetings of literary clubs.

The focus of this study is not primarily political writing, however, but the literary writing that expressed the voice of the community and appealed more broadly to an emerging black culture--poems, short stories, biographies, travel writings, and didactic pieces. In addition to providing political commentary and appealing for broader educational opportunities, the *Appeal* vigorously promoted culture. Many San Francisco writers now had a venue for publishing their works. In addition, the paper employed agents to write about communities around the Bay area and beyond; agents traveled to or lived in small western communities in the United States and Canada and sought stories about life in these communities. Through these agents, the editors included not only journalistic writings of current events, but articles on cultural issues and literary pieces such as narratives and lyric poetry. Both in the city and beyond, San Francisco's first major black newspaper promoted a keen awareness of literature and the arts.

Overview of the Literary Writings of the Newspaper

It is important to recognize that the literature included in the *Appeal*, like that published in black newspapers around America, drew heavily on the folk tradition. Much of the literature by black writers included in 1862 editions reflected the folk tradition and slave experience as depicted in poetry, song lyrics, short stories, travel and biographical narratives, and essays. These writings conveyed the plight of African Americans and solidified here in the west, as on the east coast, a sense of racial pride and solidarity.

According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, behind the achievements of individual African American writers during the antislavery period lies the communal consciousness and experiences of millions of slaves, whose oral tradition in song and story has given form and substance to literature by black people since they first began writing in English (161). Many of the literary works published in the newspapers reflected the characteristics of black literature during the mid nineteenth century. Anti slavery protest poems, spiritual poems, short stories about the tragic mulatto character, didactic short essays about overcoming a personal challenge and/or a protagonist overcoming great odds were commonly printed in the newspaper during 1862. These imaginative writings include the use of double meanings, the trickster character, black folklore and animal tales, and utterances of common sense found in traditional black oral literature during the time of slavery. Literary themes often expressed a cry for freedom from slavery and injustice, and evoked longings for love, the pain of separation, the comforts of home, and paid tribute to the beauty in nature.

Indeed, 1850-62 was a period of great flowering in African American writing. During these years, black writers wrote about their own lives as well as the national scene, expressing themselves in poems, slave narratives, and fiction. Many writings captured the writer's own experiences or, more broadly, the agony of slavery and separation of families. In addition, political poetry has its beginnings in the years before the civil war, with poetry that protested slavery and a life of bondage for an entire racial group in America. These talented writers capture the experiences of those living in a state of bondage.

According to Hazel Ervin, author of *African American Literary Criticism 1773-2000*, many early white critics of literary works by African Americans believed that literary expression “came by means of nurture rather than by nature,” given that blacks were “classified as barbaric and natural ability was developed through nurturing” by whites (11). He goes on to argue that white critics believed the celebrated eighteenth-century Boston poet, Phyllis Wheatley, succeeded because of “a nurturing environment given her existence as a slave” (11). Certainly Phyllis Wheatley and many black writers benefited from white mentoring by learning to read and write and then developed their skills as poets, but it is clear that style and content of so much of this literature in the newspapers came from the heart and experience of black writers instead of from a nurturing environment. According to Ervin, many black writers had to confront the importance of valuing content over style, meaning it was more important to address an issue or situation facing African Americans during this time than to develop a specific style. Early eighteenth century writer Phyllis Wheatly is the exception, and her work was widely respected by nineteenth century black poets and readers. Ervin suggests that an analysis of the works of black poets should address content as opposed to style, given the arguments of early African American critics of W. E. B. Dubois, Victoria Earle Matthews; and James Weldon Johnson who felt “art should restore, beauty, truth, and justice to the black community” (11). Indeed, all of the poems published in the first year of the *Appeal* established poetry as an art form and addressed the important issues of truth and justice in the black community; if the poetic style is not revolutionary, the ideas often are.

Thus, California participated in this black renaissance. Many works of local poets were published in the *Appeal*; of particular interest are the works of James Madison Bell, designated poet of the year in 1862 by the leadership of the San Francisco community. Other writers drew on a keen awareness of the existence of slavery in their poetry and prose; some writing about their own cherished freedom from bondage as well as their appreciation of life's comforts, a loving companion, and religious freedom.

In addition, blending of the black spiritual and political tradition was also depicted in the poems and prose of San Francisco's African American community in 1862. "The genius of the spirituals rested in their double meaning, their blending of the spiritual and the political" (Gates and McKay 161). Many poems published in the newspaper that year were thus complex expressions of love, loss, and the virtues of a comfortable home, while at the same time conveying a sense of the agony of the black slave experience and how many lacked those very comforts.

This chapter will examine major themes of literary writings in the 1862 run of the *Pacific Appeal* to show how the themes reflect both local and national interests. In 1862, being black in America meant being a part of a larger community of the oppressed, which needed to be expressed to all who could read the newspaper's literature and literary writings about the struggle of slavery, the desire for freedom, and the many dreams of African Americans, which were forefront in the minds of many black writers of that day. According to Penelope Bullock, "even though free Negroes formed their own communities within the larger society, their ultimate objective was full participation in American life" (6). This was the case of San Francisco's black community. Through

reading the black newspapers during 1862, it is evident that full participation in American life was paramount for blacks throughout the country.

Poetry in the *Pacific Appeal*

Poetry published in the 1862 run of the *Pacific Appeal* shows African American writers relying on traditional forms, but using distinct figurative language, symbols, and themes. These poems express social, religious, and political issues central to the American experience of 1862—primarily the awareness of slavery’s impact.

Starting with the first edition on April 5, 1862, the *Pacific Appeal* dedicated column thirteen to poetry. A column dedicated to poetry was not uncommon for nineteenth century newspapers. Many poems were of varied length, ranging from three to eight stanzas. Even though the newspaper consistently printed poems in this column, often a second poem would appear on the front page of the newspaper. During this first year, poems of varied length were written by individuals living in San Francisco or in surrounding communities. The newspaper often published a writer’s city of residence with her/his name.

An examination of poetry in the *Pacific Appeal*’s 1862 weekly newspaper includes several poems expressing the heartfelt issues of San Francisco’s early African American community. Many of the poems use specific language conveying a double meaning, indicating experiences that may have been discouraged by slave owners but covertly done by the slaves in order to access the joys of normal living. Of the twenty-two poems published in the *Pacific Appeal* during the first year --April 5 to December 31, 1862--seventeen are about slavery, freedom, and/or separation, three are sentimental love

poems, and two are a combination of spiritual and social poems. Most of the poems, however, reflect an aspect of the human experience in the context of slavery, bondage, separation, and the search for freedom. The poems are lyrics, narratives, ballads, and odes written by eleven different writers of which three are clearly women and three authors are anonymous or their identities are not indicated.

Many poems use nature to convey the speaker's longing for life's comforts. Writing about nature, finding one's self in nature, is a more accessible and safer form of expression than to reveal one's emotions outright. For instance, the coupling of nature and emotions as seen in "My Mother's Sentiments," published August 2, 1862. This poem shows a mother's contentment with her home as depicted through the imagery of nature, indicating her sense of peace and happiness. The poem begins with the speaker comparing her children and her home to a stream of water, a "little stream that is never dry." This stream is unchanging, providing solace. After this description, the writer states that her home and the stream beside it provide her with all life's comforts: "Such is the wealth that I implore, and God has given me such and more." Clearly, emotions are grounded in reliance on nature and traditional Christian piety.

In the second stanza, the writer compares her comfortable home with sons and daughters to a garden and again mentions the brook.

Daughter more excellent than fair
A son not great but good;
A house for comfort, not too small
Nor large enough for pride.
A garden and a garden wall,
A little brook beside. (7-12)

Although this poet, M. E. Reed of Petaluma, expresses what is undoubtedly a universal sentiment--thankfulness for a home and children and nature's bounty--here those concerns take on the additional meaning that this small dominion is the best that life has to offer. The speaker ends the poem with a statement of gratefulness by feeding the poor beggar at the gate, and then praises God at the end. The narrator demonstrates her humanity towards others by feeding the poor beggar at the gate. This mother is aware of the plight of the poor and thus class.

The religious devotion expressed in the poem is typical of many of the twenty-two poems published in 1862. In addition, it was common in African American sentimental poems to suggest freedom in some covert manner--here the stream runs freely. The poet is longing for a universal experience of creating a comfortable home.

"To Annie" by J.G.C., published on May 10, also conveys strong, positive emotions through references to nature. The speaker expresses his love for a woman who eludes him by not outwardly reciprocating his love. In the first stanza, the poet uses vivid language for expressing feelings of love:

Ask me not *if* I love thee;
A glance would declare,
Though the words were not spoken,
The flame that was there. (1-4)

In this sentimental poem, the writer uses the concrete imagery of a flame, illustrating the universal feelings of love and its intensity. "My spirit would seek thee, / though severed apart" (5-6). The severing apart refers to separation between the lovers in the second stanza:

Ask me not *why* I love thee

Why murmur the trees,
When their foliage is kissed by the evening breeze? (9-12)

This stanza compares love with nature, which is common in poetry written during the nineteenth century to indicate the beauty, tranquility, and social freedom found in nature.

This poem shows the intensity in the love relationships among African Americans—through the tone that is insistent and urgent. In the third stanza, the speaker declares his love in the first sentence: “Blame me not *that* I love thee.” His love is true as demonstrated by the command posed in the first line of each stanza. “Ask me not...” followed by italicized “if” “why” and “that.” “ ... I love thee.” The progression of the poem is to the hope of love reciprocated. Black writers like J.G.C. were writing poems of universal significance, indicating African Americans’ humanity toward each other in spite of the many issues of slavery, illiteracy, and the injustices facing black Americans in 1862.

Fifteen of the poems published in 1862 used similar intense language and imagery of freedom, peace, and bondage coupled with love. This language appeared in lyrical poems using both positive and negative language together often depicting bondage. For example “Song,” written by James Madison Bell and published April 12, expresses the love of a man for a woman; the man admits in the opening line that “By pledge and vow I oft were bound,” and this suggests that the speaker has carelessly given his love. But written by a black writer in 1862, this line also suggests that the man knows what bondage entails—no real freedom. In this nine-stanza poem, the speaker expresses his love in a tone of joy and release because he has finally found love:

By pledge and vow I oft were bound,

But still my heart was free—
Free as the wild deer on the mound,
Until I met with thee,
Ere I had heard thy dove-like voice,
I'd roamed o'er land and sea,
Midst friends I'd had a friendly choice,
But still my heart was free. (1-8)

The speaker cherishes his freedom—both emotional and physical--that he is willing to give up for love of this particular woman. The emotions of love are a welcome state of bondage. The animal imagery in these two stanzas--the wild deer and her dove-like voice--depicts freedom and tranquility found in nature. Yet, he will blend his appreciation of the natural world with love for her. The poem insists on his former freedom of the heart:

I stood at midnight's lonely hour,
Where none could hear or see,
And mused on love and of its power,
But still my heart was free. (16-20)

This poem, like many others, suggests repeatedly through the references to freedom and restraint that the subject here is both personal attraction—the topic of love poetry—as well as the freedom to express such emotions that only those who have known bondage can fully appreciate. The last line of each stanza is repeated in seven of the nine stanzas: “but still my heart is free.” In the eighth stanza, he gives up that freedom to be loved by the woman. This poem addresses the theme of capturing love and then releasing of one's heart to a love interest when the reciprocation of love is questioned.

So many African Americans longed for freedom from slavery—bondage and freedom could only be loaded words in any poem. Freedom meant not only freedom in love, but also freedom to live a peaceful life. The speaker ends his song to his love

interest with an interrogatory sentence asking: “Say, am I loved by thee?” (28). He expresses the universal desire for and the difficulties facing couples in love. At the same time, the writer suggests the special urgency of freedom for black Americans.

As is expected, freedom is the “thread” in many poems written by African Americans during this time. As McKay and Gates note, language often addresses more than one level of expression, such as the emotional level of achieving love and the social and political levels of achieving freedom. Angela Davis, in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, notes that the lyrics of “Spirituals were embedded in and gave expression to a powerful yearning for freedom” (qtd. in Davis 7). Protest poems extend these two levels to include an action of protest, whose aim is to achieve freedom at both the social and emotional levels. To a people living in bondage, the freedom to love is very important.

An example of both negative and positive language in a poem is “Good Night” by Vaundry of Sonoma, published in the July 19 issue:

Good Night—is but a little word
Yet beautiful --- though brief,
And fails upon the gentle heart,
Like dew upon the leaf. (1-4)

...

Then scorn not thou this little word
Of peace and amity,
It is a link in love’s bright chain,
How small so e’er it be. (13-16)

In the first stanza, good night is a “little word” that is beautiful and brief; in the second stanza, the speaker compares good night with “A verdant Olive Branch of peace” (4:13). The third stanza suggests that sleepers wish for an undisturbed rest that a good night provides, and in the fourth stanza the narrator warns others not to scorn this “little

word,” since it is a word connoting peace and amity, a “link” in love’s chains. Chains certainly suggest both the negative bondage of slavery as well as the positive bondage of love. The implication is that blacks might aim at the only kind of chain—a bright chain-- that humans desire, love itself.

Fifteen of the twenty-two poems, while overtly about subjects like love and departure, have similar loaded meanings. The use of negative and positive language creates the imagery of struggle and captivity within love relationships. In “Past the Hour” by M. E. Reed of Petaluma, published in the August 9 edition, these issues of freedom and bondage are more overtly suggested.

Past the Hour

Sure, I’ve sought the gate so long,
E’en the hedges know me;
Birds laugh at me in their song,
Streams reflect and show me!
Not a flower that smiles so sweet
Seems my grief to soften;
E’en the meadows hate my feet,
I’ve been there so often.
But if ere I pass this way.
Meet me at some future day;
May I? Hush! Yet stay— Yet stay!
Don’t I hear her coming?

Coming? No! Twas but the trees!
I do not hear her coming:
E’en the very wasps and bees
Mock me with their humming!
Vowed she not, by all that’s just,
All that’s true she ‘d meet me?
And is it thus she breaks her trust,
Thus she strives to meet me?
But if e’er again I’m cast
In such meshes as the past,
May I? Hush! Yet stay –yet stay!
Now indeed she’s coming!

O my love! My life's delight!
Treasure of my being!
All my sorrows take to flight,
Thee, my sweet one, seeing!
Yet how couldst thou keep me here,
Heart and spirit failing?
How? But no--we'll have no tear—
It is not time for wailing.
For, despite my wayward freaks,
I'd stay waiting twenty weeks,
But to see thee coming! (1-36)

A poem whose setting is a gate in a fence certainly conveys ideas of restraint and freedom. The gate invites freedom, although the speaker is static, waiting. "E'en the meadows hate my feet," suggests that he is shoeless while waiting to see his lover, poor and expectant. In the second stanza, the speaker refers to "the meshes" of his past and his urgent waiting suggests that he cannot return to that state; instead, he desires to see his love. On the figurative level, the act of waiting for his loved one in this poem almost resembles the experience of slaves before and during the Civil War where their travels were restricted in a system of slavery. So while this poem addresses the man waiting to see a woman of his heart, it also depicts the times and life of a slave waiting for freedom. Once again, this poem is sentimental and has language with a double meaning of both social and political.

Another example of a poem conveying double meanings was published in the *Appeal* on November 22 and also written by M.E. Reed of Petaluma.

Forgotten,
Thou hast forgotten me, and life is dreary,
A chill, blank waste; hope's beacon light is fled;
Of mine existence, I am sadly weary,
For with thy love life's happiness is dead. (5-8)

The speaker expresses his pain and agony when his love has left him, and he is feeling forgotten. The writer describes the pain of love lost using the language of grief and sadness common in nineteenth-century poetry by African Americans, much of it suggesting the misery of slavery. Through this imagery, the speaker conveys sadness for lovers like himself. “Thou hast forgotten me, and life is dreary, /A chill, blank waste; hope’s beacon light is fled” (5-6). The imagery and negative language—dreary life, chill, blank waste, light fled, and loss of hope—are language that many African Americans could understand during this time. This poem reflects the feelings of love within the social context of African American life—a dreary life for many.

In the next poem, the writer expresses sadness of separation from a loved one, possibly due to slavery. Sadness of separation is depicted in “In Response to the Gift of a Flower from Miss G. N. L.” printed in the June 14, 1862 issue of the *Pacific Appeal*:

This simple flower, O lovely one,
Is well befitting thee;
For in thy far off humble home,
I pray thee think of me;
And still though years of joy may come,
With some faint trace of sorrow;
The drooping heart of a weary one,
From hope, some joy may borrow. (1-8)

Even though the speaker reflects on fond memories of a loved one, the expression, “For in thy far off humble home” indicates a separation for an unknown time. The speaker separated from a loved one hopes the loved one is living in better conditions and will not forget her. In many newspaper essays, the emancipation of loved ones was often expressed. Often those in slavery worked and saved over time to buy their freedom and the freedom of a loved one left on the plantation. One such story does appear in the

newspaper two years later. The references to separation, a humble home, and drooping heart of a weary one are common imagery in black poetry since Phyllis Wheatley, who also often expressed the theme of separation in her poetry.

