SO! Podcast #79: Behind the Podcast: deconstructing scenes from AFRI0550, African American Health Activism

Sounding Out! Authors

Blog post published November 25, 2019 in *Sounding Out!*
https://doi.org/10.59350/sfpc4-k2r11

Abstract

Welcome to Next Gen sound studies! In the month of November, you will be treated to the future. . . today! In this series, we will share excellent work from undergraduates, along with the pedagogy that inspired them.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), American Studies, Black Studies, Children's Issues, Digital Humanities, Digital Media



Recommended citation

Authors, S. O. (2019, November 25). SO! Podcast #79: Behind the Podcast: deconstructing scenes from AFRI0550, African American Health Activism. *Sounding Out!*. https://doi.org/10.59350/sfpc4-k2r11

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Welcome to Next Gen sound studies! In the month of November, you will be treated to the future. . . today! In this series, we will share excellent work from undergraduates, along with the pedagogy that inspired them. You'll read voice biographies (Kaitlyn Liu's "My Voice, or On Not Staying Quiet,") check out blog assignments (David Lee's "Mukbang Cooks, Chews, and Heals"), listen to podcasts, and read detailed histories that will inspire and invigorate. Bet. –JS We are thrilled to bring you today's utter *gift* from Dr. **Nic John Ramos** (Drexel University) and **Laura Garbes** (Brown University) who team taught this tremendous course in the Department of Africana Studies at Brown University called African American Health Activism from Colonialism to AIDS that used podcasting as a critical venue of knowledge production and a pedagogical tool. The introductory paragraph of their syllabus explains the class as follows:

> *This historical survey course examines African American activism and social movements from Colonialism and Emancipation to the contemporary period through the lens of African American access to health resources. The course also explores how marginalized peoples and communities are using new digital technologies, such as podcasting, to represent and intervene*

> *on historical inequalities. Thus, the course aims to produce public historians who are well versed in the history of medicine from the perspective of African descended peoples AND can produce social justice-oriented digital content based on their knowledge of history and marginalized communities.*

In other words– theirs wasn't a radio or a podcasting *themed* course, but instead, Professors Ramos and Garbes introduced podcasting to students as a mode of critical thought and expression. As they reflect:

> *Like many educators, we see podcasting as an opportunity to enter students on the ground floor of an increasingly popular social medium that many conceive of as a potentially more democratic sound space. We firmly believe spaces of sound, such as podcasting, however, cannot truly be democratic unless more people have the knowledge and know-how to enter their voices and the voices of their communities into the fray. In these troubling times, we especially see podcasting as an opportunity to share and tell stories often misheard, untold, and unheard in history and on the radio. It was important to us that our students recognize that the voices of the communities they come from and/or the histories rarely hear elsewhere have a legitimate place in the academy and on the airwaves.*

Today, via the form of a podcast, Ramos and Garbes go fantastically meta- on us, introducing one of the final projects from their course–an audio story entitled "Shadows in Harriet's Dawn" by Brown Undergraduates **Mali Dandridge, Sterling Stiger, and Amber Parson**— giving us rare insight and commentary on the process. The student work understands Harriet Jacobs (activist and author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl)* in the context of enslavement and childhood trauma. The full transcript of their "Behind the Podcast" podcast follows this introduction. Here's the students' podcast description:

> *Through the re-telling of American author and former slave Harriet Jacobs's girlhood from her autobiography Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl there is an opportunity to learn about the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of children of American slavery. Harriet's 19th-century trials of navigating complicated family dynamics, emotional abuse, and sexual harassment at a young age are analyzed in the lens of the modern science supporting the clinical ACEs questionnaire tool. This podcast will hopefully mark the beginning of creating more discussions that uncover the social determinants of well-being and trauma in a way that could be helpful even for the struggles of modern day youth.*

You may also download the **syllabus** for their course (African American Health Activism Syllabus 1.25.2018), along with their **Podcast Pitching Assignment** (AFRI 0550 Pitching Assignment for Webpage), a process assignment they named the **"fieldwork summary prompt"** (AFRI0550 Fieldwork Summary Prompt), and the **grading rubric** for this assignment (AFRI0550 Podcast Grading Rubric). In addition, Ramos and Garbes have also generously documented this experience via their collaborative website: Case Study: Afri 0550, A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO STORYTELLING AND TECHNOLOGY that you absolutely MUST check out. We all have so much to learn! **CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD**: **SO! Podcast 79: Behind the Podcast: deconstructing scenes from AFRI0550, African American Health Activism** **SUBSCRIBE TO THE SERIES VIA APPLE PODCASTS FOR**

