Introduction
Race, Writing, Architecture

American Patterns

Architecture is fictional at a fundamental level. Yet its fictions are not just make-believe worlds, but rather the making of worlds, constitutive of our social being.


The idea for this book emerged from a deceptively simple question: Why are there so many porches in the conjure tales of Charles Chesnutt? Although Chesnutt’s conjure stories center on often-fantastic transformations within a reimagined slave South, the contemporary frame settings of his late nineteenth-century tales can seem repetitious at best, almost always placing the same characters on the same porch of the same post-Reconstruction North Carolina mansion. Was this repetition a sign of a lack of narrative imagination? Or was Chesnutt’s insistent return to the plantation porch instead a canny exploration of a powerfully resonant physical site and social space? And what did it mean in particular for an African American author writing at the so-called nadir of American race relations—and the peak of the Colonial Revival—to probe the socio-spatial legacy of the architecture of slavery? Why those porches, in this way, at that moment?

My pursuit of answers to these questions took me deep into Chesnutt’s work and the state of late nineteenth-century American architecture before eventually leading to the chapters that make up Sites Unseen, a study of race, American literature, and the built environment. I soon found there were many sites like Chesnutt’s porch in American writing: architectural representations, including but not limited to the built environment of slavery, that engage America’s racial and spatial history in compelling ways, sites that had nonetheless largely been overlooked or ignored by scholars otherwise
interested in the intersections between literature and architecture. Indeed, although race has been one of the most important analytic, theoretical, and historical categories in literary studies for more than a quarter century, it has played only a small role in the interdisciplinary study of architecture and literature—or, to borrow a phrase, the study of “buildings and books.”¹ And although ideas about race and ideas about architecture turn out to be complexly intertwined in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American culture, no major work has appeared on this subject. These are oversights this book aims to reverse. Foregrounding a series of often unexamined spaces, texts, and interactions while also returning to familiar forms with new questions, Sites Unseen seeks to make cultural and material practices that have heretofore gone largely unremarked—by literary critics and architectural theorists alike—visible and salient.²

In addition to reconstituting the interdisciplinary field of architecture and American literature to include a broader range of authors, this book thus investigates new narrative and physical territory. Rather than focus exclusively, for example, on the grand and the genteel, like so many previous studies—yet without ignoring what have traditionally been considered “white” spaces and texts—Sites Unseen interrogates a variety of equally expressive American vernacular forms, including (on the one hand) the dialect tale, the novel of empire, letters, and pulp stories, and (on the other) the plantation cabin, the West Indian cottage, the Latin American plaza, and the “Oriental” parlor. These are some of the overlooked plots and structures, I argue, that can and should inform a more comprehensive consideration of the literary and cultural meanings of American architecture from roughly 1850 to 1930, the period in which American architecture came of age as both a domestic profession and an international practice. Making sense of the complex relations between architecture, race, and American writing gives us a clearer view not only of this formative era but more broadly of what architectural historian Dell Upton has aptly termed the social experience of the built environment.³

Literature has a special role to play in the recovery and articulation of this experience. Stories rooted in specific places and housed in particular structures can tell us a great deal not only about past practices but also about meanings and ideologies, both shared and contested. But literature cannot do this job alone, and Sites Unseen thus draws crucially on important work by scholars in multiple additional fields, including history, urban planning, architecture, cultural geography, and material culture.⁴ Indeed, it seeks to make these fields speak to each other in new ways. At stake are questions at once historical, material, literary, and philosophical. What are the specific
relays between architecture and race in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American culture and society? How are the racial dynamics of the built environment registered in the narratives of American writers? Whose stories, and what places, have we overlooked? Finally, how does the recovery of past meanings help us envision, design, or inhabit spaces today? Before turning to an account of the specific chapters in this study, I want first to place in view a few of the most important ways—and some of the most fascinating texts and objects—in which race, architecture, and representation have been inextricably linked in the U.S. in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Race and Architecture in the Pattern Book Era**

A central premise of this book is that the built environment is always shaped in some way by race whether such shaping is explicitly acknowledged or understood. By this I mean that even structures appearing to have no racial inflection whatsoever cannot be understood apart from the racial circumstances that helped create them. Although contemporary scholars have only recently begun to pay close attention to the relationship between race and architecture, in the nineteenth century most American commentators understood built forms to have explicitly racial origins and connotations. Many of the very earliest American builders’ guides, for example, dating from the late eighteenth century, included “Oriental” home designs—where “Oriental” could mean anything from Asian to East Indian to Middle Eastern—and even such imports as Italian and Gothic architecture were considered not merely national or regional styles but expressions of racial character. As Scott Trafton has recently shown, the wide-ranging project of nineteenth-century American revivalism, which embraced such disparate yet overlapping modes as the Classical Revival and the Egyptian Revival, depended on an expressly racial understanding of architectural structures. “Much of the project of architectural revivalism was the construction of a set of essentialist connections between people and their buildings, and architectural styles were rendered with . . . ethnographic precision,” Trafton observes. “Nineteenth-century revivalist architects were voracious in their considerations of nationalized or racialized styles of architecture, and the history of revivalism is characterized by continual comparisons between carefully delineated geographic—and what during this period were therefore ethnological—regions.”