Many years after 1862, James Weldon Johnson “signaled to African American writers that the highest function of literature was to exemplify the forms and racial flavor of its African American folk practices,” which is a characteristic of some poetry written by black pioneers (qtd in Ervin 11). Hazel Ervin found in her research for *African American Literary Criticism 1773-2000* that many early African American poems addressed political and social issues of the black experience, voiced the struggle to overcome the injustices, and were written in a religious tone. These same characteristics are common in the poems of 1862.

In some poems published in the black news publications, the message is clearly religious and social. By 1862, several religious institutions were well established in the black communities of San Francisco. Many poems expressed thanksgiving to God for His deliverance of oppressed people. In 1862, two religious poems evoke the idea of freedom in a biblical context, in the tradition of slave spirituals, which blended religious tales with hope of freedom. “The Passage of the Red Sea,” printed in the April 5, 1862 *Pacific Appeal*, is about freedom for “the groaning slave” and clearly has a didactic message. The poet tells of God’s reactions to “tyranny’s iron rod” and the deliverance of a chosen people from bondage, across the Red Sea. Clearly behind the biblical tale of the battles that take place to accomplish this task, and the destruction of Pharaoh, is the plight of slaves in America. Specifically, the poet writes that God spoke to his angel and said:

“Redeem the earth from zone to zone, / Spread freedom from shore to shore” (15-16).

The poet uses imagery from the original story of Moses and the deliverance of the Jewish tribes in the *Bible*. The theme of deliverance from slavery is expressed throughout the poem:

Then on! On! To their deep, deep tread
Their Hallelujah's rose:
Even those who sentineled their bed
Praise God for their repose. (34-36)

The exclamation points depict a sense of emotion as the angel carries the charge of freeing the enslaved, which conveys a tone of hope and excitement in the poem. The narrator speaks to an audience that understands oppression and seeks deliverance for all people living in bondage. Deliverance of a people is anticipated, given the climate of an immanent war. This poem conveys a message of hope for families and friends of African Americans seeking freedom from slavery.

Given the number of poems with freedom as the theme, San Francisco's African American community clearly welcomed this message of hope and freedom, even though many blacks lived as freed men and women in the State of California. San Francisco's black community reached out to those living in bondage across America. They had established safe houses and provided clothing and supplies for escaped or newly freed slaves who were earlier brought to California to work on farms and in the gold mines.

In the second religious poem, “Song,” written by J.G.C. and published in the April 19 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*, the speaker expresses ideas of freedom, the comforts of home and repose through the imagery of a dove:

As to the ark the gentle dove

Returned, though free to roam
And found, beneath its sheltering roof,
Affection and a home-
So from the arts and luring wiles
That falsehood may suggest,
My spirit turns to thy pure heart
For refuge and for rest (9-16)

For the speaker, the dove returns to the ark, which represents home. In the last two lines, he then refers to himself returning to a place of refuge and rest. This poem is religious because of the references to Mecca and a Moslem's act of worship. Through its tone, the expressed social need for a place of refuge, peace, and safety is found in the religious experience.

Often poems were placed on the front page of the newspaper to address an important person or issue of the day. For example, in an essay entitled "Death of a Noble Woman" in the June 14, 1862 edition, poetic verse is embedded in the essay: "Where the tree of life is blooming, /There is rest for the weary/ There is rest for you"(7. 8,10). These lines express the weariness of life for blacks before the Civil War. This reference to the weary finding rest in heaven is common in lyrics of songs sung by slaves.

While some express ordinary life circumstances of separation or farewell from a loved one, others celebrate the emancipation of slaves. Nine poems are overtly political. Many poems express the joy of emancipation and anger about conditions common for African Americans. In the poem, "All Hail! Day of Gladness," published in the June 21, 1862 *Pacific Appeal*, emancipation is celebrated. Freedom for slaves, appreciation for Abe Lincoln, and faith in God for the future are expressed:

There freedom's sun is shining,
The slave no more repining;

For wife and children separated wide-
Nor scourges without number
From slave-marts, by the river's flowing tide.
Sing! Sing! &c.
Let hope on faith's pinions,
O'er all our vast dominions;
Anticipate the day now coming on---
When Lincoln's proclamation,
Shall say unto the Nation,
Foul slavery's curse no longer shall be known.
Sing! Sing! &c (19-31)

By June of 1862, the mantra for freedom at all cost and the anticipation of Lincoln's emancipation inspired many writers throughout the country to express the excitement of freedom for the slaves.

Another clearly political poem published in the November 15 edition is by W.H. Foote of Weaverville, who addresses the abolition of slavery in Washington. "The Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia" recognizes the existence and deplorable aspects of slavery in the nation's capital:

Above the towering, anticipated dome,
Where Freedom's wings have vainly hovered
Long,
The patient bird at last has found a home,
And carols forth her wildest, sweetest song.

To shackled thousands is that song addressed,
In tones potential is that mandate given-
That song is "Freedom to the long oppressed"
That mandate "Be every shackle driven!" (5-12)

In the final verse, Foote gives God credit for freedom:

In tones of thunder from the Mercy Seat,
The world re-echoing the just decree,
From pole to pole, where land and water meet.
He said: "Be injured Ethiopia free! (29-32)

Other poems expressed the urgency of Civil War politics and often echoed the concerns expressed in journalistic writings. Poems and essays explored complex issues, like what to do with slaves captured from Confederate forces--whether or not to use the newly captured slaves in the union army to fight against the rebel forces. Printed in the May 24, 1862 *Pacific Appeal*, the poem "What Shall We Do with the Contraband?" by James Madison Bell raises the question of what to do with the slaves who are identified as contraband. "Shall we arm them? Yes, arm them! Give to each man/ a rifle, a musket, a cutlass, or sword; (1-2). In the final stanza the speaker asks:

Does not reason suggest, it were noble to die
In the act of supplanting a wrong for the right?
Then lead to the charge! For the end is not far,
When the Contraband host are enrolled in the war. (14-18)

In the narrative poem, "The Contraband" by Benictano the speaker describes his efforts to escape the rebel forces and find liberty in the north during the Civil War. He tells about his journey and sends a message about key events witnessed while he is on the run:

IV
I 'scaped from out the rebel line,
Last night, to bring you word.
Because your enemies are mine-
At least, so I have heard.
The Northman is the bondman's friend.
And wishes he were free;
I've periled all for that one end-
I want my liberty. (25-32)

For the readers of the *Pacific Appeal*, this poem provides information about the plight of slaves who are fighting for their freedom.

Another poem evolved out of a discussion between a white citizen and a black citizen about the purpose of the war. In a letter to the editor of the *Pacific Appeal* July 5, 1862, a citizen of San Francisco states: “Mr. Editor: This effusion is a result of a remark made to me by a white man, who in a conversation about the causes of the present rebellion, said, “The Negroes have done it.” If you deem it worthy of insertion in the *Appeal*, I would like to see it published [...].” In this poem, the writer expresses a conversation between white man and black man about the frustration of the war and its solutions to slavery:

“The Negroes have done it;”
What? Caused this dead strife.
Where father and son
Are contending for life,
Where the corpses of brothers
Encumber the plain,
And the earth has been quenched
With the blood of the slain? (1-7)

The last stanza is a response to the position established in the first verse:

“The Negroes have done it;”
Yea! Few people on earth.
Would still love the land.
(Tho’ it gave them their birth.)
Were oppressed and enslaved
As we have been— ‘tis true!
Make us men like yourselves.
Then see what we can do. (25-32)

This poem documents the differing of opinions about the war, which were felt on the streets of San Francisco. Here, the two men debate the need for a war that centered on the freedom for some at the expense of others. It also depicts the division that existed throughout the country and eventually led to the Civil War. According to Bruce Dickson

in his work, *The Origins of African American Literature*, the voice of African Americans desiring freedom and acceptance in American is expressed in the poem's rebuttal (307). In many cases, the newspaper was trying to tread a line between being political and courting mainstream ideals. This poem clearly indicates both the political and social sides of issues.

James Madison Bell also wrote a long political poem that expresses the common anger of African Americans about slavery, "The Bondsman's Hope." Bell expresses the desire for freedom through natural imagery and religious references.

All weary and worn and with cares opprest,
They laid shem [sic]down on their couch to rest;
But a vision stole on the panting soul
And bore it away from the base control
Of the tyrant's lust and the despot's ire,
To a land of rest, the weary's desire-
A land of bright waters and fragrant flowers,
And verdant landscapes and fruitful bowers,
Oh, freedom, how sweet! E'en the thought thereof
Inspires the soul till it soars aloft,
Forgetful of life and its cumbrous chains,
And strolls for a while through elysian plains. (25-37)

As mentioned earlier, protest poems were popular during this time and throughout the abolitionist movement. They often reflected the desire for freedom from bondage common in many poems published in black publications during this time. Another, "Freedom is Marching On," written for the emancipation celebration, August 1, 1862, is a ballad with music and refrain of "Glory, Glory Hallelujah." This ballad again expresses happiness in freedom, reciting the horror of slavery, giving God praise for this great feat, and the freedom of the nation's capital. Two other narrative political poems, one an elegy, tell the story of the life of a young man as a slave and the other of war. The

first poem “Elegy on T. T. Tatem ESQ” by J. M. Whitfield was printed in the *Pacific Appeal* November 15, 1862, edition. His poem is about a young man who died while working in the fields as a slave:

With freedom for his battle-word
Truth for his sword, and faith his shield,
fought the battles of the Lord,
died in harness on the field. (12-16)

And there deplore the loss of those
Who led the vanguard of the fight.
And overthrew the banded foe
Of virtue, freedom, truth and right. (25-28)

The hero spoken of in the poem lived his life fighting for the rights of slaves while enduring slavery. The writer James Monroe Whitfield had developed his reputation as a writer in the east. According to Joan Sherman, in *Invisible Poets-Afro-Americans of the Nineteenth Century*, James Monroe Whitfield submitted poems to the *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. “In 1853, he published the collection of *America and Other Poems*. He lived in San Francisco from 1861-1870, while traveling throughout the Pacific West and Nevada reading poetry and operating his barbering business. He died in San Francisco on Prospect Place in 1871 and is buried in the Masonic Cemetery” (Sherman 46). According to Joan Sherman, many of James Whitfield’s poems and letters were also published in San Francisco’s *Elevator* between 1867 and 1870.

The other poem is about a young man who fled a slave plantation escaping to the Union Army in search of freedom. As expected, these poems express the heartfelt emotions of wanting freedom from bondage, which was often found in death, found when escaping a life of slavery, and/or freedom found on the battlefield.

The California Poet

It is evident that during its initial year, the *Pacific Appeal* gave poetry an elevated status in its pages. In addition, California had its own black poet, James Madison Bell, whose poems were published not only in black newspapers but eventually in *The Poetical Works of James Madison Bell* in 1901. As a writer of many political and protest poems, James Madison Bell, from Ohio, lived in San Francisco from 1860-1865 and worked arduously as a writer and lecturer. While living in San Francisco, Bell wrote several poems that were concerned with African Americans facing deprivation and bondage. He was one of the first poets to read publicly at the Emancipation Celebration on August 1, 1862, and his efforts were praised: "In literary merit, it is quite equal to the average run of productions for similar occasions gotten up by white poets..."(*Pacific Appeal* August 2, 1862). In 1862, Bell assumed the presidency of the San Francisco Literary Institute. After five years, James Madison Bell returned to the east coast and lived with his family.

In 1862, a black poet in California was still considered rare, particularly a man who embarked on new ground for expressing observations and inner feelings about the world in poetic verse. To African Americans, and whites as well, the black poet was an anomaly. Leaders of the African American community designated James Madison Bell "Our California Poet." In his article "Our California Poet" August 9, 1862, Philip Bell wrote that whites had not previously recognized the poetical talents of black writers: "The white man has said the pages of Poetry have never been embellished by the genius and erudition of colored men that they did not possess the capabilities of enriching that

department of learning” (*Pacific Appeal* August 9, 1862). Philip Bell states that James Madison Bell’s efforts demonstrate the fallacy of that viewpoint.

James Madison Bell contributed several poems to the newspaper during its first year. The works of earlier writers such as Phyllis Wheatley, George M. Horton, and James M. Whitfield were recognized nationwide as “the standard bearer of black American antislavery poets” (Gates and McKay 483). Their work paved the way for poets such as James Madison Bell, who used his poetic talent to protest the institution of slavery.

According to the biographical sketch written by Bishop B.W. Arnett D.D., a friend, in the preface of *The Poetical Works of James Madison Bell*, Bell was born in 1835 in Gallipolis Ohio, where he lived until seventeen years of age. As a strong supporter and personal friend of John Brown, he attended one of the first high schools for African American children. According to Arnett, minutes before John Brown’s raid, he moved to Canada, where he lived until 1860 and then moved to San Francisco in February 29, 1860. Being an activist in Ohio and Canada, he again resumed political prominence in San Francisco; he again addressed the injustices of African American life. James Madison Bell, along with Philip A Bell, editor of the *Pacific Appeal* and later the *Elevator*, and others become active in the effort to gain access for blacks to educational opportunities as well as the effort to allow blacks to testify against whites in a court of law. Bell used his ability to write verse to address the ills of slavery. “While in California,” notes Arnett, “some of his most stirring poems were written:”

“Emancipation,” “Lincoln,” “The Dawn of Freedom,” “War Poems,” and “Valedictory on Leaving San Francisco” (9).

Bell left California late in 1865 to return to Canada and to visit his family. To Arnett, “his poetry is like the flowing of the mountain spring, the secret of its source is unknown” (Bell 10). During 1862, the *Pacific Appeal* published five of his poems. Of the five poems written by Bell, three addressed themes of slavery, bondage, and freedom. The remaining two poems are lyrical love poems one is about parting ways between two love ones and the other is about pledging one’s love.

In summary, poetry in San Francisco during 1862 expressed the many heart-felt issues of the black community. It was a popular form for the creative voice of San Francisco. Often young people in literary social clubs and at church events were encouraged to compose and recite poems. Blacks often patronized reading rooms established in San Francisco as a social gathering place for reading literature and viewing art. Various agendas often included poetry recitation. The *Pacific Appeal*, by providing a designated column, helped promote poetic expressions throughout the community. According to black poets and critics of African American literature, Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka, “Black poetry was to further the causes of political and social revolution” (Ervin 14). This was accomplished in the nineteenth century through a variety of literary expressions but especially through poetry published in the *Pacific Appeal* throughout its years of operation.

Narrative Accounts, Short Stories, Letters, and Didactic Essays in 1862

Literary writings other than poetry were also popular and published in San Francisco black publications. The newspaper provided readers from other cities in the Mid West and East with news about blacks living in cities of the Pacific Coast. News important to the struggle of African Americans was communicated through a variety of nonfiction literary writings such as travel narratives, narrative accounts, and didactic short essays, all of which appeared in the *Pacific Appeal* during its first year of publication. Other genres, such as essays and speeches written by San Francisco's own James Madison Bell as well as Frederick Douglass and others, were published in the *Pacific Appeal*. The themes of emancipation, education, slavery, love, and the loss of a love one were the focus of these literary writings. Often the newspaper published reflective writings about life's universal issues, specifically the desire for a home. Through journalistic literature, the newspapers advertised events that promoted the development of art and culture in San Francisco's African American communities.

Personal and travel narratives were popular during the first year of the newspaper. Often written by residents of surrounding communities, these narratives described San Francisco's surrounding communities. Writers described their travel to other cities and destinations in Northern California, as well as narrative accounts about brave African Americans who faced insurmountable odds. The upbeat tones of these narratives describe the scenery, trip events, and people encountered along the way. Some narratives were reprints from other newspapers from other states but that told a common story. Narrations describing a trip or a visit out of town were often written in a letter of

communication. In 1862, four travel narratives describing journeys to areas surrounding San Francisco were published. They describe the terrain or highlight key events of the trip. The purpose of the travel narratives was clearly to celebrate the beauty of San Francisco's surrounding region and to inform African American readers about life in nearby communities.