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https://soundstudiesblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/africana-podcast-listening-session.mp3 ***Behind the Podcast: deconstructing scenes from AFRI0550, African American Health Activism*** *In this podcast, Dr. Nic John Ramos and Laura Garbes introduce* Shadows in Harriet's Dawn, *a final audio project by Mali Dandridge, Sterling Stiger, and Amber Parson. They analyze the project in the context of the course,* African American Health Activism, *taught at Brown University in spring 2019. The two reflect on how beginner technical and ethical training come together within in the audio story. Resources mentioned within this podcast provided at the end of this transcript. Listeners are highly encouraged to listen to this as a piece of the larger course blog, written by Laura and Nic, and developed as a webpage by Leo Selvaggio, Instructional Media Specialist at the Brown MML.* **Nic Ramos:** Hi, this is Nic John Ramos. **Laura Garbes:** Hi, this is Laura Garbes, **NR:** and this is, Behind the Podcast… **LG**: …deconstructing scenes from African American Health Activism. **NR**: Laura, what are we doing in this podcast? **LG:** Right, So first of all, we're trying to display a really awesome audio story that our students made. That's first and foremost. But we're also using it as a teaching tool, right? **NR:** Yeah, that's right. For our class called African American Health Activism from Colonialism to AIDS, which is taught in the Department of Africana Studies here at Brown University. This historical survey course examines African American activism and social movements from colonialism and emancipation to the contemporary period, through the lens of African American access to health resources. The course also explores how marginalized people and communities are using new digital technologies such as podcasting to represent and intervene on historical inequalities. The course aims to produce public historians who are well versed in the history of medicine from the perspective of African-descended peoples and can produce social justice oriented digital content based on their knowledge of history and marginalized communities. **LG:** Yeah. So part of this is really giving space to show the great work on this audio story on Harriet Jacobs and childhood trauma. Through doing so, we want to touch on a few things behind the process that will be good for educators looking to implement similar projects in their own classrooms. **NR:** If you're interested in learning more about podcasting as a pedagogical tool, check out our webpage. **LG:** Well, check out our webpage, which will put it in the show notes later. Always with the show notes.. [laughs] Right, because there were going to put in a bunch of sound clips of this and sort of a step by step guide of how to replicate the process assigning a podcast. And, you know, there are other sources out there and we linked them at the end of that guide. But what we really wanted to emphasize was like… Okay, cool there is a lot of stuff on the technical recording and the technical interviewing pieces. And then there's some scholarship, notably Dr. Jenny Lynn Stoever on the sonic color line, and the cultural politics of listening and how our listening ear has been conditioned. We weren't really finding something that kind of weaves those two together, and we really think it's important that when we're teaching the technique, it not be divorced from that theory. **NR:** The podcast we're showcasing today is called Shadows in Harriet's Dawn, on the childhood trauma of American slavery, through the retelling of American author and former slave Harriet Jacobs' girlhood from her autobiography, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. There's this opportunity that our students saw to learn about the adverse childhood experiences of children of American slavery. This podcast will hopefully mark the beginning of creating more discussions that uncover the social determinants of well-

being and trauma in a way that could be helpful even for the struggles of modern-day youth. **LG:** Yes, okay, so this podcast was created by three students in your class. Amber, Sterling and Molly. So, let's take a listen. Upbeat, childlike music ***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Archive #1:** I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away. (Chapter I) Children's music box mixed in with the sound of children laughing **Archive #1:** My father was a carpenter, and considered so intelligent and skilful in his trade, that, when buildings out of the common line were to be erected, he was sent for from long distances, to be head workman. On condition of paying his mistress two hundred dollars a year, and supporting himself, he was allowed to work at his trade, and manage his own affairs. His strongest wish was to purchase his children; but, though he several times offered his hard earnings for that purpose, he never succeeded. In complexion my parents were a light shade of brownish yellow, and were termed mulattoes. They lived together in a comfortable home; and, though we were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment. (Chapter I) Loud thump Silence **Mali:** But, almost inevitably, the fond shielding around Harriet would cease to exist, profoundly changing her life for the worse. **Sterling:** For Harriet, the context in which that happy childhood took place would be revealed to be one filled with abuse and trauma. **Amber:** Trauma works to stay hidden and unexposed. It knows how and when to enter into the crawl space, and it is always on the run to move from generation to generation. **Amber:** My name is Amber and I am here alongside my other fellow classmates Pauses **Sterling:** Hello, I'm Sterling. Pauses **Mali:** Hi, I'm Mali. **Amber:** And we're here today to explore Harriet Jacobs' story in relation to childhood trauma. **LG:** Ok Nic. I'm going to stop this right here, just to say two and a half minutes have passed. That's it. And there's already a collection here of kind of really rich sound clips. You hear from the archive an approximation of Harriet Jacobs's voice straight from the very beginning. You hear different types of music. You hear their own voices that have to be cut out of different sound clips. It's already getting pretty complex. And as we'll kind of see as we go into it, they'll go on to cut in all of the interviewees' voices and introductions so that you've got a sort of sense of where we're going. **NR:** Yeah, what I really love about this is that they've really set the tone and mood, but also have given us a clue about where they want to take this podcast, what direction they want to take this podcast. What I really love about this is that we get already a very historical context, that they're drawing out how they want to connect it to really present-day issues. **LG:** And I think two things really made those possible. So first is the fact that we have trainings at the MML at Brown, which in that digital resource guide we mentioned there's the stuff that is going to be available on arranging tracks. When you specifically focus on arranging tracks, it makes it possible for first-time podcasters to think a little bit more creatively instead of saying: we're going to put the entire chunk of what we recorded from person A, the entire chunk from person B, and we'll do our analysis in the end. You can see that they're being creative. They're interspersing these things like quotes in an academic essay or a historical essay. **NR:** Yeah. What I love is that we're going to hear in the next couple minutes all the people that they're going to interview as experts to craft an argument and perspective on Harriet Jacobs. **LG:** Let's listen. **Sterling:** Through the re-telling of this American author and former slave's girlhood from her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* there is an opportunity to learn about the adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, of children in American slavery. **Mali:** Harriet's 19th-century trials of navigating slavery, complicated family dynamics, emotional abuse, and sexual harassment at a young age have a lot to reveal

about trauma and the different ways it is able to manifest itself. We hope to offer both a lens of social and scientific understanding of these complexities using knowledge from the following expert sources, starting with our guest Anna Thomas. Cheeky, academic music **Enter:** Montage of guest speakers **Anna:** I am a PhD candidate in the English Department at Brown. I am graduating this year, and I work on African American literature alongside Caribbean literature. I study the relationship between ethics and form in nineteenth and twentieth century African and Caribbean literature. **Ramos:** I'm Nic John Ramos I'm the Mellon postdoctoral fellow in Race and Science and Medicine at Brown University. **Dima:** My name is Dima Amso, and I am a professor in the Cognitive Linguistic and Psychological Sciences Department. I study brain and cognitive development. **Kevin:** My name is Kevin Bath. I am a professor in Cognitive Linguistic and Psychological Sciences. My research focuses on using animal models to understand how real life adversity, especially during early post-neonatal, impact the development of the brain and may drive risk for negative outcomes. **Amber:** Through the collective perspectives of us, our guests, and several archival sources, we now present to you the story of Harriet…that is a story that beautifully and remarkably demonstrates resilience towards the mobility of trauma. 19th century music **Archive #1:** When I was six years old, my mother died; and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave. My mother's mistress was the daughter of my grandmother's mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother's breast. In fact, my mother had been weaned at three months old, that the babe of the mistress might obtain sufficient food. They played together as children; and, when they became women, my mother was a most faithful servant to her whiter foster sister. On her death-bed her mistress promised that her children should never suffer for anything; and during her lifetime she kept her word. They all spoke kindly of my dead mother, who had been a slave merely in name, but in nature was noble and womanly. I grieved for her, and my young mind was troubled with the thought who would now take care of me and my little brother. I was told that my home was now to be with her mistress; and I found it a happy one. No toilsome or disagreeable duties were imposed upon me. My mistress was so kind to me that I was always glad to do her bidding, and proud to labor for her as much as my young years would permit. (Chapter I) I would sit by her side for hours, sewing diligently, with a heart as free from care as that of any free-born white child. When she thought I was tired, she would send me out to run and jump; and away I bounded, to gather berries or flowers to decorate her room. Those were happy days—too happy to last. (Chapter I) The slave child had no thought for the morrow; but there came that blight, which too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel. (Chapter I) Science music **Dima:** So, in general, some basic principles of brain development are that there's tremendous amounts of change that happens very early on in postnatal life. So after like about three or four, the brain is sort of fine-tuning rather than showing huge amounts of organization. Even still, the way that the brain develops is that continually tries to adapt to its environment so both positive experiences are highly shaping and negative experiences are highly shaping, um and stress in particular has received a lot of attention in the developmental science community, both with respect to human stressors and animal models that try to recapitulate those and try to understand what's under the hood so to speak and the idea is that what's happening with stress and trauma especially early on in postnatal life is that it's um shaping the system and ways that then get sort of set that sort of set up their brains to have long-term consequences of that stressor. **NR:** So that was Dima Amso, one of the interviewees of this podcast. And what I like what the students are doing here is that

they're setting up an expert voice to provide context to what we just heard and we're going to hear in the future. But as you can tell, they're going to set up these experts in a way in which they're able to speak for themselves, and the listener is going to be able to hopefully differentiate the different positions that some experts say without them having to directly say the differences between these experts… if that makes sense. **LG:** Yeah, this was a conversation we had in that Q&A discussion. We went in and we talked through techniques with the students. But then we moved on to OK, actually, you'll have to do a little field work log and then we'll talk again, because there's only so much you can do before you actually go out there and interview. So I think what was great was building in time to actually discuss the interviews, because there were a few instances and a few groups were saying, OK, there some discrepancies here between either different interviewees' perspectives. Or there were discrepancies between the interviewees' perspectives and perhaps the main argument trying to be made. Allowing for those differences to kind of breathe, while weaving a cohesive narrative that's fit for a podcast, is an art, and they sort of have to walk this tightrope. And that was definitely one of the skills of argumentation that could definitely be transferred over for them when they're writing essays in the future. **NR:** You know, the students had to edit, and they had to figure out what story they wanted to tell You can tell that some of these experts are giving a story that conflate animal studies with human behavior in a way that's really popular in making comparisons today within science. But the students also had to make a decision about whether or not they wanted to go down the road of talking about the history of scientific racism and the conflation of some humans as animals. And while there's room here is that I know that they had a lot of work to do around just talking about Harriet's story alone. You'll find later that they've just left some of these opportunities to delve deeper, where it's on the listener to think about, make their own conclusions about that. Let me say a note on ethical interviewing is that when we say ethical interviewing, we're allowing the experts to speak on their terms. And allowing them, allowing their positions and their thoughts to manifest through the other voices that you're going to hear right? In the contrast of the comparisons that listeners are going to be able to hear in the different voices and positions they take. **LG:** Right and coming up next, as we'll see, they definitely contextualize all of the different interviewees' comments, like Sterling here. **Sterling:** According to Harriet from her narrative, she had an early childhood with "unusually fortunate circumstances" in comparison to other children of American slavery. **Mali:** This understanding of her background is important to truly capture understanding of how events that would impact her later in life would vastly change herself perception regarding her quality of life. In particular, these events would occur after the death of her described "kind mistress" when the mistress's sister and new husband Dr. Flint claimed ownership of Harriet. **Dima:** You know, childhood development isn't happening in a vacuum, it's happening in a broader context and a good part of early child development is about the caregiving, no matter how. It's really interesting to think about the animal models. I do these examples, so we study socioeconomic status in a lab and what they try to do is recapitulate what happens when a great parent gets their resources taken away, so for animals and the mouse studies, you can take away the bedding and make it really hard for them to keep their babies warm and they are just like working so hard to replace that to take care of that and that then stresses them out, which turns out to have consequences on the growing pup later, and then if you add an additional stressor you kind of see how this sort of balloons into multiple now stressors and formative times. Loud thump **Archive #1:** During the first years of my service in Dr. Flint's family, I was accustomed to share some indulgences with the children of my

mistress. Though this seemed to me no more than right, I was grateful for it, and tried to merit the kindness by the faithful discharge of my duties. (Chapter V) **Sound:** opening of door.... assertive, domineering footsteps... heartbeat But I now entered on my fifteenth year—a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. (Chapter V) Enter old, southern man whispering **LG:** So something I'm hearing here that is fantastic are the sound effects: something to keep our interest, that loud thump you hear before you hear Harriet Jacobs's voice again. **NR:** Just this science music they used... **LG:** It's so on point, right? **NR:** Yeah, the science music, the loud thump, opening the door, footsteps, heartbeat, they're really layering a lot of stuff to keep the listener interested, and many people wouldn't think about doing that. You could imagine that if they didn't have these elements in here, you would just be hearing one long monologue, that quite frankly you'd be just bored.