One travel narrative written by a *Pacific Appeal* agent, G.W.M., was published in the April 26, 1862 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*; it is a letter to the editor about his journey in a mail truck from Petaluma to Santa Rosa. The narrator describes the beauty of the landscape and uses humor to gain appreciation for his trip. The agent writes, "I did not promise you a horse nor a saddle, but if you'll take a ride with me in a mail-wagon, I will pledge myself to give you one of the best shakings down you've had in a lifetime" (*Pacific Appeal* April 26, 1862). As the agent G.W.M. travels with the mail wagon driver, Billy, one beautiful morning, birds are "chirruping," and "we are flying by beautiful orchards" (14). After passing several farms and homes, the men are asked to get out of the wagon and walk in "knee deep mud." The agent notes that he is on a mission for the newspaper and "the *Pacific Appeal* is worth more than your old clothes, or them 'ten dollar boots' that you was bragging about this morning before we started" (14).

Once the mail-wagon is on solid ground again, the men continue to Santa Rosa. The driver points out the housing along the way. Once arriving at the Santa Rosa hotel, the writer describes the landscape of Santa Rosa and the agricultural products awaiting harvesting. After dinner, the owner allowed the agent to use his grey horse (which

eventually threw the agent into the mud while he was traveling on the back roads). When G.W.M. reaches his destination he notes: "The journey was a profitable one, as far as the *Appeal* was concerned, but rather a rough one to your humble agent." This narrative is delightful and probably provided readers at this time with an unforgettable humorous adventure.

The April 5, 1862 *Pacific Appeal* published another interesting travel narrative, "A Visit to Napa," written by the writer identified as "A." This travel narrative illustrates the common feelings of many black residents living in various communities of the Bay Area. It begins:

We seldom can spare the time to leave the city for business or pleasure, but the tempting invitation extended to us by Mr. E. Hatton induced us to make an arrangement whereby one of us might be absent, from last Saturday until Monday following, and make the trip one of business as well as pleasure, and if possible, increase our subscription list.

It is clear that the purpose of the trip is to visit friends in Napa and to sell subscriptions.

The writer describes the beauty of Napa while also noting life's arc:

Standing beside this grave-mound, we could view the expansive valley, far below the town of Napa, over the hills of Sonoma, beholding nature in all its grandeur. How melancholy the thought that here lies one, whose eyes were recently closed in death, outside of a cemetery or city of the dead, whose moulding (sic) limbs are dumb, even to mother-earth, whose green carpet yielded softly, with joyous spring-life, as we strode away to the vehicle, to wend our course to the town.

The writer also notes conditions of black residents of Napa with a sense of irony that

California offers blacks possibilities, but also denies them basic civil rights:

The conditions of the Colored people at Napa far exceeded our expectations. Those living in the town are industrious, respectable, and civilly treated by white people. In the valley, we understand that Mr. Geo. Holman and others have large tracts of land under cultivation. We left the

town with but one regret, and that is, while the Colored property-holders are taxed, their children are denied the common school privileges.

While African Americans live in freedom and beauty, they are still not treated equally. It is interesting that the writer depicted this irony between reality and idealism.

Short stories and biographical accounts from other states were also popular.

Many short stories depicted the plight of characters in bondage--often mulattos. The stories include examples of courage on the part of African American mulattos who faced grim experiences, which resulted in death, or in other cases, ended with a better life achieved.

The mulatto story is a typical genre in African American literature, depicting the special burdens of mulattos during slavery. McKay and Gates note that the mulatto is often viewed as a persecuted character. This persecution addresses racial and personal identity ranging from militant to "pathetic self-betrayal" (551). In stories about mulattos, readers could better understand events that occurred in a racially divided society.

Four stories in the *Pacific Appeal* from other newspapers involve a mulatto protagonist who is depicted traditionally, according to McKay and Gates, Jr., "mov[ing] from the pitiful victimization [...] to the proud claiming of heritage" (551). In these stories, the first two relate the pitiful victimization of the mulatto character, and the third is a story of courage. "A Nuptial Tragedy," published in the April 25, 1862 edition, tells the story of a slaveholder who decides to free and educate the beautiful daughter of his house slave. The child (unnamed) is sent to a school in Philadelphia. Eventually she meets a man who proposes marriage to her. In the meantime, the mother was sold and later she hears of her daughter's wedding. On the wedding day, the young woman's

mother appears to see her daughter. A tragedy occurs when the husband realizes that his wife is of African decent; the groom shoots the girl's adopted father, and then he leaves the bride. Upon realizing what has happened, the bride commits suicide. In this story, the life of the mulatto girl ends in a tragedy, which is consistent with many stories about mulattos. The tragedy occurs when the father wants what is best for his child, and he does not realize the problem he is creating for his daughter when she tries to live in the world to which she is accustomed as a white woman.

“An Interesting case of a Freed Slave Girl,” first published in the *Boston Traveler* and printed in the July 19, 1862 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*, is a secondary account of a slave girl from Virginia. This narrative is about the efforts by a white father to free his mulatto daughter and the resistance of the father's family, who wish to deprive the girl of land and money given to her by her father at the time of his death. In the end, she gains the land, given the laws of Virginia, and her father's will. She purchases her slave mother, the wife of her dead father, and two sisters whom she loves dearly, so they can live a life of freedom. This narrative may have been encouraging to San Francisco's readers; a white father helps his slave child establish a life of freedom, which may have been unusual at that time.

Many narratives informed readers of the courage of heroes during a time of slavery and war. For example, “The Death of a Noble Woman” was published in an eastern newspaper and reprinted on the front page, first column of the June 14, 1862, edition of the *Pacific Appeal*. Written by Rev. A. B. Fuller, this narrative concerns a mulatto woman and her lifetime struggle with racism, despite her fair complexion, and

her commitment to establish a school for educating slaves. This narrative once again illustrates the persecution of people who appear white in complexion but who are made to suffer because of traces of African descent. Most of the narratives about mixed race people show their struggles in a society that has condoned slavery. One “gave some account of little ‘Daisy’, a child whose father was formerly a slave, and both whose parents had African blood in their veins, though they, as well as their child, were so nearly White as with difficulty to be distinguished from their Anglo-Saxon neighbors” (July 14, 1865). This narrative also illustrates the importance of education and the courage of Daisy’s mother, Mrs. Peak, during a time when her actions could have resulted in death. Although many slaves were taught to read and write, they were educated in a state with laws that prohibited it. Mrs. Peak “constantly taught the colored people as far as possible, keeping a private school in her own house—*very private* the laws of Virginia and their penalties required it to be—and through her instrumentality many an else ignorant slave was taught to read and write” (July 14, 1865) The press shared with the black public narratives about the challenges facing African Americans living elsewhere in the country. These stories illuminate the political and social issues of slavery and the importance of its abolition.

Literary writings during this time increased awareness of atrocities committed throughout the country towards black men and women. The best example of protest fiction is, of course, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Given Stowe’s popularity around the country, it is hardly surprising that the *Pacific Appeal* published articles about Stowe’s work *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the July 14, 1862, edition.

The fourth story published by *The Pacific Appeal*, “The Zombi: or the Mulatto of Murillo’s Studio” in the July 5, 1862 edition, tells of a child’s efforts to gain freedom for himself and his father. “The Zombi” is about a mulatto child named Sabastian, who, along with his father, are slaves to Murillo, a famous painter and art instructor who lives in Spain. Sabastian is told to find out who is painting at night on the canvasses of Murillo’s pupils and if not he will receive twenty-five lashes. In the end, the boy is caught with the pallet and easel in hand finishing the face and body of the Virgin Mary. Murillo and his students are amazed at the beauty of Sabastian’s work. Although Sabastian stands ready for the lashes for completing the paintings, Murillo tells him that he can request a reward instead. When Sabastian requests the freedom of his father, Murillo, overcome with compassion, grants the freedom of both Sabastian and his father. Sabastian becomes a permanent student of Murillo and one of the greatest painters in Seville.

Many readers probably found this story very uplifting during a time when African Americans in California were denied the right to testify in cases involving whites. For the readers of *The Pacific Appeal*, the story of a courageous young slave boy who becomes a famous painter probably provided courage to face the various issues confronting African Americans struggling for freedom in pursuit of their dreams. This story also communicates the struggle facing African decedents not only within America but also in Spain. “The Zombi” encouraged readers to address racial problems and find solutions, as does the young boy. This story shows that racism existed outside of America, and yet with courage, even a child could fight racism and achieve greatness.

The narratives published in the *Pacific Appeal* newspaper reflect realism found in traditional literature written during this time. For African Americans and many abolitionists, an overtly political approach was necessary to obtain freedom from bondage. These stories follow the example of Frederick Douglass and other authors in depicting the real life experiences of black people living in an era of slavery. Many of the narratives published in the newspaper of 1862 support Frances Smith Foster's claim that "The people of African descent used their print culture to help reinvent themselves as African Americans and to construct African America" (2).

In addition to political and social literature about contemporary affairs, the *Pacific Appeal* also published articles that expressed a writer's personal opinions about canonical literature. Since the *Appeal* addressed readers interested in both national and international news, the newspaper often spoke both to the black culture of San Francisco as well as to a larger culture of educated readers, both black and white. According to Frances Smith Foster, "From its beginnings, the African American press was international in distribution and in its concerns" (12). In the April 26 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*, Alexander Smith published "A Poet on Chaucer and Shakespeare," suggesting that Chaucer wrote about common experiences, whereas Shakespeare created characters rich with imagery of the imagination. He writes, "Reading his poems is like going into a country town on a market day; you see lots of people, everyone different from the other in countenance, speech and attire, but you do not find, nor do you expect to find an angel or a demi-god." Smith demonstrates his understanding of classical literature as well as his broad range of literary experience. This article demonstrates the

varied intellectual levels within the African American community and its readers. Many African Americans during this time could relate to the treatment of a character like “Caliban,” depicted as “brutish” in *The Tempest*, which was the topic of another short essay in the newspaper. Given the high literacy of San Francisco’s African American population, according to Douglas Daniels’ *Pioneer Urbanites*, many black readers and writers relished articles about classical literature.

Another genre of literary writing found in the 1862 newspaper is the common sense instructional (didactic) short essay. These writings suggest solutions to daily issues or problems general in nature that could apply to all people but probably met a specific need of the black community. By providing instructional information to its readers, the newspapers addressed issues of personal character, health, family, matters relating to slavery--such as how to protect a run away slave--and other universal topics. These didactic essays helped develop the cultural, intellectual, and social aspects of the community. In 1862, four short didactic essays were published, two of which may have been reprints from other local newspapers, such as “Incentive to Action,” written by W.H.C.S. first printed in Sacramento April 16, 1862. This article appeared in the communication section column beneath the weekly poem of the April 19, 1862 edition of the newspaper. “Incentive to Action” addresses the importance of physical exercise in order to maintain physical strength and a strong mind. The main theme is expressed in these words: “Health and strength are found in action, not in ease.” “Obedience to this law is ever rewarded with physical strength and intellectual energy, and every violation is punished with bodily weakness and mental imbecility.”

Issues of health are addressed again in “Life and Health” by E.R.J. published in the April 26, edition. The theme of this short essay is how to maintain a sound mind: “If we desire to retain the vital spark within us, and live to a good old age, we should adopt the best means that has been entrusted to us by God, to promote a healthy structure of the body and mind.” Today, this type of short essay is within the genre of personal improvement or self help writing. In this short essay, the writer quotes Aristotle as his justification for his advice about the importance of maintaining a healthy body and mind: “Aristotle said that there is not logic so forcible as that which is based upon experience.” To the community, the writer speaks with authority, which probably impressed readers.

Another didactic short essay appeared in the communications section column of May 3, 1862, edition of the newspaper. Two short essays under the title “Observation” were printed. The first one expressed the need for developing manners and attention. In this short essay, the writer suggested that those who need to learn manners can improve their comportment by observing others in order to overcome personal interaction problems such as “stiffness and awkwardness” when in the company of others. He states, “As the art of pleasing is to be learnt only by frequenting the best companies. ” According to the writer, it is important for a person who wants to acquire esteem to first observe people very closely, “their emotions, looks, and expressions without staring and glaring.” The writer ends by stating that this type of observation will serve useful for a lifetime. For the reader, this article probably was useful for developing social skills. The community no doubt benefited from articles that addressed individual cultural/social development.

In "Tell Your Wife," published in the November 1, 1862 edition of the newspaper, the writer expresses his opinion about how men and women should relate to one another in marriage when the family faces issues of spending and economy. The writer suggests that the husband treat his wife as a partner, informing her of the family's finances. Advice articles, such as this one, suggested solutions to common issues confronting families during this time.

In the poetry, narratives, short stories and short didactic essays published in the *Pacific Appeal* during 1862, writers skillfully conveyed their social, political, or religious ideas to readers in San Francisco. These writings expressed the heartfelt desires and concerns specific to African Americans as well as those issues and concerns universal in nature commonly found in all communities of American life. The literature in the first year of the black press in San Francisco expresses common issues facing African Americans during this time, which can apply to communities of people with similar cultural values.

In conclusion, reading the literary writings of the early black pioneers shows that their lives in most ways resembled the lives of all Americans seeking a better life. Going west meant a new sense of freedom for African Americans, just as it did for other pioneers. Through publishing the works of African American writers, the black press made it possible for this literature to reach an audience concerned with the development of culture and growth of black communities and to encourage freedom of movement, and political and intellectual engagement.

Chapter 2: Literary Focus of the *Elevator* Newspaper in its Initial Year, 1865

Introduction and Background

By April 1865, with the Civil War over and Reconstruction beginning, an additional newspaper, the *Elevator*, emerged in San Francisco's African American community. After leaving the *Pacific Appeal*, Philip Bell started the *Elevator* three years after the establishment of the *Pacific Appeal*. According to J. William Snorgrass in "The Black Press in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1916," Phillip Bell left the *Pacific Appeal* newspaper over a dispute with Peter Anderson, the proprietor of the newspaper; the two men disagreed on the direction of *The Pacific Appeal*. "Most scholars of the era contribute this split to severe personality conflicts," notes Snorgrass. "Bell was considered a 'militant' for his time, while Anderson preferred a more tactful and diplomatic approach to the 'black' problems in California and the rest of the country" (308). The shift in philosophy is evident in the banner of Bell's *Elevator*, "Equality Before the Law." The banner of the *Pacific Appeal*, on the other hand, appealed more broadly for the rights of the black citizens of California: "A Weekly Journal devoted to the Interested of the People of Color." With Bell gone, the *Pacific Appeal* took a more moderate tone under the leadership of Anderson (Snorgrass 308). The *Pacific Appeal* experienced publishing difficulties and struggled to exist over the next ten years. As of today, very few editions published 1864, though 1867 issues are available for review. It is unknown whether or not publication problems can be attributed to Bell's absence; however, Bell's new publication, the *Elevator*, published consistently until the late 1880's while the *Pacific Appeal* did not produce consistent editions.

The *Elevator* emphasized gaining civil rights and justice for black San Franciscans. A strong political emphasis was typical of many newspapers around the country after the Civil War, all recognizing the need to address civil rights for African Americans. The black press challenged many traditional laws and norms that violated the civil rights of African Americans. In 1865, much of the journalistic literature of the *Elevator*--as well as that in the *Pacific Appeal*, although the tone tended to be less assertive--addressed the living conditions of African Americans throughout the country. Like the *Pacific Appeal*, the *Elevator* published in its weekly edition articles that were both journalistic and literary. Many writings focused on the political concerns of life for blacks after emancipation as well as other popular topics promoted at the Colored Convention of 1865, such as black suffrage and political representation in California. Since the California Legislature had repealed the Testimony and Witness Laws in 1863, the *Elevator*, through its name and motto of "Equality Before the Law," promoted black suffrage, civil rights, and education for African Americans throughout the state. Articles about these important issues were published and debated in numerous news articles in San Francisco's black newspapers.

In its initial year, the *Elevator* also focused on black voting rights and political representation in California. For example, "The black Man's Natural Equality Before the Law," on the front page of the June 23, 1865 edition, discusses the question of how to gain suffrage for African Americans. "The great question of the time, relating to Negro Suffrage, is clamorous for discussion. It will not be put off any longer, but must be at once boldly encountered by every journalist who has the adventurousness to go in front

of the great train of progression, which is now going” (*Elevator* June 23, 1865 column 2). The tone of this article is harsher than that of articles found in the *Pacific Appeal* in 1865. Also, during this year, the *Elevator* continued coverage of the fight to get San Francisco’s Trolley companies to allow black citizens to ride the streetcars. In 1868, the California Supreme Court ruled on behalf of black citizens, giving them access to the streetcars. The companies rescinded the order disallowing blacks to ride its cars as a result of the fight led by San Francisco’s black citizen Mary Ellen Pleasant. While the *Pacific Appeal* covered similar issues, its coverage included fewer details and there were fewer articles and fewer public response communications.

In addition, the San Francisco black newspapers in 1865 responded to the social needs of newly emancipated slaves living in its communities. For example, several articles in 1865 organized services for newly freed men; for example, the Ladies Freedmen Relief Association announced its fundraising activities for money and goods to benefit newly released slaves living in the city.

In its initial year, the *Elevator* reached a wide reading audience throughout the Pacific coast states. It continued the tradition of providing a news publication for both black and white readers living in the west. Its readers came from communities of California, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and Vancouver B.C. A letter written by E. Hatton in the April 14, 1865 edition of the *Elevator* suggests circulating the *Elevator* to all “liberal men, without distinction of color.” His desire to appeal to a racially mixed audience is consistent with what Frances Foster and others claim about post-Civil War readership of black newspapers--they were widely read by white as well as black readers

who were interested in the affairs of black Americans. Consistent with the tradition of other black newspapers throughout the country and the rival newspaper, the *Pacific Appeal*, Bell continued his practice of promoting the newspaper and building its readership through agents hired to sell the newspapers throughout the west and to find news and interesting stories and articles for publication in the newspaper. Local organizations and churches promoted the newspaper by communicating their activities in the publication.

The *Elevator* was typical for its time, a four-page newspaper. The first edition, which subsequent editions followed, includes the title, *The Elevator*, “A Weekly Journal of Progress” and the banner “Equality Before The Law.” In the first column is the prospectus, stating that it is a weekly journal issued every Friday, costing 15 cents a copy per week or \$2.50 for six months. An explanation of the newspaper’s organization, a statement by the editor, and a table of contents are also included in the first column. (See appendix 3). In the first edition, a four-stanza poem written by J.M.B. (James Madison Bell) lays out the purpose of the *Elevator*:

“Our Paper and Its Purpose”

‘Tis not to rival with our neighbor
Tis not to ruin or supplant,
That we I Freedom’s field of labor
Would exercise a common grant
Concerning toil, why should we differ?
Why into vain contentions fall?
Does not the cause of Freedom offer
Abundant labor for us all? (1-8)

Bell suggests that there is enough news for both newspapers in San Francisco and that liberty is for both blacks and whites. He calls for unity in building the future. This poem

speaks to the role of the newspaper when the speaker calls for achieving “glorious oneness” (15).

Other articles in the April 7, 1865 newspaper were devoted to topical news; one noted a post civil war conference to address the displacement of black citizens of Georgia, which covers the entire first page of the newspaper. On the next page, the newspaper published a poem, “In Commemoration of the Death of Abraham Lincoln.” Following the poem, the editor included a discussion of the poem and its writer, James Madison Bell, who read the poem at a local meeting of black citizens held on Tuesday, April 18, 1865. In the next column, the newspaper printed letters to the editors, and meeting announcements about various activities of local organizations. At the end of the newspaper, several pages were devoted to advertisements. This newspaper layout pretty much followed the same design as the *Pacific Appeal* in its initial year. Clearly, news and literature were still mixed in each edition of these local papers.

Under the leadership of Philip Bell, the *Elevator* promoted arts and social justice in literary as well as journalistic pieces. Literary writings followed the tradition of the *Pacific Appeal*, reflecting the common experiences and issues facing San Francisco’s black community as well as others throughout the nation. In her study of early black news publications, Chanta M. Haywood notes: “It was important, [...] to the editors that literature functioned to meet their political goals. The editors encouraged all forms of literary submissions from poetry and essays to short stories and serialized novels” (418). This is evident in much of the literature published in San Francisco’s black press. Both the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal* promoted a variety of literary expressions--poetry,

travel narratives, biographical narratives, didactic short essays, longer essays, and speeches. While the type of creative pieces published in both papers remained consistent with the 1862 *Pacific Appeal*, the topics addressed shifted after the war.

In both newspapers, literary writings shifted from issues of slavery to life for African Americans after slavery. In the *Elevator*, many of the poems written by local writers focused on themes of emancipation and sadness over the death of Abe Lincoln, and often reflected the experience of African American soldiers. Other poems published in the newspaper were often reprints from other newspapers. Several were clearly written by white poets who were abolitionists. When comparing the poetical expressions with the earlier newspaper of 1862, many of the poems published in the *Elevator* were less sentimental and focused on political themes of the day. San Francisco's black poet J.M. Bell wrote about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in several poems, which in some cases were published in both black newspapers. Not evident in the poetry of 1865 are the symbolic imagery and metaphors that carried the issues of slavery evident in the poetry of 1862. Many poems focused on the writer's message of grief over the loss of a great leader or loved ones. Other articles supported preservation of the Union. In addition to poetry, biographical writings, travel narratives, and didactic writings popular during this time also reflected the shift from pre Civil War issues to issues about daily postwar life.

In poetry, what is most significant to note, however, is that the poetic output in 1865 shifted dramatically from poems depicting life during a period of slavery and bondage to language that celebrates life after emancipation. Much of the poetic verse lacked the language longing for freedom and imagery of freedom. None of the poems

published during 1865 promoted life in California, as was true three years earlier; however, a few travel narratives about life for blacks in California appeared in the *Elevator* of 1865.

Poetry

During its first year of publication in 1865, the *Elevator* published approximately fifteen poems. As stated earlier, some poems were reprints from other newspapers and that fact was noted parenthetically near the title of the poem, and others appeared to have been written by local writers. All of the poems communicated heartfelt issues of the community. Many expressed political and social themes about the inner feelings of African Americans and others who supported the liberation of blacks in America. Common poetic themes in the *Elevator* of 1865 centered on celebrating the Fourth of July, emancipation of slaves, the end of the Civil War, the loss of a great leader-- Abraham Lincoln--and other issues of death and loss. Many poems addressing the political or social climate of the day found their way into the black press regardless of ethnicity. The works of James Madison Bell and white poets such as Bayard Taylor and Eliza Pittsinger, expressing their concerns about the Civil War, the death of Abe Lincoln, and emancipation, were published on the front page of the *Elevator*. Many of these poems were consistent in form and style with the poems published in 1862 editions of the *Pacific Appeal*. Newspaper verse was generally not intent on forging new poetic trends but in getting messages across to a readership. Poetry in the newspapers often expressed deep emotions and experiences of the author, provided information to readers, or attempted to persuade readers about issues of the day.

Political poems were the most popular type of poem. One appears on the front page of the *Elevator's* the April 14, 1865 edition, Bayard Taylor's "Requiem In the North." This poem expresses Taylor's support for the North:

Speed swifter, Night! -wild Northern Night,
Whose feet the Arctic Islands know,
When stiffening breakers, sharp and white,
Gird the complaining shores of snow!
Send all thy winds to sweep the world
In addition, howl in mountain-passes far,
And hang thy banners, red and cold,
Against the shield of every star! (1-8)

In this poem, the "wild Northern Night" is a metaphor for the union army and its efforts to preserve the union. It communicates the strength of the union in its efforts to preserve America. The speaker writes that the north will hang the union flag in every state. To San Francisco's editors of the black press, an expression of strength of the union army in its efforts to combat the confederate south was welcomed. African American citizens living in San Francisco in 1865 were confronting issues of race that denied black men and women their voice, representation, and the vote in California. In 1865, poetry still expressed covertly the need to continue the struggle.

During the initial year of the *Elevator*, the newspaper published the works of popular San Francisco poet Eliza Pittsinger several times. Her poems often expressed political and/or social themes. She held public poetry readings in San Francisco that were often advertised in the *Elevator*. In the October 27, 1865 edition, the newspaper published "The Bagle" on its front page. Pittsinger's poem is a thirteen-stanza poem with imagery recalling E. A. Poe's "The Raven" and the significance of the Union. For example, lines from the seventh stanza:

Can our glorious Union sever, spreading now from shore to shore?
Long-cemented, mighty Union, towering up from shore to shore?
On the scroll was—Nevermore! (46-48)

The use of the word “Nevermore!” indicates strong feelings about severing the union. Interestingly this poem seems to use some of the same language found in E. A. Poe’s poem, “The Raven,” that was written several years earlier. This poem, like others by Pittsinger, expresses the desire to thwart the efforts of succession by the southern states. Eliza Pittsinger poem “Anniversary Ode” celebrating the freedom of the slaves, calls for freedmen to sing. This seven-stanza poem expresses the joy of freedom for the slaves and at the same time expresses anger towards the institution of slavery. As an abolitionist, she gained press coverage in the *Elevator* of her poetry reading engagements.

Let Freedmen of all hue and creed
In universal anthem trill
The name of him, who lived to speed
Three millions from the tyrant’s will!
Let freedmen sing, while foremen tell
In tones that mingle with the dust,
To other time, the cause that fell
Beneath a godless leader’s trust! (24-32)
(*Elevator* July 7, 1865)

Pittsinger’s tone captures the emotions felt by many American who opposed slavery as well as the joy expressed by all African Americans during this time.

Eliza Pittsinger’s writings, along with her picture, were included in one of the first anthologies of California literature, an 1893 collection titled, *The Story of the Files-- A Review of Californian Writers and Literature* by Ella Sterling Cummins. According to this publication, Pittsinger wrote poems about the themes of war. “Her verse is cast mostly in the moral instructive form” (Cummins 24). According to Cummins’s profile of

Pittsinger, very few of Pittsinger's poems were available at the time of the publication of the anthology, which explains why only one poem was published.

Political poet James Madison Bell wrote several poems for the *Elevator*. In a communication, the editor of the *Elevator* states that they chose to publish the works of James Madison Bell because he was a well-respected San Francisco black writer and speaker and because of his eloquence and appropriateness (April 21, 1865). During this time, the newspapers received an abundant amount of correspondence mourning the assassination of President Lincoln. In the 21 April edition, the editor of the *Elevator* wrote:

We have received several communications on the disastrous event which has recently startled the country, and which will send a thrill of painful agony throughout the civilized world, wherever freedom is loved and oppression hated-but the crowded state of our columns prevents their admission. Among them are some poetic compositions, which are very creditable. (*Elevator* April 21, 1865)

Philip Bell published several poems that expressed the grief felt by citizens of San Francisco's communities. One of James Madison Bell's poems titled "Poem," given by Bell at a reading on the evening of April 18, 1865 appeared on the front page of the April 21 edition of *Elevator* and focuses on themes of both mourning and protest. This long poem expresses the concerns of many Americans who mourned the death of Lincoln. Specifically, in the fifth stanza of the poem, the speaker feels the desire to exterminate the traitors from the land.

And we, in sight of earth and heaven,
On bended knee, with lifted hand,
Swear as we hope to be forgiven.
To drive foul treason from the land!
Henceforth we'll grant nor ask them quarter

Exterminate! Shall be our cry,
Fathers and sons, and wives and daughters!
Rebellion's hated brood shall die! (33-40)

Bell conveys the anger and deep sense of loss experienced by many Americans who supported President Abe Lincoln throughout the country. The language, imagery, and the use of the exclamation point at the end of several lines indicate the country's deep outrage over the assassination of Abe Lincoln—and over the war itself. The speaker attempts to persuade its readers about the need to expose and eliminate those who rebelled against the Union. It expresses not only anger but also an attempt to heal the wounds of loss within the community.

The sadness over the death of Abraham Lincoln was expressed through many different forms of literature; however, poetry was the more popular form published in both the *Pacific Appeal* and *Elevator*. With the Civil War ending and the loss of Abe Lincoln, expressions of jubilation, yet also sadness and grief were felt throughout San Francisco's black community and expressed in the *Elevator's* poetry.

Other social and political poems celebrate the emancipation of slaves. "The American Jubilee," written by J. L. Richmond and published in the August 25, 1865 *Elevator*, celebrates the emancipation of slaves. The first stanza expresses the joys of freedom felt by many in the African American communities of San Francisco:

The jubilee, the jubilee—
Hurrah! Hurray!
The Negroes from their bonds are free,
Hurrah! (1-4)

Then:

The welcome time has come at last:

We talk of slavery in the past,
And we feel gay to hear the glorious news,
Climb up the hills and mountains high,
Hurray! Hurray!
And let our voices rend the sky!
Hurray! (5-11)

This thirty-seven-stanza poem vividly expresses the happiness felt by America's slaves. No longer are African Americans writing about the possibilities of flying like an eagle or living free as a deer—metaphorically discussing the possibility of freedom--but are now finding the voice to celebrate “climbing up the hills and mountains high.” The poem depicts the accomplishment of freedom, the joy of winning the war, the role of slaves in fighting the war, as well as happiness that Lincoln emancipated the slaves.

“The Glorious Effects of Emancipation” by James Madison Bell, published in the October 20 edition, tells of the emancipation of slaves living in the British West Indies. In four, eight-line stanzas, Bell conveys the happiness felt by African Americans about the emancipation of slaves elsewhere in the world. It is easy to imagine the happiness felt by African Americans throughout the country for the emancipation of blacks living in slavery, but reading the many poems written during this time provides a greater appreciation for the freedom of thousands of people held in bondage through the heartfelt expressions of language depicting universal feelings of freedom and joy. Poems also addressed the importance of local social issues, specifically education. Miss Anne Dyer published “An Address to Children” in the July 28 edition of the *Elevator*. This five-stanza poem expresses the importance of school and calls on children from local communities to attend school:

Oh! Come ye wandering children,

Come and listen to my call,
Oh! Come unto the school house,
Be it either larger or small,
For a little education
Is better than none at all. (1-6)

In the last two lines, the speaker expresses the importance of some education, calling upon “wandering children” to get an education. The speaker reiterates the desire of black parents to secure an education for their own children. Published during the early development of schools for black children, this poem stresses the importance of a schoolhouse for black children, which eventually became a reality. San Francisco’s black parents wanted a school of their own for their children. During the 1860’s, African American children as well as Native American and Asian children attended segregated schools in California. Schools for black children were referred to as “Colored” schools. This poem demonstrates the extent to which poetry expresses and communicates important matters in the black communities of San Francisco.

As was also true in 1862, some poems were personal rather than political; some centered on the theme of the death of a friend or family member, expressing grief at a difficult time. A poem written by a resident of Sacramento and published in the September 22, 1865 edition of the *Elevator* expresses universal feelings of loss and grief: “Lines---On the Death of Mary Cromwell Yates” written by Annie Hyass. She writes about the loss of Mary Yates, possibly a child. The poem is a seven-stanza poem with an irregular rhyming pattern, which may indicate the difference in the grief felt by both parents of the poem’s subject—Mary Cromwell Yates. The following stanza expresses common feelings of loss on the part of parents as well as the writer herself:

Thy mother grieved to see thee go,
Thy father wept to part-
For thou was nearest to his soul,
And dearest to his heart;
And he at last can meet thee there,
When this frail life is o'er-
I almost now can see thee smile
To meet him on the shore. (40-48)

Readers feel the closeness between father and daughter. Although this poem does not indicate any particular racial significance for African Americans, it expresses a universal human commonality at the time of death of a loved one felt by all. Clearly, poets were still writing poems of universal importance for black publications.

During the initial years of the San Francisco's black news publication, both the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* published other non-political poems. Unlike the *Pacific Appeal*, however, the *Elevator* published few sentimental poems about love, separation, or religious expressions of God's wrath or purpose in the universe. In both newspapers, themes of sadness, freedom, and education were popular topics. Poems in the *Elevator* were more inclined to address the political themes of the day, the issues of the community, or the personal heartfelt issues of individuals. During the post war period, the black community experienced not only personal grief, of course, but also grief for those who died in the war, as was the case with many communities throughout the country—some poems published in the *Elevator* suggested that double intent.

By the end of October 1865, the number of poems published in the *Elevator* decreased, while the newspaper increased its political essays, communications and other journalistic writings that express ideas once expressed through poetry and short

narratives. - Many African American writers expressed viewpoints overtly, probably not feeling the need to mask political and social ideas in symbolic imagery.

Elegies and Travel Narratives in the *Elevator* Newspaper

The black newspaper was the main forum for conveying publicly the loss of a loved one or an outstanding citizen from its local communities. The *Elevator* often published literary genres other than poetry for expressing grief over the loss of a member of the community--such as a short letter, article, or obituary. In the May 5, 1865 edition of the *Elevator*, however, the editor published in column one on the front page a biographical sketch that celebrated the life of a recently deceased community leader, Henry H. Hawkins, a black San Franciscan who died at 70. "In Memoriam--A Biographical Sketch" reveals ancestral information about Henry Hawkins that was probably common to most descendants of slaves or freed slaves during that time. Henry Hawkins was born in 1795 in slavery and died in 1865 as a free man. The sketch also includes information about his father's role in the slave trade business: Henry Hawkins was the descendant of Sir John Hawkins, a white man from England. This narrative begins with the story of how John Hawkins raided a village in Africa on the coast of Guinea, wishing to capture and sell hundreds of slaves in Hispaniola. Later in the sketch, a complete description of the birth and life of Henry Hawkins, his travels, and his life in San Francisco is included. It explains how later in life Henry Hawkins bought his freedom and that of his family after moving to San Francisco earlier in the century. This sketch provides a rare account of the life of a man, who was born in slavery and who, in 1865, lived as a free man in San Francisco. This account was published as a eulogy of

his life--a celebration stressing the life struggles of Henry Hawkins and his ability to obtain freedom from slavery. Henry is depicted as an exemplar, a model husband, father, and citizen who serves as a leader in his family and the black community of San Francisco.