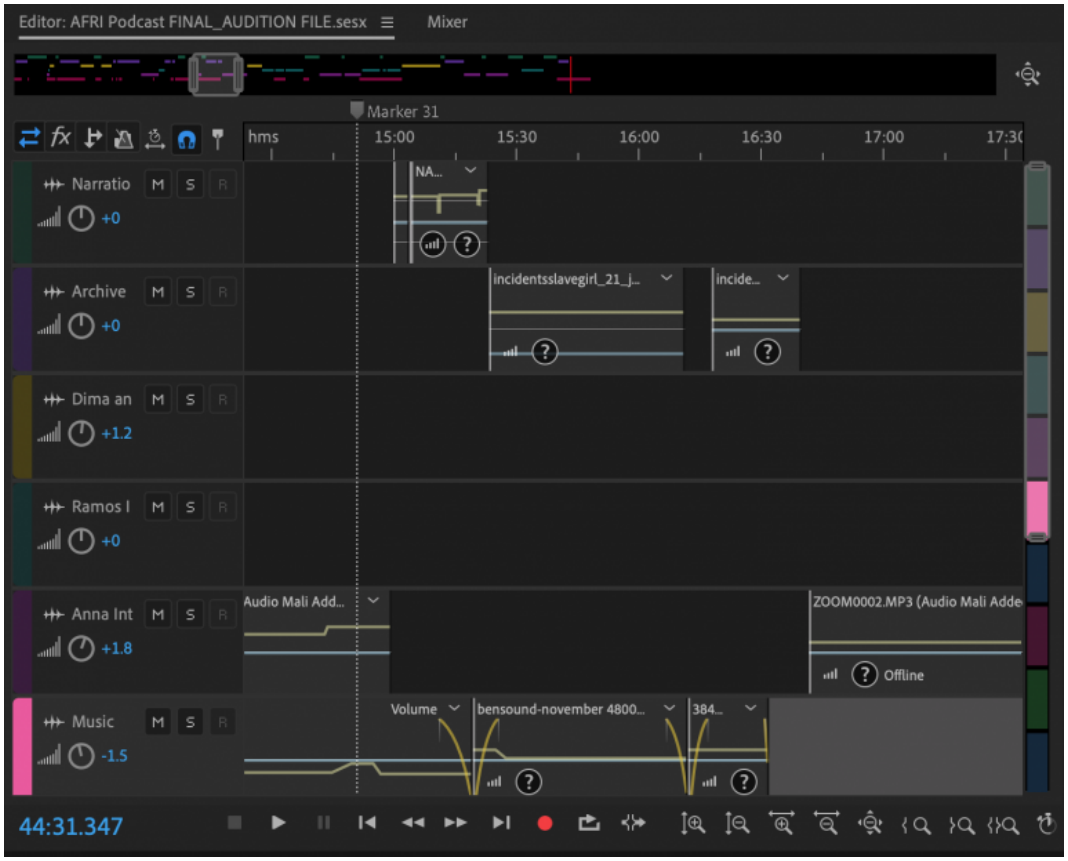


Figure 1: Final Audition Software File for "Shadows in Harriet's Dawn"

LG: Yeah, kind of nodding off even if it's really interesting content. You know, the mind can't really hold onto that for very long. So finding those ways to vary it and each of the students in the class were actually very thoughtful about this. You noticed more and more as they were listening to podcasts throughout the semester, and they were analyzing using that story sheet, they started thinking about the sound effects. They also started thinking about the music that accompanied voices during the interview. So it wasn't strictly just interviewing sound, and then music. You could see earlier on that Mali put in some music behind her voice, the mixing, and so the way that they're layering these tracks is reflective of kind of this listening ear they condition throughout the course of the semester. And then the sound of the door opening and footsteps, and then a heartbeat... you can kind of get the emotions associated with it. And that technique was really key

to teach in advance. One thing you'd also hear in this, which is something that I think we talked about a little bit, Nic, is just a little bit of that p popping and noise leveling, right? This is something that had we had a 13 week-semester of something like we would have been able to do a post-production type of review that would have kind of caught all of these things. But as they are now, they are a fantastic final draft. And we really encourage people to play with those techniques in that way. And we also offered within the digital resource guide a tab specifically catering to the postproduction process. So, if we had more time in an ideal world, what would we have taught? **NR:** Yeah, exactly. That makes sense. **Archive #1:** He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue. Of the two, I preferred his stormy moods, although they left me trembling. He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him—where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature. He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men. The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage. The degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe. (Chapter V) **NR:** In the next couple clips, what you'll hear is a moment where the students knew that they were going to take a pretty lengthy section from one of the experts, Anna. But they didn't want to lose listener interest. And so they did a really interesting thing, which is that they edited in another sound clip just to add something new. **LG:** And that's that whisper that you're going to hear. You'll hear a little bit of a whisper in between that long passage in which Anna has a lot of really rich insights. But they wanted to make sure to parse it out by different argument so that you're getting each part in a digestible way. **NR:** Right, which essentially allows listeners to be able to absorb and think about what they've just heard. **Anna:** In the structure of the narrative that's really a turning point of the "difficult passage"- that's what she calls it -when she in very adolescence begins to experience the sexual persecution and harassment of her master. It's deeply formative, and she doesn't know how to talk about it, but there is a perception that the fact that she would even repeat any of the things that he said to her makes her feel like she's somehow complicit in what's happening to her and she doesn't feel like she has any recourse. It's at that moment where she understands what it means to be owned. In contrast to her early childhood when she somewhat of a normative childhood where she's in a stable home life, and then suddenly the danger of her passage into early adolescence and womanhood is marked by the fact that someone who owns her is exerting power over her. Whispers again **Anna:** It's deeply formative when she goes on to the next years of her life, even before she escapes, intent upon trying to find a way to live outside of the fear of him raping her. The choice that she has in relation with him is to either be raped, a choice that is obviously not …, or to capitulate to a relationship into which consent can't exist (i.e., she does not have a choice, this is not a meaningful choice in any sphere). **Ramos:** It's the idea that certain children, white children, inherently hold an idea of racial purity right or a sort of innocence an