As in 1862, travel narratives remained popular. However, in 1865, many narratives were written in the form of letters as opposed to essays as seen in the *Pacific Appeal* of 1862. Writers often imbedded short stories and poems in letters to the editor. Letters may have been the common form for writing by new writers who desired to publish their experiences in the black newspaper since the work of established writers such as James Madison Bell were not published as letters to the editor. Many travel narratives are similar in tone and theme when compared to narratives published in the *Pacific Appeal* three years earlier. The narratives in the *Elevator* of 1865 describe the beauty of land, political or social concerns; as well as in some cases express the comfortable living conditions of African Americans. One expressed the writer's feelings about the City of Sacramento while describing the political conditions, stressing the need to address civil right issues. Such is the case in a letter to the editor from a Sacramento writer on July 27, 1865. The writer states,

The weather in our city is beautiful, 104 degrees in the shade, and on the increase [...]. We the people of Sacramento are not only having warm weather, but we are having a warm time generally. The primary election on the 22nd was not over encouraging for the not very sanguine candidate for the U.S. Senate. (August 4, 1865)

In "A Pleasant Visit to San Jose," published in the August 4 edition of the *Elevator*, the author describes the beauty of San Jose as well as accounts of life in San Francisco and the desire for a school for black children.

As we emerge from the confounding din of our commercial metropolis (San Francisco) and the fleeting cars bore us out upon the bosom of the beautiful valley of San Jose, as it spreads out its rural arms, as a welcome embrace for thousands of happy yeomanry, while it kisses with fruitful lips our majestic bay.

In this short narrative, the writer also discusses support for the establishment of a state school or High School Academy for black students in San Jose as opposed to San Francisco. These two narratives are examples of the type of communications written by local black residents about their travels and life in San Francisco and its surrounding cities. The *Elevator* of 1865 published a few communications in the form of letters that included short narratives describing a writer's travels throughout the Bay Area.

Essays and Letters

Most nonfiction of 1865 focused on political issues of the day: suffrage, reconstruction, civil rights, education/literacy, loss of love ones, and the death of President Lincoln. Many of these pieces are journalistic in nature and not creative nonfiction works. In addition to essays discussing the political issues of the day, the *Elevator* also included articles about literary activities and events of interest to its black citizens. Many of these events included poetry readings and recitals. In 1862, the community focus was on church events and the formation of literary groups as a cultural building activity. By 1865, the *Elevator* expanded to include literary readings throughout the city. Reading lounges, where people went to read the newspaper, books, and view

art, were also established. One article in the *Elevator* October 27, 1865 edition discusses a favorite lounging place as the “Homestead depot of literature.”

In addition to writing about favorite places to visit in the city, the *Elevator* promoted social and cultural development through its letters to the editor. These letters promoted various community activities, cultural events, writing contests, literary circles, and upcoming speakers. Even journalistic literature such as letters to the editors requesting books and dictionaries for the library indicate the social growth and literacy of the San Francisco’s black communities.

Essays about literary authors were also popular. The black press published many short essays expressing opinions about the works of popular writers such as the November 24 issue, which published an article titled, “Anecdote of Alexander Dumas.” It was common to read articles about the works of Alexander Dumas, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglas, and others in both the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* during the 1860s. Articles about the works of William Shakespeare were also published in the black newspapers in an effort to appeal to those who were highly educated and familiar with the literary canon.

In summary, the *Elevator* provided the community with an additional newspaper for reporting local and national events. Both the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal* were also responsible for the evolution of literature specific to its community of readers. Through publishing literary writings by black and white writers of poetry, a biographical sketch, travel narratives, and essays promoting literacy for African Americans living in San Francisco, news publications became essential for building culture and literature

specific to the characteristics of San Francisco. The black press in San Francisco through publishing its own newspaper provided an alternative to the white press and its coverage of the black community. San Francisco's black newspapers provided "The black and white communities of San Francisco with contrasting views" (Snorgrass 308).

Chapter 3: Literary Writings of the *Elevator* and *Pacific Appeal*, 1875

Introduction and Background

For the African American community of San Francisco, the 1870s was a time of peace and “Quietude” as defined in the *Pacific Appeal* in the March 20, 1875 edition. With the passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870 and the Civil Rights Act of 1875, black men gained the right to vote, and African Americans gained equal rights in public places, at least in theory. Through the Civil Rights legislation, it was illegal to discriminate against a person because of race in public facilities. However, Jim Crow practices and policies as a backlash to the Civil Rights gains began spreading throughout the country by the end of the decade. Even though according to the newspapers of 1870s, Jim Crow practices were not as evident in San Francisco as elsewhere in the country, San Francisco’s African American news publications lobbied for new laws to protect the rights of black citizens, and pushed for changes in policies and practices, primarily in education and political organizations. During the 1870s, African Americans in San Francisco enjoyed the benefits of the national policies that insured the rights of black citizens. Black newspapers reflected the shift in political and social issues by a change in the type of writings printed and a change in the themes of these writings. Ten years after the beginning of both newspapers, the trend in journalism shifted from discussions of slavery and emancipation to civil rights and equality. In addition to the political gains and a shift in the focus of journalistic writings, changes in literary writings published in the newspapers were evident through out the 1870s. Literary writings shifted from short

stories and poetry and some didactic tales to an increasing number of didactic short narratives and tales.

The African American newspapers' news articles focused on personal, social, and political issues of the day. During 1870, the fight for black suffrage was accomplished. On February 3, 1870, Congress signed into law the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted African American men the right to vote by declaring that the rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Interestingly, California did not ratify the Fifteenth Amendment until 1962. According to historical references, in 1870, California lawmakers were afraid that this Amendment would give Chinese people the same rights as whites. Essays debating the issues of civil rights for Native Americans and Chinese people living in California were often published in the black newspapers of San Francisco.

Another important political influence affecting the black community came from the national trend towards granting full civil rights to America's black citizens. Within the first three months of 1875, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act on March 1, 1875, which gave all persons, regardless of race full and equal enjoyment of public transportation, and accommodations at inns, theaters, and other amusement places. However, in California, African Americans gained access to public transportation, specifically trolleys, in 1868 through a California Supreme Court action brought on by San Francisco's well-respected "Mammie" Mary Ellen Pleasant, who became known in the 1960's as the "Mother of Civil Rights in California." Mary Pleasant also fought for

the civil rights of blacks in accommodations of hotels, employment, business, and real estate. The Civil Rights Act and other reconstruction laws designed to give African Americans equality in the political and social environments were found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1883. However, in the 1870s, the debate about how to change local and statewide existing practices and policies so that blacks could benefit from the Civil Rights Act continued in the issues of San Francisco's black newspapers.

African Americans in San Francisco and surrounding communities celebrated the new civil rights gains. In 1875, the *Pacific Appeal* ran articles calling for large public meetings and demonstrations in celebration of the national policies, which recognized and protected the rights of African Americans throughout the country. One article notes: "It is contemplated by the leading colored men of this city to have a Fifteenth Amendment and Civil Rights demonstration in one of the public halls of this city about the last of March or the first part of April in honor of the passage of these measures" (*Pacific Appeal* March 6, 1875). To African Americans in San Francisco and surrounding communities, this legislation meant an end to legalized discrimination and injustice. Black citizens also sought equality in schools throughout Northern California. Nevertheless, for many African Americans it was a time for cautious celebration, as described in a March 20, 1875 article, "Political Quietude": "Since the passage of the Civil Rights Bill the political world has suddenly gone into temporary quietude. Calm always precedes storms" (*Pacific Appeal* March 20, 1875). In the April 9, 1875 edition, one black resident felt that it was too soon to celebrate and expressed his concern about

holding celebrations for the new legislation. This expression of celebration with caution prevailed in journalistic essays.

Both black newspapers of San Francisco continued to articulate to the black community of San Francisco important issues and solutions for achieving equality of life during the period of Reconstruction; however, both news publications also experienced changes during this period. According to historian William Snorgrass, the *Pacific Appeal* continued the weekly run throughout the 1870s. In 1879, proprietor Peter Anderson sold the newspaper to William Carter, the assistant editor, who closed the newspaper's shop in 1882. During the representative year of 1875, over twenty-five extant *Pacific Appeal* editions are available. On the other hand, there are only eleven extant weekly editions of the *Elevator* from 1870-1877. Only one extant edition of the *Elevator* is available for the representative year of 1875. Based on the extant editions found at the Library of Congress, San Francisco Public Library, and various University Libraries, the *Elevator* newspaper continued printing the weekly run into the 1890s.

Anticipating changes due to the Civil Rights laws and anticipated gains in San Francisco, the reporting staff of the *Pacific Appeal* grew in 1875. Approximately twenty-five additional agents reported the news about San Francisco's black community to other communities throughout Southern California, the Pacific Northwest, United States, and Canada--compared to approximately ten hired in the first year of the *Pacific Appeal*. By 1875, both newspapers included information about life beyond America, life for blacks living in Haiti, Barbados, Panama, and other South American countries as well as life in Europe.

Compared to the earlier years of 1862 and 1865, San Francisco's black newspapers of 1875 became less focused on the creative arts and more militant in reporting about social and political issues. Specifically the *Pacific Appeal* in 1875 changed its purpose statement and its banner, emphasizing the importance of civil rights for black residents of San Francisco. In the January 9, 1875 issue of the *Pacific Appeal*, an article ran advertising its banner change from 1865, "A Weekly Journal Devoted to the Interest of the People of Color," to the 1875 banner, "Truth Crushed to Earth will Rise Again." This change reflects the continued emphasis of the newspaper on political and social equality of African Americans. In addition, it is important to remember that during this time, many Reconstruction gains were under reconsideration in the national discussion, which the newspaper often covered in its journalistic writings.

The change in the *Pacific Appeal's* banner suggests a more aggressive approach to addressing issues of inequality in San Francisco's political and social arenas. A dozen years earlier, the editor of the newspaper of 1862 stated in an article, "We have nothing to disguise; we enter the field boldly, fearlessly, but with dignity and calmness to appeal for the rights of the Colored citizen of this state" (*Pacific Appeal* April 5, 1862). The newspaper reported the truth about situations in order to bring about change rather than to wait calmly for change to happen. In an article about its purpose on April 5, 1862, the *Pacific Appeal* noted that the paper was devoted to the moral, intellectual, and political advancement of the community. This purpose statement did not change, but the various types of articles published in the black newspapers of 1875 reflect a more aggressive approach in reporting the news.

For example, “Our Schools,” printed in the January 2, 1875 edition, reprimands the black community for its apathy in addressing issues confronting the community. The writer states, “But those days of fear and trembling and servitude and dependence are gone now, a new era has dawned, and the battles that others have fought for us we must now fight ourselves.” This article addresses the issues of access to schools by African American children, which was a very important issue for San Francisco’s African American community as well as communities of Sacramento and other cities. Members of these communities organized the press and other community resources to help achieve educational equality. In addition, the May 29, 1875 edition includes an article about a speech given by Col. Martin Delaney on civil rights for African Americans, its definition, and history. This article informs black citizens about the meaning of the Civil Rights Act and how it affects them. In this same issue, readers also express their opinions about the need for a more aggressive attitude. Newspaper reader J. L. wrote a letter to the editor stating that it was time for blacks in California to wake up and press for changes. He writes: “I thought I would try to help wake up some of our colored citizens.” The *Pacific Appeal* under the leadership of Peter Anderson continued lobbying for civil rights and printed examples of civil rights activities in other cities in the effort of achieving equality for African Americans.

In short, the 1870s was a time of change for the black press. Important local social and political issues became the focus of San Francisco’s black press. The most prevalent political and social issues discussed in both African American newspapers are 1) inequality in the school systems in San Francisco and the surrounding cities and 2)

lack of local and statewide black political representation and participation in political organizations. The national trend towards repealing civil rights gains and adopting Jim Crow policies also became the focus of the newspapers. The newspaper also printed many letters from its readers in its communications sections of the newspapers. Essays and letters printed in the newspapers indicate that many African Americans began to address issues of participating fully in American life. Essays of the previous decade that once called for freedom from slavery and the need for immediate emancipation now stressed Reconstruction issues of the need for gaining black political representation and obtaining civil rights for black citizens.

Even though the emphasis during the 1870s was on social and political issues, imaginative writing continued appearing in the black newspapers of San Francisco. However, emphasis shifted from poetry to didactic short stories. By 1875, didactic self-help literature became increasingly important to the readers of the black newspapers. Didactic essays focused on aspects of family life, homemaking, individual moral behavior, temperance, and community living. Specifically, didactic writings stressed the experiences of life such as the day-to-day concerns of raising children, marriage, stories about love and romance achieved, household decisions, and issues important to women readers. The focus on topics of interest to women may have to do with the high literacy rate of black women. According to historian Willi Coleman, "In the 1860s, when the overwhelming majority of African Americans were illiterate, 74 percent of California's black female population could read and write" (De Graff, Mulroy, Taylor 102). Coleman also found that in California, "Three decades later, a larger percentage of black than

white girls attended school for six or more months per year” (102). Coleman attributes the development of culture, social life, and concern for education and the development of the black middle class in San Francisco to this high degree of literacy.

In 1875, the *Elevator* continued publishing poetry as well as short stories and didactic short essays on the front page of its weekly (at least as apparent from the one extant issue—other issues from the decade tell the same story); however, the *Pacific Appeal* ceased publishing poetry and exclusively printed didactic short essays and narratives. The *Elevator* also published a few poems and stories composed in letters to the editor written by the writer Jennie Carter living in Nevada County California. From 1867-1875, poems, stories, and didactic narratives in Carter’s letters expressed her life experiences both past and present and daily events living with colorful residents in the local community of Mud Hill. By the 1870s, many of the other poems published in the *Elevator* no longer stressed the yearning for love, freedom from slavery, and mourning the loss of/or separation from a loved one, but instead the poems of the 1870s stressed social issues of poverty, tales of a local character, sorrows hidden deep in the heart, the cycle of life in nature, the role of the newspaper, the possibility of returning to Africa, and a celebration of the 15th Amendment. In short, poetry spoke more openly of contemporary social issues and private lives. This trend in imaginative writing of the 1870s continued into the 1880s.

Across the country, slave narratives, biographies, memoirs, and life stories providing personal testimonies of slave life and experiences after slavery were popular during Reconstruction. African American writers after the Civil War wrote their life

stories and experiences in narratives. For example, such works written by black writers such as *Life and Adventures of James Williams* were popular nationally during Reconstruction. According to Hazel Ervin's *African American Literary Criticism 1773-2000*, reconstruction literature depicting black stereotypes were also popular among writers such as Irwin Russell and Joel Chandler Harris. However, during the 1870s, San Francisco's black press did not publish many excerpts of popular African American works. Although, based on a letter from "Semper Fidelis" published in the May 17, 1873 edition, the writer expresses gratitude to the editor about publishing excerpts from a popular book by Porter and Coates, the *Underground Rail Road*. According to Researcher Eric Gardner, Philip Bell promoted this book and often published excerpts of it in the *Elevator* during the 1870s (Gardner 105).

From 1867 to 1875, a resident by the name of "Ann J. Trask" of Mud Hill in Nevada County California near the Bay Area wrote many letters to the editor of the *Elevator*. Many of these letters include stories of both fiction and nonfiction and a few poems. Interestingly, researcher Eric Gardner editor of *Jennie Carter- A black Journalist of the Early West* discovered that the name "Ann Trask" was another "semi-fictional persona for Jennie Carter. She was recorded as M. Jennie Carter in the 1870 and 1880 federal censuses from Nevada County, California" (Gardner IX). Carter wrote letters to the *Elevator* using the pseudonyms Semper Fidelis and D.D. Carter (her husband's initials), in addition to Ann J. Trask. In her first letter, Mrs. Trask wrote to Phillip A. Bell saying:

Mr. Editor: I have been a reader of your excellent paper for some time, and thank you for your efforts on behalf of our people. Now our children

and grandchildren are readers, and to encourage reading, [you should] have in each number a short story for them. If you like the idea, and think my scribbling any account, I will write for you. Ann J.Trask. (Gardner 3)

According to Gardner's work, Jennie Carter wrote seventy-five letters, ranging from communications about current events, short stories, and poems between June 8, 1867 and December 19, 1874. In her letters, Ann discusses many of her ideas about planning for upcoming events such as the state jubilee to celebrate the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment; political issues—for example in 1873 she wrote a letter about the Republican Convention and the Chinese experience; stories about children and animals; and nonfiction narratives about events of slavery, such as a mother and child traveling on the underground railroad. Of the seventy-five letters, four letters include a poem. During the 1870s, Ann Trask wrote about twenty letters and included two stanzas of a popular poem in one letter of concern about the politics in California. The poem is about Queen Victoria's invitation to African Americans to relocate in Canada.

Other than the stories written by Jennie Carter, very few short stories were published in the black newspapers of 1875. Of the few stories that were published, one is about a mulatto protagonist and another about the struggles of a husband to buy his wife a dress. For the most part the didactic and literary writings of poems and narratives printed in both black newspapers stressed social issues directly relevant to California's African American residents, and in a couple of instances, these poems were overtly political. More commonly, however, political concerns were expressed in letters and short essays addressing black suffrage, political participation, and educational issues. Literary writings expressed the hopes and challenges faced by both individuals and families.

Poetry

By 1875, the *Pacific Appeal* published no poems, and other imaginative writings, whereas the *Elevator* published a few poems and short stories. The *Elevator* ceased publishing biographical and travel narratives and information on literary groups.

Between 1870 and 1877, only eleven editions of the *Elevator* newspaper exist. In the extant newspapers, seven poems and three Longfellow sonnets were printed, so it seems clear that poetry was still popular in this paper, although far fewer poems were published. Compared to the earlier decade, the newspaper editions of the 1870's print about one poem per edition, whereas in the early years of the newspaper several poems were printed in each edition. Of the seven, five are printed on the front page. Two poems are printed within the pages of the edition. These poems are about a variety of topics such as celebrating the 15th Amendment, returning to Africa, responding to beggars, appreciating the natural cycle of trees, and a character in a mining town.

In March 1870, the *Elevator* published two political poems written by Mrs. C. S. Davis on the front page of its weekly run. One poem expresses the emotions felt by many in response to the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment and the importance of celebrating this national event. In an effort to celebrate black suffrage in American, the writer expresses feelings of joy and elation felt by many in Bay Area African American communities. The second poem printed responds to a popular national political movement calling for black citizens to leave America and establish a colony in Africa.

Mrs. Davis' second poem published in the March 11, 1870 newspaper titled "Return of Afric's Sons" was published by request and noted after the title of the poem.

C. S. Davis, a local writer, expresses a common desire of many African Americans who believed in returning to Africa to establish a colony. The speaker dreams of leaving a place of pain and seeks a place of freedom and security. She writes about traveling across the seas from America to Africa. Once again, consistent with other poems written during this century, the speaker conveys the peace and joy felt when taking such a journey in imagery of nature:

Blow western winds and well the sails,
And waft us o'er the ocean's vales-
Behind us fades the distant lea,
Before us spreads the rolling sea.

Gladly we leave the isle of pains,
Our cruel lords and servile chains;
Allured by home and all its charms,
We hasten to the land of palms. (1-8)

It is interesting to note that the editor wrote his personal point of view about traveling to Africa at the end of the poem: "We dissent from the sentiment contained in the above lines, which if carried to its legitimate conclusion would lead to colonization. Ed EL." It is clear that the editor strongly objected to African Americans leaving America and establishing a place in Africa for America's black citizens. This poem expresses the desire of a few African Americans at that time and conveys the theme of freedom, acceptance, and the desire for a better life in another country.

Two other poem address social issues; one, responds to a question about the role of the newspaper and the other to the needs of a beggar. In the October 10, 1874 edition of the *Elevator*, the editor published on the front page a poem titled, "What is a Newspaper?" representing the editor's point of view about the role of the newspaper. In

the poem of 1874, the editor's response can apply to any newspaper publication and is not limited to the role of the black press. The editor writes, "To the question from a child, 'What is a newspaper?' the Dublin *General Advertiser* gives the following reply:

Organs that gentlemen play
To answer the taste of the day.
Whatever it be,
They hit on the key,
And pipe in full concert away. (1-5)

In this nine-stanza poem, the speaker answers the question using a different topic indicated in the first line of each stanza. In stanza two, the speaker answers the question with further information:

News from all countries and climes,
Advertisements, essays, and rhymes,
Missed up with all sorts
Of (f) lying reports,
And published at regular times. (6-10)

Stanza three discusses "Articles able and wise" in which the speaker acknowledges that the editor understands the articles, but the reader often does not understand what may be logical to the editor. Stanza four examines "Statistics, reflections, and reviews" as scraps of information to review and debate by those intrigued by the data; and the last stanza nine ends the poem with "The price of cattle and grain." This stanza notes that some information such as the price of goods and directions for digging a drain would take too long to explain.

Printing a poem about the newspaper was common in the initial years of San Francisco's black newspapers, with two newspapers competing for financial support by the black community. In the *Elevator's* April 1865 edition, a poem about the purpose of

the newspaper also appeared on the front page. Several readers over the life of the newspaper wrote letters to the editor and short essays about the role of the newspaper or its importance to its readers.

Another poem, “A Lesson” (author unknown) reprinted from the *Buffalo Courier* and printed on the front page of August 1, 1874 edition of the *Elevator*, gives the writer’s philosophy about the importance of responding appropriately to a beggar in need. This poem expresses the black community’s response to the problem of poverty experienced by some of its struggling families. The cultural significance of this poem lies in the religious language and the compassionate response at the end of the poem. In the first of six stanzas, the writer states:

We cannot always be giving;
The woman has come again;
She has such a whining story
Of hunger, or cold or pain;
She wearies with petitions;
Her Johnny is out of a place,
Her children are sick with hunger,
I tire of her listless face. (1-8)

The speaker is clearly annoyed with this beggar. By the end of the poem, however, the speaker shows humanity to a woman who is destitute and must beg in order to feed her children. The last stanza lines 3-5, “The lowliest soul may be/ Ample of priceless treasures, / That only a God can see.” suggests to readers that it is important to remember that the beggar woman is a “priceless treasure of God” and must be treated carefully. References about God and the need for compassion in the case of this woman depict the religious values and attitude of African Americans during this time. Once again, in this poem, race or culture is not a factor, but the poem reminds black readers about the need

to show charity to a person in need. The speaker addresses how the African American community should respond with humanity following Christian principles to a member of their own community.

Many poems depict issues common to women. "The Lesson" is about a woman who must support her children. Many women probably found this poem interesting. Historian Elizabeth McHenry states in her work *Forgotten Readers Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* that given the high literacy of women, many more women wrote poems and stories for the newspapers. Three of the five poems published were written by a woman and/or about a woman (not including the Longfellow sonnets). According to critic Cheryl Walker, "A number of women's poems from this period assume the persona of a simple character ... whose concerns, like the slave mother's, represent a critique of the larger society" (37). In the poem, "The Lesson," we see this simple character of the beggar woman and an ordinary person's resistance to poverty. The poem critiques those who lack compassion for a beggar woman seeking help for her children from strangers without knowing whether she will in fact find the help needed.

A poem about a local character was printed in the *Elevator* on February 11, 1870. A reprint from the *Overland Monthly*, it depicts a tale about a common local miner, Jim Wild. In this poem, a miner friend is searching for Jim in a saloon and has a conversation with a person in the saloon. The editor notes: "The miner enters a saloon in search of his friend, and the interview is thus related in mining lingo" (*Elevator* February 2, 1870). Based on the sixth stanza, Jim may have been a black man, who disappeared and may

have been sold. The poem illustrates the friendship between Jim and (one can assume) white miners. The editor's comments clearly indicate the reason for printing this poem: "We find the following quaint lines in the current number of *Overland Monthly*. They can scarcely be dignified with the title of 'Poem' but is a true picture of early California mining life." Jim was a common character in mining towns. "Jim was a favorite at the bar—almost every mining camp had one such" (February 2, 1870). Obviously, many people in San Francisco who were familiar with California mining towns understood the protagonist "Jim" in this poem. This is an early example of local color writing, popular in the late nineteenth century.

In addition to political and social poems, a few poems about nature were published in the August 28, 1875 edition of the *Elevator*. "Before the Leaves Fall" (author unknown) is printed on the front page in column one, a poem about the natural life cycle of trees. The anonymous writer illustrates this cycle through personification of a tree's leaves. The leaves referred to as "we" in this poem show the life cycle of a tree, for example, "We will wear the colors of all the earth, /until we pass away" (2:3). This poem figuratively relates to the human life cycle and the historical issues of the time. It covertly suggests feelings of the past and a sense of calmness during the twelve years after the Civil War. This poem follows the imagery of nature's elements and human experiences often used in the romantic poems of the early nineteenth century. The imagery depicts man and nature in sync. The cycle of the trees in the forest represents the human cycle of life.

In the first stanza, the speaker asks if the trees are stirred by nature's aging cycle of a tree's leaves. In the second stanza, the trees accept the loss of its leaves, and by the last stanza, the speaker gazes with appreciation while remembering the early stages of the tree's life cycle reflecting on man's cycle of life:

I wonder if oak and maple,
Willow and elm and all,
Are stirred at heart by the coming
Of the day their leaves must fall.
Do they think of the yellow whirlwind?
Or of the crimson spray,
That shall be when chill November
Bears all the leaves away?

"If die we must," the leaflets
Seem one by one to say,
"We will wear the colors of all the earth,
Until we pass away.
No eyes shall see us falter;
And before we lay it down
We'll wear in the sight of all the earth
The year's most kingly crown."

So, trees of the stately forest,
And trees by the trodden way,
You are kindling into glory
This soft, Autumnal day.
And we, who gaze, remember
That more than all they lost,
To hearts and trees together
May come through ripening frost. (1-24)

This poem clearly captures the feelings and struggles of oppression felt by many African Americans in the 1870s. The cycle of change in the life of a tree compares with the loss felt in the human heart; yet, humans can sustain loss and can survive. The hope of a people for a better future is captured in nature's setting. The speaker expresses the human struggle in line five: "And we, who gaze, remember that more than all they lost."

The trees at dusk depict the themes of surviving life's cycle and remembering the beauty of life through nature. The imagery of the ripening frost suggests the "ripening" events in the lives of people.

Nature is the subject of another poem published on the front page of the *Elevator's* April 7, 1877 edition. In the four stanza poem, "Midnight" by O.C. the speaker notes the peace and tranquility in nature:

All around the "sable goddess"
Holds her court in dreamy rest;
Wraps one-half the world in slumber.
Then no fears the mind infests. (9-12)

The speaker depicts peace through imagery of restfulness and sleep. Then in the last line the speaker notes that in this slumber, sorrow escapes one's view until sunlight appears. Rest in this poem depicts a way to escape sorrow for a time. In the post-war "quietude," an end to struggle is welcomed.

Following "Midnight," in this same edition of the *Elevator*, the editor printed three Longfellow sonnets: "Nature," "In the Church Yard at Tarrytown," and "Eliot's Oak." Through natural imagery, each sonnet captures a common human experience and emotions, such as the guidance of a mother with her child and the burial place of a respected writer. Even though, these poems are not significant for explaining a situation unique to the African American experience in San Francisco, they continue to show human struggles by comparing human loss with natural loss--a safe way of evaluating the life of African Americans, which is consistent with poems published in the 1862 and 1865 newspapers, where the conditions of slavery were expressed through imagery of captivity and enclosure. In addition, each poem is an example of the longing to escape

from political and social upheaval. The Longfellow sonnets express experiences of finding sanctuary in nature.

Didactic Narratives and Essays, and Short Stories

During the 1870s, both the *Elevator* and *Pacific Appeal* published several didactic short stories about real life events, which often addressed social issues, and also few short stories. The *Elevator* published five such narratives in the newspapers during this time. One such narrative published in the August 28, 1875 of the *Elevator* on the front page in column three is titled “A Girl of Spirit.” This narrative begins with providing background information of the circumstances about the family and maid in the story:

A few weeks since a lady residing on Cass Avenue became minus a cook, and forthwith proceeded to advertise for one. The day following the insertion of her advertisement the lady was agreeably surprised by the appearance of a smart, good-looking girl, dressed in becoming style and not lacking in good looks and evident breeding, who applied for the place. (*Elevator* August 28, 1875)

This narrative tells the story of a young girl who ran away from her home in Montreal and relocated in San Francisco. Once arriving in San Francisco, the young woman secured a job as a maid in the home of a family living on Cass Avenue. The narrative describes an unusual young woman who is a “smart, good-looking girl, dressed in becoming styles” (*Elevator* August 28, 1875). As the family cook, this young girl is valued by the family. Later the family becomes aware of her exceptional music ability and inquires into her past. Soon they find out that she was from an upper class family from Montreal, and she ran away from her father in an effort to avoid marrying a man her father had chosen. In the end, her father was notified of her whereabouts, and they were reunited after he realizing his mistakes.

The narrative suggests that the young girl is a mulatto, and stories with a mulatto protagonist were popular during and after slavery. Even though mulattos were often the offspring of the slave owner, they were not exempt from harsh treatment and abuse experienced by many slaves. In 1875, with slavery abolished in America, a narrative about a young girl who escapes a tragic ending and finds a happy home is uplifting, a story about adapting to life in a city far away from her family. Furthermore, the reconciliation with her father suggests the power of patriarchal persuasion and adaptability—he sees the error of his ways, as any good father should. This narrative shows a girl who is highly appreciated because of her ability to cook and her hidden extraordinary music abilities. Once the family realizes that she is an accomplished pianist, they remove her from her job as a cook and then treat her as a guest in their home. This narrative shows the kindness of the family once the girl reveals the truth about her past, the desire of the family to reconcile the girl with her father, and the need to bring about a change of heart within the girl’s father. The girl is reunited with her family and the patriarchal order is reestablished.

This narrative reveals the trend of realism in literary writings depicted during this period. The newspaper published many stories during this time depicting real life experiences, which show how individuals survived or coped with life’s diversities.

Another narrative published in the last column on the front page of the August 28, 1875 edition of the *Elevator* entitled “She Seemed Willing” by Max Adeler is a humorous story about courting. The story addresses a common theme of courting between a young woman and a single man who has a house and would like to find a

companion to live with him. In this story, the protagonist, Peter Lamb, wishes to convince Henrietta Sinnickson to consider him as a life partner. It begins with Peter Lamb asking Herietta if she ever feels lonely, and if she ever wants someone in her life to make her happy. When he asks, “Do you ever feel that way?” She responds, “Yes, Mr. Lamb, [...] sometimes, I confess, I do have such a feeling.” From that moment, the story unfolds with Peter Lamb asking Henrietta to consider a life with him. This humorous and romantic story depicts a universal notion of love as it reveals the desire of Henrietta and Peter to find companionship. It shows the newspaper’s desire to provide its readers with humorous and interesting romantic stories about life that every reader can understand. It is not didactic, but it does show the interest in romance common to many readers during the 1870s.

Another short narrative printed in the second column on the front page of the August 28, 1875 edition and titled “Economy in the Household” is a reprint from the *Brunswicker* newspaper. In this narrative, Mrs. McGoochen announces to her husband that she will discharge the hired girl and do household chores herself. Given the reference of “the girl,” it is presumed that the household helper is a black woman. From the work of Henry Douglas Daniels, it is clear that whites in San Francisco also sought jobs as maids but in business establishments. In the narrative, Mrs. McGoochen says later that she would like to save money by discharging the girl so that her husband will buy the rug that she has requested for so long. This narrative illustrates the common desire of women to beautify their homes. During the 1870s, having a maid was a sign of social status in the white upper class community, but new furnishings were important too.

The story ends without revealing the girl's plight or the attitude of the family about household help, and it reveals that having the ability to hire servants was an indicator of wealth and success; however, for those with limited discretionary funds, it meant going without some desired furnishings. In this case, Mrs. McGoochen is willing to forgo the maid and do household chores herself in order to purchase a rug for her home.

Interestingly, the desire to furnish one's home beautifully with furniture was a goal of the aesthetic movement of the nineteenth century. Beautiful furniture indicated the wealth of a family.

Also, in the August 28, 1875 edition on the front page, another narrative, "One Right of a Wife," addresses the role of women in determining household issues such as raising children, purchasing clothing, and washing clothes. This narrative depicts a husband questioning the wife's spending practices.

Other editions of the *Elevator* include short, one-column narratives about the household, family life, and child rearing, and other situations commonly experienced by women during this time. Although the *Elevator* published several short narratives about issues common to women, the paper did not publish many articles supporting the early efforts of women's rights. Clearly, propriety is a concern, educating black readers about proper etiquette and conduct. Another common element of the stories printed in black newspapers is concern for proper living; many articles answer questions or simply share humorous events about life with a little satire. These stories entertained the reader; however, most of the narratives conveyed common experiences with a sense of verisimilitude.