idea of who ought to have an innocent childhood or who has the ability to have an innocent childhood. But essentially what you can see is from the 19th century onwards is this idea of racial innocence being ascribed unevenly across the entities of race and gender. **Archive #1:** Everywhere the years bring to all enough of sin and sorrow; but in slavery the very dawn of life is darkened by these shadows. Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn, before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and such a one among the slaves. Perhaps the child's own mother is among those hated ones. She listens to violent outbreaks of jealous passion, and cannot help understanding what is the cause. She will become prematurely knowing in evil things. (Chapter V) Heartbeats **Archive #1:** Soon she will learn to tremble when she hears her master's footfall. She will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child. If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. (Chapter V) Brief musical interlude **Amber:** In order to understand the direct and intergenerational impacts of the adverse childhood experiences that Harriet faced, we have to dive deeper into her life starting with the years of her young adulthood in which she began her escape from slavery. **Sterling:** A complicating series of events occurs as a direct result of Dr. Flint pressuring Harriet to have a sexual relationship with him. Rather than being raped by Flint, Harriet made the difficult decision to consent to an illicit relationship and have children with Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, a white attorney who was their neighbor. Brief musical interlude **Anna:** What she does in that context is to enter into a relationship with the man who becomes the father for her two children and part of how she's thinking of that is that once her master knows he will want to discard her and that this man might be able to purchase her freedom. Thinking about questions of consent and thinking about questions of power, even within the narrative Harriet Jacobs does not have a way of naming that relationship that she has. She calls him the father of her children. She calls him a man who does not own her, she calls him a man that does not despise. You know any other words that we might want to say it like her lover, her partner, her any of these words are so impossible in on the context in which one party is enslaved. When she goes on to have two children and when she has her daughter, she is struck with the sorrow of imagining her daughter having the same exact experiences of childhood that she herself had. **Mali:** As a result of Harriet's strategy of coupling up with Sawyer to make Flint refrain himself from her, Flint became more frustrated with her. Flint's frustration made Harriet wary of his potential to further abuse her and her children. In a complicated series of plans she made to escape slavery and protect her children, she ended up having to remain hidden in the crawlspace of a garret for seven years. Somber music **Archive #1:** A small shed had been added to my grandmother's house years ago. Some boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by anything but rats and mice. It was a pent roof, covered with nothing but shingles, according to the southern custom for such buildings. The garret was only nine feet long, and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air. My uncle Philip, who was a carpenter, had very skillfully made a concealed trap door, which communicated with the storeroom. He had been doing this while I was waiting in the swamp. The storeroom opened upon a piazza. To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. (Chapter XXI) Sounds of nightfall (crickets, owls etc) The air was stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that I could not turn on the other without hitting the roof. The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the

wretched may, when a tempest has passed over them. (Chapter XXI) Morning came. I knew it only by the noises I heard; for in my small den day and night were all the same. I suffered for air even more than for light. But I was not comfortless. I heard the voices of my children. (Chapter XXI) Audio of children laughing **Anna :** I think one thing that she says in the narrative is she tells us about the injuries of enslavement and their continuities from her time in the garret that restricted space is marked by her body through chronic pain for the rest of life and she tells us that. There's something very important to attend to in the way that she's figuring pain and justice, and so that even as she's moving… her freedom is eventually purchased which makes her very angry because she thinks that that purchase validates slavery in a way that she would not have chosen at that point in her life. But she also is telling us that there are continuities between enslavement and freedom and one of the places where that's located is precisely about about pain and about chronic pain and it is not a metaphorical pain – her body was in the cramp position for seven years. Moving and thinking more about the topic of your class, I think that the legacies of injustice are marked generationally and and it's also about questions of access to healthcare, access to diagnoses, and access to all these things that Jacobs and the way that she is thinking about about justice and the sort of promises that justice doesn't always keep even when you're in freedom. I think she has a lot to say about what is sort of carried through and then structurally supported by a system that is only justice in name. **Kevin:** You could also think about that and you can also think about intergenerational transmission of these kinds of experiences, so how they're basically perpetuated again there been studies in the case of animal models where it's looking at the quality of care that the animal has received from its mother or in the case of other models you can remove either the mother of the father. So it's not unique to the mother, it's about the quality of care they're receiving per se. But if you change the quality of care and you give the pups high levels of care versus low levels of care, it can actually drive risk for developing behaviors that look like anxiety, like behaviors in those animals and then when they have their first litter of animals, they exhibit the type of care that they received when they were very young, basically showing that how mom treated you when you were young basically perpetuates how you are going to treat your children and then you look at the first generation of offspring of those and you cross fostered them, you could actually see the perpetuation of this through just the genetic information is provided from the father to the female offspring. The female offspring, when they have their first babies, they become mothers like their fathers' mothers were. **Ramos:** Yeah, a lot of people think about intergenerational trauma in very different ways. So, if I took Lewis Joylyn West's idea of epigenetics you could think about some people coming along and saying well can my genetics be passed along. Meaning that my predisposition to violence: could that be genetically passed on to my children? And there is definitely some of that that you might say that Lewis Joylyn West was thinking about this is his idea that there is such thing as violent people. But I do think that the other way that most people think about it is, intergenerational trauma is a fact. It's something that people grow up with. **NR:** Wow. So there's so much here to talk about. **LG:** All these different voices. You see how they arrange that to have conversation back to back of Anna, then Kevin, and then Nic. **NR:** Right, and I think that what you see here is that they're allowing the listener to think things through. You know, if they had another pass at it, I would encourage them to think about how… you know, what some of these experts are bringing to the fore, and how to punctuate what each of the differences are. So, for instance, they used my voice **LG:** Is it weird to listen to your own voice recording? **NR:** It really is [laughs] As a historian of psychiatry, to talk about

epidemiology of violence theory, which becomes popularized in the seventies and eighties as a supposedly colorblind or race-neutral way of saying that neither Black or white people are inherently predisposed to violence as was previously believed, and that what we need to start looking at is how violence is passed along through exposure in childhood. And so you can definitely hear both of those ideas come to the fore, especially in the way in which… you know… the irony that Kevin and Demas narratives provide in this podcast is that now scientists are using animal studies to make arguments *for* the humanity of children exposed to trauma during their childhood. But for the longest time, these conflations with animal studies were used for the opposite sense to make, particularly people of color more animal-like. So one of those things is they read an article of mine that basically argued for "Why did we have this switch" And it was basically these ideas of that we now know and term epigenetics that were not used in the seventies in the same way that they're being used today. But epidemiology of violence theory is this theory that argues that it's not about Black or white people. It's not about race. It's about exposure to violence, as we saw in the eighties and the nineties. How these ideas of who is violent gets played out means that communities of color being policed. And these are all points that I think could have been a little bit more attenuated at this moment of the podcast and could have been punctured with some sort of other material. I don't know. **LG:** Well, I think this kind of points to one of the challenges of teaching in a class, simultaneously teaching content and teaching techniques on how to communicate that content to the public. In an ideal world, it would be just so amazing if there were some two-semester sequence where we could really work with the material, work with the syllabus, well, learning the techniques and then move forward in the second semester, applying those techniques to create a narrative. But I think what's quite challenging is it's hard to distance yourself from materials that you have just learned, right? Because we're in a learning community. We're there twice a week, every week. And it's very easy to start assuming that what you know is common knowledge. So, I think I'm happy that you unpack that a bit for us Nic. So even another pass through would have sort of given an explanatory comma to all of these different portions that can get sort of jargony. But again, it's hard to step back when you're in a class setting. **NR:** Well, I think also what's really surprising to me is that my students understand epidemiology violence as so normalized. You know, what they learned in my class is the first time they're dealing with what we're talking about here, sometimes it's the first time they're learning about these things. And so what's interesting about this is that epidemiology of violence theory is so normalized in their generation, they felt like it doesn't didn't need to bear any comment. And that was really surprising to me. **LG:** Yeah, that was really interesting. And then as we move along, they're going to continue your voice here as they sort of draw out a different comparison that you've made or a different example. So, for instance, when Art Spiegelman came out with *Maus* which is this graphic novel about a descendant of a Jewish family who is inquisitive about the what happened to his family during the Holocaust. You can see that there is trauma that even the descendants of those people who did not experience that traumatic event like the Holocaust they inherit some of that trauma just by the silences that their families keep. So you can imagine that there's this big question around of all groups of people who survived some large social community trauma the Holocaust being one of them, slavery being another, genocide, war they are bound. I think there is more work to be done by that but obviously you can see that not all paths of inquiry necessarily lead to the same thing. Some psychiatrists would argue some of the idea of dealing with people's trauma after the Holocaust led to epidemiology of violence

theory. But the other way we can look at intergenerational trauma is it leads us to much more capacious ideas of reparations that are critiquing this the larger structural issues at hand when we're talking about race, classism, capitalism, sexism, homophobia and so on and so forth that require a much more rigorous consideration for the transformation of society. Everything we know about society. Mighty rider song **Mali:** Yeah, in talking to Ramos, he really shed light on the fact that intergenerational trauma isn't an isolated incident.... **Sterling:** Yeah, it's occurred in multiple populations in multiple time periods and I think that points to the ways in which trauma moves **Amber:** In resonance with the "Black Radical Tradition", a concept explained in work by Black Studies and Political Science Professor Cedric Robinson, children of American slavery and their descendants were propelled through their adversities with various sharps and fragments of resilience. Harriet Jacobs is important because of her intersectional identity of being someone impacted by childhood trauma and of being someone in African American history that used the Black Radical Tradition to work against oppression in her life (i.e., childhood trauma) that resulted from the subjugating, hegemonic knowledges of the time. Harriet's writing and account of her youth was a radical form of activism and resilience that challenged the people of her time to actually consider black people's humanity as an extension of their mental and emotional well-being. **NR:** I think that this is this is a really fantastic part of the podcast, and it's easy to miss the argument that my students here are making, which is that what Harriet Jacobs did, you know, to stow away and try to find freedom for seven years in a garret, her ability to kind of try to figure out a way to have a different place for children or her ways in which is thinking about, you know, mental well-being, even though that people passed over this incident of her being they get as not being about health or not being about activism. My students have positioned Harriet Jacobs work as a part of the Black Radical Tradition, and I think it's fantastic! And it's a really interesting way to think about what is the Black Radical Tradition, which my students were asked every week, "What is the Black Radical Tradition?" after reading a portion of Cedric Robinson's work. **LG:** I'll just say that after week one, when we discussed the Black Radical Tradition, some of the posts that students do.. they post every week reflecting on it. Some of the main questions were around, "What is this Black Radical Tradition?" And also, "So what will we do with this? How will we reapply it? How do we use this to think through issues in the present, right? How do we look at historical cases and see this tradition present?" And I think they did a fantastic job doing exactly what was one of the main learning objective for the course, really just being critical historians and also people that create audio stories. So through this audio story they're drawing out that circle argument, and they're reapplying what I think is a really complex are given a portable theory in the tradition. **NR:** Yeah, and as we see in the rest of the podcast, I love is that they turned away from questions of violence and trauma that they could have just stayed with and made a decision to say, "Maybe we're asking the wrong questions to figure out how to think about this situation, which is to think about resilience." And I think that's a really important move, which is not to ignore the violence and the trauma around them, but to show how they're not going to allow that violence and trauma to define people as broken or damaged, as inherently predisposed to violence. People who are struggling to define their own humanity through resilience. **LG:** And as they make this pivot here, which will listen to you in a second, it's holding these two facts at the same time, holding these two experiences of trauma and resilience as inextricably linked. **Sterling:** Just as trauma can be made to be mobile and transferred intergenerationally, resilience has some shared characteristics that are worthy of exploring within the context of Harriet's story.