By 1875, publishing “self help” short narratives--aphoristic, didactic, and humorous in nature--became a greater emphasis of the black newspapers. During this year, several articles printed in the *Pacific Appeal* and *Elevator* addressed a variety of topics and often appeared on the front page of the newspaper. In some cases, the writings may have been based upon true events or at least events that appear plausible. Many of the articles do not address issues of race or characteristics of African American literary writings. Several of these articles are in fact fables or clearly fictional events using hyperbole, comic relief, understatement, and strong imagery. All address an issue of personal conduct, family life, or provide a solution to problems of life in urban and rural communities. In most cases, the newspapers omitted the identification of the authors.

Several short narratives address moral issues by using fictional characters to convey a lesson for readers. For example, in the January 16, 1875 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*, buried at the bottom of page two following letters to the editor and local announcements, a narrative titled the “Fox and Thief” tells the story of Mr. Fox when he meets a thief. The moral of the story is not to befriend a thief. This narrative appears to have been written by a local writer since the word “reprint” is not included before or after the narrative. This story begins with: “One day Edward Fox went with his brother Charles James Fox to witness the first balloon ascent made in England. There was a great crowd, and Fox detected a pick-pocket attempting to relieve him of his watch.” Edward Fox confronted a man about trying to steal his watch. In the conversation, the man said that he needed food for his family, so Edward felt compassion for the man by

giving him a guinea. Later Edward discovers his watch missing, and Charles Fox witnessing the theft said:

[...] I saw your friend take it. Edward replied, Saw him take it and made no attempt to stop him? At the end of the story, Charles Fox replies, you and he appeared to be on such good terms with each other that I do not like to interfere. (*Pacific Appeal* January 16, 1875)

The lesson is not to befriend a stranger who is a thief, for he may steal from you.

Interestingly, the writer uses the last name Fox in a story about a thief. In addition, Edward Fox, the brother of Charles Fox, observes the theft yet fails to stop it. This leaves the reader wondering who really is the thief. The universal problem of thievery probably was an issue in San Francisco since the gold rush days, and by 1875, theft may still been an issue in many of San Francisco's communities.

The *Elevator* also published another interesting didactic essay in the February 6, 1875 edition titled "Slander." The author gathered a collection of eighteen quotes by well-known writers or philosophers on the topic of slander. For example, "Slander soaks into the mind as water into low marshy places, where it becomes stagnant sad offensive-Confucius." Clearly, the editor felt a compendium of thoughts about slander was necessary at this time. The newspaper served the community by reminding black citizens of their civic and social responsibilities.

By 1875, black newspapers recognized its influence in black communities and promoted moral behavior. "The Newspaper as a Moralist" published in the October 30, 1875 *Pacific Appeal* promotes the newspaper as a resource for addressing moral issues and providing instructions for solving problems:

What cautions more likely to be effective against gambling and profligacy, than the mournful relations of an execution, or the fate of a despairing suicide? What finer lecture on the necessity of economy than the auction of estates, houses, and furniture? Only take a newspaper, and consider it, well pay for it, and it will instruct thee. (*Pacific Appeal* October 3, 1875)

This short essay promotes the newspaper as a resource for information that may be useful for solving everyday problems.

In the April 3, 1875 edition of the *Pacific Appeal* newspaper, two didactic narratives give worthwhile advice to readers. One short essay “Boys, go Home” gives advice to boys about visiting parent(s) once they leave home, and it instructs boys who have left home to remember their waiting parents:

Ah boys! You who have gone out from the old homesteads into the rush and bustle of life, do you ever think of the patient mothers who are stretching out to you arms, powerless to draw you back to the old home nest? (*Pacific Appeal* April 3, 1875)

In this story, a boy’s mother prayed to no avail that her son would return home before her death. It ends with the boy missing his mother’s death. The message is instructional to boys who sought adventure away from home, reminding them to return home before the loss of one’s parent. The value of family solidarity and loyalty is clearly evoked. The author is not identified in the story. Possibly, the editor felt that the message addressing the issue of children leaving home might have been common to many families during the 1870s. This narrative does not appear to address an issue specific of the black community. Nor does this narrative use imagery or language specific to African American literary writings. It simply documents the efforts of San Francisco’s newspapers to provide its readers with instructional narratives addressing a variety of issues in addition to reporting the news.

In the second narrative “A Rare Fish and a Great Monster,” the writer describes the adventure of capturing an unusually large and rare fish by a fishing vessel captain and his crew. It begins:

Captain Raud, of the schooner *Morning Star*, on the voyage from the Galapagos to San Francisco, put into Santa Cruz for water. While lying there one morning, as the water beat was going ashore, an immense fish was seen swimming about the schooner. Its great size astonished every one, but as the captain had attacked whales, he did not scrapple to assail this monster, and having a harpoon, bent it to the boats (*Pacific Appeal* April 3, 1875)

In the end of the narrative, the captain and his men caught the huge fish, and the fishermen are praised by the captain for their bravery. The captain states that none of the brave men would want to tackle a fish like this again and describes the bravery of the fishermen in the schooner on the return trip back to San Francisco. This story demonstrates the importance of courage and loyalty valued in the African American community.

In addition, several short essays addressing marriage were popular during this time. Many narratives address women coping in a difficult marriage and making improvements in marriages to accomplish compatibility, companionship, and bliss. One such essay appeared in the *Pacific Appeal* January 9, 1875 edition. “Beecher on Unhappy Marriages” gives advice to readers about living with a problem spouse. The writer states that this message was delivered as a sermon by Mr. Beecher, who discussed problematic marriage unions and family relationships. The writer states, “Mr. Beecher, [...] drew the picture of ill sorted unions and family relations of all kinds that gall and fret and degrade lower instead of elevating, his audience became breathlessly attentive.”

The writer describes a woman who is lovely and sensible and who is married to a man described as brutal and coarse. She eventually becomes coarse and brutal like her husband. The article describes the differing reactions of men and women in the congregation to his examples of problem marriages.

These didactic essays were published on the front page of the newspaper and suggest to African American readers living in San Francisco communities the importance of maintaining high moral standards and values. Other didactic essays provide African American readers with information about household and agricultural concerns. These short essays provided solutions to problems common in 1875 to people living in rural agricultural towns surrounding San Francisco and resources for addressing common concerns for those who previously lived in slavery and may have lacked knowledge about various household solutions or agricultural practices common to San Francisco and the Bay Area's climate and soil conditions. The October issue of the *Pacific Appeal* published two articles on the front page, which differed from those printed in earlier editions of the newspaper, titled, "Useful Hints and Suggestions" and "The Sense of Bees." Both reprints from *Scientific American* would have provided readers with solutions to common household problems.

In addition to didactic narratives, short stories were published in letters to the editor of the *Elevator* from Semper Fidelis. In one letter, she wrote a very interesting story about how she rescued a woman and her child who was traveling the Underground Railroad to escape the plantation owner's slave catchers. In this story, Jennie Carter

describes how she helped this woman by leading her to a Quaker family who could house her and set up the next part of her journey.

These short narratives, didactic essays, and short stories replaced the popular emphasis throughout the 1860s on fiction and poetry. They often addressed specific issues of living in urban and rural African American communities.

Essays of a Political and Social Nature

Lastly, political and social issues are addressed in nonfiction essays of the newspaper. Both San Francisco's black newspapers included essays, speeches, and communications, which addressed the political and social issues of the day, particularly efforts to improve literacy and education for black children in San Francisco and surrounding cities. While the establishment of schools for black children was an important social issue expressed in the writing printed in the early newspapers of 1862 and 1865, by 1875, the African American press promoted equality in educational institutions and resources for children in African American communities. Education was very important to African American parents. In March of 1875, the *Pacific Appeal* published an essay "Their School" where the writer expressed the experiences and concerns of parents:

Everything considered, they are manifesting the most commendable zeal in trying to have their children educated. This is one reason so many of them flock to the town. The very fewest number of them could read when in slavery, now they are determined to educate their children. (*Pacific Appeal* March 20, 1875)

African Americans in California during the mid nineteenth century viewed education for their children as a necessity for living successful lives and achieving

freedom and equality. Many members of African American communities determined that literacy would move people beyond servitude, opening doors of opportunity in business and employment. This attitude surfaced in the black newspapers as early as the 1850's and 1860's in San Francisco. The initial battle for education focused on the establishment of schools for black children. By 1875, the educational battle had shifted. Schools initially established, as the "Colored schools" for black students in 1850's, no longer existed. By 1875, parents and community leaders determined that separate schools for black students did not produce the desired or expected opportunities necessary for achieving success. Many parents and community leaders felt that education beyond grammar school level education was necessary in the success of their society for success. The 1875 newspapers debated and analyzed issues of education in San Francisco and surrounding cities in 1875. Eventually in 1875, San Francisco established integrated schools in an effort to accomplish equality for black children, which was only a beginning for achieving educational equality in San Francisco.

In summary, by 1875, compared to the earlier issues of 1862 and 1865, fewer poems, and fiction writings appeared in the weekly run. During the initial years of each newspaper, both the *Elevator* and *Pacific Appeal* newspapers included literary writings of poetry, travel narratives, and fictional stories as well as essays, short articles, and speeches; however, by 1875, a change in the genre of literary writings as well as the quantity published occurred. Very few travel and biographical narratives were published at this time in the black newspapers of San Francisco. During the 1870s, the black newspapers responded to the moral development of its readers and issues facing San

Francisco's African American communities. Recommending solutions to everyday problems became important to the black press. Focusing on issues of morality was common during the nineteenth century and was often expressed in the literature of the African American community. Short didactic essays expressing solutions to everyday problems, addressing personal conduct, and providing solutions to household problems and family issues were printed in the newspapers. Consistent with poems published since the early newspapers of the 1860's, poetry in the 1870's were often printed on the front page of the *Elevator*. Several poems addressed social and/or personal issues subtly often using imagery of nature to convey a message with social meaning. Although the *Elevator*, in contrast to the *Pacific Appeal*, did not completely abandon the personal expressions of poetry and fictional narratives during the 1870s, it published far more short nonfiction narratives with moral messages and didactic short essays. Narratives were popular and were often printed on the front page of the newspaper depicting situations and events common to both men and women. Many told stories about securing love relationships that all could enjoy.

Literary writings published in the newspapers of 1875 indicated a tendency towards a didactic style of writing, which dominated both of San Francisco's black newspapers during this time. Both the *Elevator* and *Pacific Appeal* show a prominence of didactic essays and short fables addressing common moral issues, as well as journalistic essays addressing social and political issues of the day. Of the few literary writings published, the *Elevator* newspaper included a few poems and short stories, in addition to didactic short narratives addressing a variety of topics ranging from ways to

improve one's personal conduct to giving instructional advice about managing ones home life. Even though the authors of these articles are unknown, it is interesting that this genre is so popular in the black newspapers of San Francisco.

Chapter 4: Literary Writings in the Black Press, 1885

Introduction and Background

By the 1880s, the African American population in California grew from 4,086 to 6,081. In San Francisco, it had grown slightly from 1,176 in the 1860s to 1,628 out of a total black population of 6,081 statewide (U. S. Census Data 1880). Even though the Census taken in 1880 indicates a population growth of only 450 over twenty years, the demand for black newspapers continued to grow. To serve the black readership, according to researchers Gayle Berardi and Thomas Segady, two more African American newspapers started during the late 1880s and continued into the turn of the century: the *California Eagle*, which may have possibly started in the early 1880s and closed its doors in 1896; and the *Vindicator*, which ran from 1884-1906. However, according to J. William Snorgrass, after the *Pacific Appeal* closed shop, the *Elevator* remained San Francisco's lone black newspaper that was published consistently from 1879 until 1884. Yet, very few editions of these extant publications are available today on microfilm for examination.

The black newspapers of San Francisco were short lived, yet they continued to address the social, intellectual, and cultural needs of African American citizens living in San Francisco and surrounding communities. According to Snorgrass, the *Vindicator* took its place alongside the *Elevator* and "fought for human rights in California" (312). Throughout the remaining years of the century, two additional black publications followed the model of the early black newspapers of the *Elevator* and *Pacific Appeal* in providing news for the black community and publish the works of black writers: The

Sentinel, and the *Western Outlook*. The *Sentinel*, established in 1890, closed its doors in 1891. According to Snorgrass' study, the *Sentinel* fought for the rights of African Americans and "advocated the building of a black aristocratic society in the Bay Area" (313). After the *Sentinel*, the *Western Outlook* of San Francisco, the longest running news publication established in 1894 and running until 1928, moved towards a more business like approach to the news, according to Snorgrass.

As a result of the early black newspapers, several other black news publications from other cities throughout the state also operated in California, competing for the California and the Pacific Coast African American readership. By the end of the nineteenth century, at least eight black publications had been established in the Bay Area. The black press in the Bay Area continued in spite of challenges faced from 1862 into the 20th century. While the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* ran some articles from eastern newspapers, it appears that most were written by western journalists since the articles addressed local issues. However, by 1885, the papers relied more heavily on reprints, possibly given the cost of publishing the newspaper and the competition with other black news publications for financial support from a small black population of 1,628. It is interesting to note that the *Elevator's* edition of 1885 no longer printed a list of its agents, who gathered the news and promoted the newspaper throughout the Pacific Coast and Canada. This suggests that the *Elevator* was scaling down given the advanced age of Phillip Bell and possibly the inability to continue paying for the services of the agents. Since the inception of both newspapers, the editors advertised the importance of buying the paper, and often, readers wrote letters about the need to support the newspapers.

San Francisco's *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* went through many changes in the 1880s. The *Pacific Appeal* ceased to exist after 1882. According to William Snorgrass, the *Pacific Appeal* continued publishing after Philip Anderson retired in 1879, when the newspaper was taken over by William H. Carter, the assistant editor, and published under Anderson's conservative policies until Carter closed shop in 1882 (308). However, extant editions are only available through 1879. On the other hand, "the *Elevator* survived until the turn of the century" (Pride and Wilson 69). Even though the *Elevator* continued its publication into the next century, only six extant editions are available from 1880-1898 through the Library of Congress and the San Francisco Library. Philip Bell served as editor until 1885. Phillip Montesano author of *Some Aspects of the Free Negro Question in San Francisco 1849-1870* writes, "Phillip Bell continued publishing the *Elevator* until sometime in 1885 when his health forced him to retire" (32). He died at the age of 81, a poor man in San Francisco, on April 24, 1889. The December 3, 1881 edition lists Philip A. Bell as the editor, but by 1885, the organizational statement printed in every edition shows published by the *Elevator* Publishing Company. However, the 1890 extant edition indicates Bell as the founder and J. B. Wilson as the managing editor, and consistent with the paper of the 1880's, the agents of the newspaper are not listed on the front of the weekly run.

The post Reconstruction years of the 1880's were a time of change for African Americans throughout the country. In 1883, the Supreme Court declared the Congressional Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. This Act had attempted to provide equal access for all citizens to hotels, theaters, and other public places.

Throughout the country, racial injustice increased. By the 1880s, lynching of African Americans was beginning in the South.

However, this problem was not the focus of the extant editions of the newspaper. The editor of the *Elevator* continued to focus on local events, politics, business affairs, and the social life for blacks living in San Francisco. Issues of local political participation and interest stories about local black business enterprises, social organizations, and church activities continued. Newspaper articles, announcements, letters to the editors about concerns of San Francisco's local community members dominated the daily issues of the black press. For example, in the May 2, 1885 edition, page two, the *Elevator* published an article honoring two black pioneers who started businesses during the early 1850s and 1860s in San Francisco, "Business Enterprises among the Colored Men of California." The editor wrote, "We hope to be able, in a short time to ... chronicle the fact of colored men establishing, and carrying on all kinds of mercantile and other business enterprises in this city and throughout the State." Other articles discussed African Americans pressing for full participation in the Republican Party now that the right to vote had been achieved ten years earlier. In "The Republicans and The Colored Voters," the writer states, "The colored voter is looked upon in one sense as being the property of the Republican Party, and has no right to think or exercise his own political judgment" (*Elevator* September 11, 1885). San Francisco's African American voters desired to participate freely in the Republican Party.

The black newspaper was highly respected by its readers. One such reader from Elko Nevada wrote, " Please find enclosed P.O. order for my subscription to the dear old

Elevator, my best wishes for ever success” (*Elevator* April 28, 1885). Cuney signed off: As ever your old friend, S. E. Cuney. Through the language “old friend,” this reader was obviously a long time subscriber and possibly aging just as the *Elevator* newspaper was a twenty-year established publication.

Literary writings continued to be featured in the *Elevator*. In the three extant editions of the 1880s, there are perhaps fewer poems, short stories, travel narratives, and didactic short essays. However interestingly two poems are published in the one extant edition of the *Elevator* of 1885. These poems are both didactic in nature: one addressing personal conduct while dating, and the other addressing proper response to a beggar. The one short story printed, also didactic in nature, addresses an unreasonable sacrifice to obtain a silk dress. Several other articles are printed on page one following the poem and the story “The Silk Dress”: “War Correspondents,” “School and Church,” “A Two-Horse Railroad,” “Pawn-Shop Stock,” “Rheumatism.” The one story and special interest articles, humorous and sentimental in nature, would have been of interest to women. The two poems, one short story, and other articles printed in the *Elevator* do not speak to race but address common issues of interest to both blacks and whites living in San Francisco.