Anna: From page one she is still demonstrating extraordinary resilience, and I think one thing that's very important about the way that she's thinking about resilience is that she's not establishing herself as the only resilient person in her world you know if you think about the way that she talks about her grandmother's extraordinary resilience, her uncle's extraordinary resilience, the efforts that her parents made before they passed and their extraordinary resilience, and she also in observing her children is seeing the ways that resilience is evidenced in them. I think what she really does is show how… the family structure which is very intent on demonstrating itself as vibrant even as it's threatened constantly, even as there are family members who have died, even as family members who have been sold away from the family, even in those instances she still very intent on demonstrating the resilience of those relationships that remain and I think that does two things one it speaks to the strength of those ties and the ways that that the world making homemaking are happening throughout her life and also it's to mark a particular form of loss which is look at this resilience relationship that I have with the uncle who remains to me. **Amber:** Wow, I mean being exposed to this sort of loss and hardship from such a young age must have bred resilience within Harriet **Mali:** Yeah, so with intergenerational trauma comes intergenerational resilience Anna: But I mean resilience is throughout the text. When her children are imprisoned and attempt to flesh her out of hiding her children are extraordinarily resilient and there's a moment when one of them after the freed from the prison but not from slavery the master is is saying something to one of them.. 'you know I want to go back to the jail because I'd rather be in jail than be near you,' so the ways in which these children are thinking through really complex ideas of freedom and choice and deeply constrained circumstances I think also demonstrate the way that they are building resilience to existing structures that seek to imprison them in multiple registers. I mentioned that her listening and her watching her children I think that is a big source of resilience for her, it's the one consolation that she has and very extreme physical and spatial circumstances Brief musical interlude of uplifting music **Ramos:** I mean part of it is what we're missing out of all of this is how people of color, women, queer people of color pass on resiliency they pass on struggle they pass on hope they'd pass on different ideas of what it means to be human. Different ideas of what it means to have a childhood that don't necessarily line up with all of these very like scientific, erudite definitions of what an innocent childhood should look like. We all know this. As humans we have the capacity to dream otherwise we have the capacity to take on a whole bunch of pain, but there's so much joy. And that's one of the difficult things when you're a historian. You can show all of the pain that's going on. But what's more difficult to grasp is how there's so much resiliency, so much joy, so much struggle in all of that. That is much more difficult. **Sterling:** Yeah, it's important to consider that people often think that there is no joy in black childhood, which simply isn't true. **Amber:** Black children cry, but they also laugh, they get sad, but they also experience bliss. There's beauty in the struggle, just like any other human experience. **Ramos:** Part of it is what is inspiring for me is it seems for Harriet Jacobs that the concept of freedom was not something that was actually here yet. It was in her mind. And that she could go to it in her mind. It's a future past that is not here but that which people strive for. So, wow we're getting really philosophical. But that's all just to say that's the irony and the contradiction of Harry Jacobs form of the black radical tradition. You can only see it by looking at how it's been made into our crawl space. And that's really profound. It's a much more damning critique of modernity than it is of anything else, which is why I'm saying we need radical transformation of society. You know what does that mean for people's

everyday lives. Well I don't know. **Dima:** Resilience, I think, is really the million-dollar question right now in the science. That's where we spend hours of our lives listening to talks and trying to understand because everybody wants to bottle resilience and it's a very complicated issue because of the individual variability in resilience, so there are two ways to think of it: one is that there is some good evidence that there is a genetic predisposition to resilience and there's this gentleman named Thomas Boyce who does really great work, and he's written a book called *Orchids and Dandelions* and what that means is that some children are dandelions, they're weeds– you can put them in any environment and they're going to thrive. And some children are orchids– they will thrive but you have to have exactly the perfect environment. And a lot of that, he has been able to do good work to associate that in humans with genetic predispositions and there's only one aspect of it. Other things that support resilience is, there's a wonderful book by a woman named Ann Masten at the University of Minnesota and she calls it "ordinary magic," where resilience isn't coming with like anything fancy, but it's coming from the basic, having your basic needs as a human met. Competence, confidence, as a child, feeling like you can do things, support, caregiving, positive interactions with your peers. All those things have been show to support resilience in the developing individual. So having really, you know, if you're a house, having that house built on solid foundations with respect to the self, and the self as competent in the environment, capable, makes it such that when the world throws you a boulder, you're more capable of overcoming that than if you didn't have those things as part of your developing experience. If you were, if you didn't have a supportive, caregiving environment or supportive peer relationships, if you were consistently told that you weren't good enough to do things in a school setting, that person has been shaped to be less resilient, according to the ideas, according to their findings, in Maten's findings and others, are based on populations that have been maltreated and abused, and they've been able to look for characteristics of individuals that have shown resilience. So resilience is complicated and like everything else, it's got some nature, some nurture components to it. **Mali:** It's important to keep in mind that even though by the end of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Harriet was not able to realize her dream of making a home for herself and her children to share, that in her life overall, she created a powerful legacy as an activist. Her insight to the social issues facing African Americans is demonstrated in her observations in comparing them to the conditions of people she encountered while traveling to England later in her life. **Archive #1:** The people I saw around me were, many of them, among the poorest poor. But when I visited them in their little thatched cottages, I felt that the condition of even the meanest and most ignorant among them was vastly superior to the condition of the most favored slaves in America. They labored hard; but they were not ordered out to toil while the stars were in the sky, and driven and slashed by an overseer, through heat and cold, till the stars shone out again. Their homes were very humble; but they were protected by law. No insolent patrols could come, in the dead of night, and flog them at their pleasure. The father, when he closed his cottage door, felt safe with his family around him. No master or overseer could come and take from him his wife, or his daughter. They must separate to earn their living; but the parents knew where their children were going, and could communicate with them by letters. The relations of husband and wife, parent and child, were too sacred for the richest noble in the land to violate with impunity. Much was being done to enlighten these poor people. Schools were established among them, and benevolent societies were active in efforts to ameliorate their condition. There was no law forbidding them to learn to read and write; and if they helped each other in spelling out the Bible,

they were in no danger of thirty-nine lashes, as was the case with myself and poor, pious, old uncle Fred. I repeat that the most ignorant and the most destitute of these peasants was a thousand fold better off than the most pampered American slave. (Chapter XXXVII) **Anna:** Part of the way that the narrative is structured is that she wants to talk about the suffering that she and her family have experienced, but not figure that as destructive to family instant. I think that that's something that generations of social scientists and scientists have talked about in terms of black family life is that there are there are fewer, shallower less important ties to family and this is part of the ways that people comforted themselves when they sold people's children, for example that 'this mother does not feel in the way that a white mother would.' So what Jacobs does by chronicling her deep attachment to her children, her deep pain from the separation that they undergo, her deep fears about their fate. **Amber:** It's easy to understand the idea of Harriet having fear in regard to her fate and the fate of her children. But it is also important to consider how the fear of individuals and institutions in power has been used as a source of response. **Sterling:** And this fear, as we later discuss, drives people to consider how much they should be protecting more vulnerable members of society **Anna:** So I think that part of what that does is to say that part of what establishing herself within a lineage of family resilience it's to say that this is the type of pain that each mother experiences. She's not saying 'I alone have felt this' or that 'I particularly have felt this.' I think what she's trying to do is to really allow us- us loosely -particularly an abolitionist audience also to see the way that trauma is registering in each generation. We know from her description of her grandmother that her grandmother had many children who were sold into slavery and that she was working to buy as many of her children back from slavery as she possibly could. Then we know that even that she was present in this attenuated way to her children that the structures of enslavement and space meant that she could not be present to her children in the ways that she would like to be. Even in freedom she cannot be present her children in the ways that she would like to be. So I think that while she's always talking about suffering and she's always talking about trauma she's always pointing us to the ways in which that is being structurally enforced and it is structurally enforced in the south in slavery and it is structurally enforced differently and to different ends and with better resolution eventually also in the North. **Amber:** In "Sick from Freedom: African American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction" author Jim Downs described the role of abolitionists as health advocates and mentioned Harriet Jacobs to be associated with this in particular. **Sterling:** Other reformers and abolitionists of the time learned about the conditions of the formerly enslaved due to the work of people like Harriet. Along with other former slaves, Harriet went on to become a benevolent reformer herself. She created orphanages and dedicated rest of life to teaching and providing health as social worker. **Mali:** While reformers like Harriet were able to realize social determinants of health and contribute to efforts to improve the quality of life for black children and their families, it is important to also understand how some used these understandings and subjected them to further social stigmatization to create other questionable insutionsions of reform. Such institutions include those like the epidemiology of violence theory. Epidemiology of violence theory served to justify the policing and overregulation of black youth and people out of a supposed intent to protect them. **Ramos:** Yeah, what's difficult about all of this stuff around childhood studies is that it all comes out of people's desire to protect members of society that we all want to protect. We want to protect children and provide them an atmosphere where they're going to live there you know healthy, maximized lives. The unfortunate matter is that even these

liberal conceptions is really productive really desirable things that people have asked to protect children end up having a dark edge to them which is why we need to protect them from something. And what we're trying to pay attention to here is the idea that protecting children from something means what are we protecting them from. And I'm saying that when we say let's protect the children, we should ask what are we protecting them from? Are we protecting them from people of color? Are we protecting them from crime? If we build up these fences to protect children, what also are we keeping in? You know does that make sense. Like what are we of actually upholding when we build up protections for children. And it just seems as if the contradiction of child protection is is totally unearthed when you look at what happens to black children particularly in all of these instances. **Amber:** Overall, unhealed trauma of all kinds have the potential to lead to recurring "mobile" adversities that extend past their origin and can be integrated into larger systems of oppression for vulnerable populations- especially children. Harriet Jacobs's life and legacy as an author discussing these themes that countered the narrow racialized practices of her time serve as a testament to the significance of understanding and intervening to improve the mental and emotional well being of children. Even as Harriet continued into adulthood, the effects of her childhood followed her in her later obstacles of being a fugitive slave woman and a mother whose children also faced serious adverse childhood experiences. However, by working to ensure that her reflections on the trauma she faced as an enslaved girl were accounted for, Harriet secured a contributing position to African American health activism that should be understood, celebrated, and never forgotten. Triumphant yet somber music **Archive #1:** Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free! We are as free from the power of slaveholders as are the white people of the north; and though that, according to my ideas, is not saying a great deal, it is a vast improvement in my condition. The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble. I wish it for my children's sake far more than for my own. (Chapter XLI) **Archive #1:** It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea. (Chapter XLI) **NR:** Wow, that was a great podcast! **LG:** It was really awesome to get to listen to this semester's worth of work, which we've been seeing them putting in. **NR:** We hope that for all the educators out there that you consider using podcasts as a pedagogical tool, that you look to our website to be able to look for things. Before we close out, we just want to thank some of our partners out there. **LG:** We're lucky enough to work alongside and have some resources from, first and foremost, the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, particularly Johanna Obenda and Babette Thomas, who are working as fellows there. **NR:** They've got a great project called Working Out Loud. We also received significant help from the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and the MML at Brown. We'd also like to thank the Department of Africana Studies and the Cogut Institute for Humanities. **LG:** Overarching this entire thank you is the grant that made this possible from the Swearer Center. **NR:** We could not have done it without

the Swearer Center. Thanks. **LG:** Thanks so much, and thanks for listening. **Resources from *Behind the Podcast: deconstructing scenes from AFRI0550, African American Health Activism.***

- "P-Pops And Other Plosives." Transom, April 27, 2016. https://transom.org/2016/p-pops-plosives/.
- Workshop I: Intro to Audio Editing Multimedia Lab at Brown. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1xNoz4xO50AYJyEahLLuAOXx_TfPWdP_iBke7j7jTXcI/edit?usp=sharing
- AFRI0550: Hearing a Story Structure https://drive.google.com/file/d/10F0EcgIApO1Nw0W3ZB4edFliWroR31bA/view?usp=sharing

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