Poetry

In the May 2, 1885 extant edition of the *Elevator*, two poems, both reprints, are published in this edition: from the *Boston Courier*, “How Easily Thing Go Wrong” and “Profession and Practice.” While the poem “How Easily Thing Go Wrong” refers to problems in courting between a boy and a girl, the title ironically also speaks of changes in civil rights gains for African Americans throughout the country. However, the poem

moves from themes of social, political issues of post-slavery to a common theme of conduct affecting any American family with teens that may explain why this poem is reprinted in the *Elevator*. This two-stanza poem is didactic in nature since it provides advice to a boy about how to date without upsetting a girl's father. In the poem, the speaker observes the reaction of the father to a boy and his daughter when the boy kisses too long. This is clear in the first three lines of the first stanza: "Alas! How easily things go wrong;"/A sigh too much or a kiss too long. /And a father's patience is quite worn out;" (May 2, 1885). The father who observes the dating practices of his daughter is not too happy with the boy. The next stanza describes the boy's reaction when he hears the girl's father's footsteps. The boy ran out of the house when he hears the "hurried steps and wrathful shout" of the father. The poem ends with the boy running up the steps of his home, deciding not to court any more. The last two lines give advice to young lovers, which is consistent with the conservative Christian views of many in the African American community. This poem ends with, "And yet how easily things go right/ when he leaves at a decent time of night. / He's wise who this is his memory log (21-23). The last three lines suggest a behavior that is more acceptable to the girl's father in the poem.

As is true of many of the poems published in the *Elevator* during the previous twenty years, this poem has clear social implications. Although covert language is not used to convey the oppression experienced by African Americans, as was the case during the 1860s, the message clearly addresses an equally urgent need of blacks during post-Civil War America--the importance of social propriety. The son must cultivate the good graces of a father. And while this poem is overtly about dating, it, like so many others

throughout the 19th century, suggests that attention to authority figures—the father—is crucial for the social order. African Americans had to learn new rules for existing in the post Reconstruction period and cautiously followed them in order to enjoy life's benefits.

The second poem, "Profession and Practice" a reprint from *Harper's Young People* is the second poem printed in the May 2, 1885 edition of the *Elevator*. It tells of the experiences of a beggar, Saint Swithin, who goes to a house to beg for bread, but instead he gives the man, who opens the door and is also starving, a purse with the promise of coins. Upon returning a few years later, Saint Swithin knocks on the man's door and says, "Give me a crust for charity." The man who is now fat responds, "Thou lazy rascal" and sends Saint Swithin away. Once again, consistent with other poems published in the *Elevator*, this poem is didactic in nature, expressing the experience of a beggar who begs for money as their only means for support. The theme of charity and the uncharitable response by members of the community is at the heart of this poem. This poem fits within the overall Christian philosophy of helping those who are in need; however, the poem also points out the problem faced by many who would like to help the needy but don't know how to respond to a request for help by person who does not accept the responsibility of providing for his own basic sustenance. Ethnicity is not at issue in this poem; the ethnicity of neither Saint Swithin nor the man at the door is known. Ten years earlier, the first poem about a beggar (women) was published in the 1875 *Elevator*. Similar to the first the poem about a beggar, the poem provides instructions about the proper way to show charity to beggars. "Profession and Practice" illustrates the

inappropriate response to a person in need, especially after the man experienced hunger himself. It addresses the response to a beggar and not the act of begging itself. Race is not a factor but acts of charity for those less fortunate appears to be the purpose of this poem. Readers of 1885 may have appreciated this poem if begging was evident in their communities. These are the only two poems published in the extant newspapers of the 1880s. Both of these poems address issues of conduct, appropriate dating behavior for teens and charitable responses to those in need, which may have been common in black communities just as in any other communities. Even though, the poems do not reveal through the language specific issues of black readers, the *Elevator* through printing these poems demonstrates its concern for issues that may affect the broader San Francisco community.

Narratives

“The Silk Dress,” the only short story published in extant papers of the 1880s, is a reprint from the *Demorest* news publications. Moreover, like the short stories from 1875, it is didactic in nature. It addresses the desire of women to dress stylishly for church and other social events. Published in the May 2, 1885 edition of the *Elevator*, this story narrated by a character Aunt Jane (who wears a silk dress) tells about the unfortunate events in the life of Annie Beidon whose husband sacrifices his life for her to own a silk dress also. The theme of this story conveys the attitude of a few women towards another woman who dressed shabbily and the importance of women’s fashions during this time. In the story, the husband goes to great lengths to see that his wife also has a silk dress to wear to church, suggesting his desire for social status in the black

middle class of San Francisco. For many, the quality of one's dress indicates a degree of personal wealth and success. In the narrative, Aunt Jane, the narrator, is telling her neighbor (unnamed) who sees Anne walking down the street about events in Anne's life. The women appear to be gossiping. In summary, the story is about Luther's (Anne's husband) desire to buy Anne a silk dress. Luther is able to purchase a silk dress for Anne, but in the end, it cost him his life when he became ill, while traveling home in the rain without a coat. Once arriving home, he dies before he is about to give Anne the gift. Early in the story, Luther states he will get this dress for Anne if it cost him his life, and it does. In the end, Anne refuses to wear the dress and continues wearing shabby clothing.

This story demonstrates a husband's effort to gain social respect and status. In addition, it demonstrates a husband's love and commitment towards his wife. Clearly, it emphasizes the need for a husband to impress others in the church community. Based on the stories written by Jennie Carter in Eric Gardner's research, women often wore their best dresses to community events. During this time, women often gossiped about each other in terms of possessions as seen in the beginning of this story. The conduct of observing dress, fashion, and style within a community of black women during this time is mentioned in the early newspaper writings by Jennie Carter in and published in the *Elevator*.

In 1885, several literary writings published in the black news publications were reprints from other newspapers. Poetry of local or western writers do not appear in the few extant newspapers available. Poetry and other literary expressions practically ceased by 1885. When compared with the poems of 1875, the two poems published are again

social in scope, but do not reflect the themes of race and culture. Poems published in the newspapers of 1862-1875, often used language laden with words of multiple interpretations and imagery of nature, which depict and express the experiences of African Americans. The themes of the poems examined in 1885 express the social concerns of any American community: appropriate dating behavior and the moral response to a person in experiencing poverty. In 1885, the black newspaper focused on events of churches, business, schools, and social clubs in San Francisco's African American communities. According to researchers Francis N. Lortie, Jr. and William Snorgrass, by 1885 black newspapers began to retreat from protest, and politics and urged African Americans to concentrate on demonstrating social responsibility, acquiring property, and gaining wealth. With Phillip Bell no longer editor, the social protest philosophy seems to have changed in San Francisco's *Elevator* news publication of 1885. The new editor of the *Elevator* focus more on business and economic gains in addition to local events, politics, and the social life for blacks living in San Francisco, which created a sense of place, community, culture, and local color.

Chapter 5-Conclusion

In my research, I set out to document the existence of literary writings by and about African Americans in California, published in San Francisco's two African American newspapers during representative years from 1862 to 1885. My purpose was to examine shifts in cultural attitudes as reflected in imaginative literature published in 1862, 1865, 1875, and 1885, and to identify, when possible, the authors. I not only document the existence of literary writings of interest to African American readers in San Francisco, but I have attempted to show through an examination of poems and prose the nature and characteristics of the writings, the cultural concerns within the works, and the changing nature of the literary works published in San Francisco's black newspapers. This study examines in the literature a sense of culture, voice, and place of African Americans living in San Francisco from 1862-1885; the writings express personal concerns, community issues, and the determination for freedom and equality. Even though many of the issues and concerns are specific to San Francisco's early African American pioneer communities, many are common to all African Americans of the mid to late nineteenth century.

As noted by many researchers, in San Francisco the evolution of culture was greatly enhanced by the establishment of formal communication networks. Not only did these networks of San Francisco's black newspapers link individuals living within San Francisco, but they also linked people living in other northern California communities; with blacks living in Oregon, Washington, and Canada; and with Afro American

communities throughout the country. Black newspapers, the first established on the east coast in 1827, were a popular means of communication in the 19th century, and those in San Francisco helped link communities throughout California, Oregon, Washington, and Canada.

Many stories have been written about pioneer life in the west, but much less has been written about minority newspapers in the west or literary writings depicting the black pioneers who left the south and the east in search of new opportunities and/or freedom from slavery and oppression and settled in west coast cities and rural communities. This study is an attempt to document, examine, and analyze the ideas, thoughts, and heartfelt issues of black pioneers through the literary expressions of those who migrated to California seeking better opportunities, land, and wealth for themselves and their families. These pioneers established communities in the Bay Area and then eventually established the first black newspaper in San Francisco. The establishment of the black press in California, from the earliest news publication of 1854 to the turn of the century, became a harbinger of change; these newspapers helped develop a sense of place, community, culture, and voice in the black community of the city.

The black press helped writers cultivate a recognizable black voice, a sense of place, and a sense of culture. The *Mirror of the Times* addressed issues of inequality in the treatment of African Americans in California; however, this first San Francisco newspaper was short lived. Fortunately, another Afro American newspaper emerged, the *Pacific Appeal* in 1862, which tackled the issues of disparity in the lives of San Francisco's black citizens. According to many researchers, the *Pacific Appeal* is

considered the first viable newspaper in California. In his 1891 study, *The Afro-American Press and its Editors*, I Garland Penn emphasizes that for many, the *Pacific Appeal* “has always been regarded on the Pacific Coast, also in the Eastern states, as a reliable index of the doings of the colored citizens of the Pacific states and adjacent territories” (92).

The second viable news publication, the *Elevator*, started in 1865 and continued the fight for civil rights for African Americans after emancipation until the mid 1890s. This newspaper owes its success to its editor, Philip Bell. The *Elevator*, established by educated, highly respected Phillip Bell was “known as a journal of progress, devoted to Science, Art, and Literature and also to the Drama” and also a “spicy weekly, which continues to this day the oldest secular Negro Newspaper” (Penn 96). I. Garland Penn’s 1891 study recognizes not only the efforts made by Phillip Bell but also other African American newspapermen of the nineteenth century. To Penn, Philip Bell was highly respected by fellow editors throughout the country: “Educated, original, capable of fine powers of analysis, he flung the sparkling rays of his imagination over the productions of his pen, and came to be regarded as the Napoleon of the Colored press” (96). Penn characterizes Bell as a “giant” in efforts and a hero in devotions and sacrifice (98). According to many researchers, Phillip Bell loved the arts and poetry. He insured that each publication of the *Pacific Appeal*, beginning in its first year, include imaginative writings. An examination of the *Elevator* also documents the presence of arts and poetry in many of its issues over its thirty years of existence. Interestingly, Penn describes Phillip Bell as a dedicated journalist, versed in the works of poets and history, and a critic

of local, statewide, and national efforts to address the plight of African American during this time. Through the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator*, Bell promoted the arts, and he addressed issues critical to achieving civil rights.

The black press not only published the works of black writers, but it also increased literacy among African Americans through the availability of the black newspaper to black citizens. Achieving an education was quite difficult, and many schools were not available. African American parents recognized the importance of an education for their children, as is evident in community-wide efforts to gain educational equality in the 1870s. Given the several poems written about the role of the newspaper, it is clear that editors saw their role as not only to pass on the news, but also to educate people and to develop a sense of culture.

The literary writings published in the black news publications expressed a variety of themes and cultural contexts specific to the black experience of the mid nineteenth century. Themes of freedom, love, and loss are central in the many poems, stories, narratives, and biographical writings. In the literature published in the black news publications, topics include death, nature, nighttime, battlefield, love relationships, education, and religion. The writers' voices were of freedom, peace, and joy. The literature depicts the social, historical, and political context of the time.

Furthermore, problems facing black women are evident in much of the poetry and short stories. Many had a woman protagonist, or addressed issues of interest to women. Many of these literary writings followed the trends of the nineteenth century literature of sentimentalism and realism. Female agency is also depicted in the literary writings

published in the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator*. According to Leslie Lewis's research, significant female agency is represented in postbellum fiction by black female writers, which focuses on patriarchy, and specifically paternal secrets (67). This female agency is evident in mulatto stories, poems, and narratives expressing freedom sought in the mother character, such as in the narrative, "An interesting case of a Freed Slave Girl" printed in the July 19, 1862 *Pacific Appeal* and "The Death of a Noble Woman," published in the July 14, 1862 edition of the *Pacific Appeal*.

In addition to issues concerning women, literary writings use imagery to express conditions unique to African Americans. Victoria Earle Matthews, in her essay, "The Value of Race Literature: An Address" (1895), explains that literary work by black writers may differ in its essential elements. She wrote, "When the literature of our race is developed, it will of necessity be different in all essential points..." (qtd. in Ervin 37). When examining the literary works of writers published in the black newspapers of San Francisco during the 1860s-1890s, we do in fact see a difference in some of the essential elements of the character, language, imagery, theme, and place in poetry and prose. However, this difference provides a unique voice in American literature, which often also exists in the literary writings of other cultural groups.

Whereas American literature is often connected with the landscape and atmosphere of a community, many early African American writers look to the landscape and nature to covertly express a yearning for freedom, peace, security, home, family, land, and both civil and individual rights. Religion and nature are captured in the setting and tone of many poems in order to express safely the inner thoughts of the speaker-

writers. The real meaning of literary writings must be explored through the symbolic imagery embedded in references to nature and/or religion. Elements of spiritual imagery and language were often coupled with freedom. Literary writings depict the black existence, characters of the mulatto protagonist, or the trickster as in the fox narrative. These motifs are evident in many of the didactic writings printed in the press.

Black newspapers were essential to the life of the black communities. According to Louis Henry Gates Jr., “Tens of thousands of pieces of creative literature—poems, short stories, serialized novels—were published in these black periodicals because they were frequently denied a forum in white-owned magazines, newspapers and publishing houses” (qtd. in Danky x). Over fifty pieces of literature has been documented, examined, and analyzed for this study, which is only a very small number of literary writings available in the extant African American newspapers of San Francisco during the thirty years studied. I agree with the work of Elizabeth McHenry, who wrote that the literary writings of African Americans published in the African American newspapers must be examined to truly establish an understanding of the development of the African American literary culture in America, which will eventually require a revising of the African American literary canon. With the absence of this large body of literature, it is misleading and incomplete to discuss African American literature in America. In addition, the study of California literature is incomplete when not considering the imaginative works of early black pioneer writers. California literature is enhanced when it includes the literary works published in California’s early black newspapers. Black newspapers of the nineteenth century inspired, promoted, and established a literary

culture and a community of readers—in this case, San Francisco and other surrounding communities that followed San Francisco’s example and developed black periodicals. By the early twentieth century, cities such as Oakland, Sacramento, Stockton, and San Jose later followed the lead of San Francisco’s editors and developed local periodicals. The influence of Phillip Bell and the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* news publications reached across America for generations that followed.

Through this study, the works of many writers not recognized in anthologies of literature have been discovered. The craft of writing flourished in black pioneer communities. While literacy was important, black writers also sharpened the craft of writing. According to Elizabeth McHenry, black writers during this time achieved the ability to write literature to the same levels as white writers. The voices of writers such as James Madison Bell, Jennie Carter, James Whitfield, M.L. Reed, Mrs. C.S. Davis, and so many others have been heard. The voices of the early African American pioneers, who sought a world of freedom in San Francisco and also heard Horace Greeley’s call to “go west young men,” are heard through the poetry and stories published in the black newspapers, depicting the thoughts and heartfelt issues of black readers.

The literary writings published in the black newspapers of San Francisco promoted culture and literacy in the Bay Area. The *Elevator* and *Pacific Appeal* newspapers published works by black writers that expressed the political, social, and cultural experience of San Francisco’s community. San Francisco’s black press influenced the growth of black publications throughout America. This literature does matter. Unfortunately, black literary writings of this time have been omitted from

publications of scholarly works of California literature. It may have been dismissed as “political,” not literary. According to Toni Morrison, “when matters of race are located and called attention to in American literature, critical response has tended to be on the order of humanistic nostrum, or a dismissal mandated by the label political” (Morrison12). I wonder if this applies to anthologies about nineteenth century California literature.

Recovering and examining lost literary writings of the early black pioneer communities of San Francisco and other Bay Area cities are the focus of this study. Through this examination of a wealth of literary writings published in San Francisco’s black press, one can better understand the life, heartfelt issues, and voices of black pioneers living in San Francisco and other communities of the West Coast.

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