By midcentury—the heyday of what we might call the pattern book era, when architectural publications were marketed directly to home buyers and not just builders and contractors—such ideas were embedded not
only in architectural publications but also in the broader culture, finding their way even into literature for children. N. W. Fiske’s book, *A Rapid Tour around the World; or Young Peter’s Remarks to His Cousins upon the Different Nations* (1846), for example, treats architecture as both sign and symptom of national and/or racial identity. Virtually all seventeen entries, ranging from “The Englishman” to “The Persian” to “The American,” highlight architectural details in their snapshot descriptions, according built forms the same signifying power as clothing, food, religion, social mores, and forms of government. Several entries even feature built structures in their accompanying illustrations. The tour begins with the English, whom Young Peter accounts “generally a very well looking people.” Not surprisingly, the same can be said of their public buildings, which are described as “very costly and magnificent” (8–9). Even “the cottages of the poor are extremely neat; the walls being annually whitewashed; and the doors and windows overhung and festooned with honeysuckles and roses and other flowers” (9). In France, where “dress is a very important thing with every individual from the highest to the lowest,” there are “many splendid public edifices . . . presenting the noblest forms of architecture” (17). The farther *A Rapid Tour* progresses, however, the less splendid the structures (and by implication the people) typically become. For instance, Young Peter is appalled at the disorderly domestic arrangements required by the servant-intensive homes of Russian nobility. “An enormous number of servants is sometimes attached to the establishment of a nobleman or grandee in Petersburgh; 400 or even 500, it is said,” the book notes. At night “they are obliged to make their beds on the floors of the rooms and entries, of the kitchen and all the back apartments, which then present a motley crowd of human beings huddled together, under sheep-skins, great-coats, bed-covers and the like, in bad air, amid filth and vermin” (36). The phrase “it is said” in this passage suggests *A Rapid Tour* deals primarily in hearsay and stereotype, but that is partly my point. Texts like Fiske’s generally consolidate rather than upend accepted beliefs about links between the built environment and national or racial character, making such sources useful as indices of the interpenetration of ideas about architecture and ideas about race.

Outside Europe it takes a bit more to impress Young Peter. Although he notes that “Turkish cities have a splendid appearance,” this is only the case when they are viewed “at a distance, on account of the towers, domes and minarets, which make an imposing show. But in the interior,” Young Peter warns, “every thing is the reverse; the houses have neither elegance nor comfort; although there is sometimes much finery in the rooms” (69). Young
Peter is somewhat more taken by the “striking” and “peculiar” architectural signature of the Chinese, the pagoda, which was “supposed to have been formed originally after the model of a tent” (94). The accompanying illustration for “The Chinaman” duly models person and structure as parallel objects (Fig. 1). This conjunction is underscored by the text, which empha-
sizes the immense size not only of Chinese pagodas—“which sometimes rise to the height of nine stories” (96)—but also of Chinese bodies: “Their figure is rather large and corpulency is considered by them as becoming” (93). In the illustration the human figure mimics yet also dwarfs the work of architecture, as though the Chinese person depicted is merely the massive tower writ even larger. In its penultimate chapter, A Rapid Tour visits Africa, which it presents to its young readers as a collection of uncivilized tribes. “The native tribes are generally in the state of society which is denominated barbarian,” Young Peter explains. Naturally, their architecture is just as primitive. “The houses are of very rude construction. The materials of the very best are merely stakes of wood plastered with earth; built in conical form like beehives. Many of them are designed chiefly for sleep at night or shelter from the showers” (104). The final chapter of A Rapid Tour introduces “The American” but demurs from illustrating him. “We have no picture for an American,” Young Peter confesses. “We do not know how to draw him or describe him. The American, as he now is, seems to possess a combination of most of the good qualities of all other races of men, together with not a few of the bad ones” (107). The American’s architectural accomplishments are similarly eclectic—and decidedly progressive. Much as he has developed in character and accomplishment beyond the more primitive native races of North America, the American builds better and with more variety. “In the place of the rude wigwam or hut of sticks and bark,” Young Peter avers, “are houses of comfort and elegance, spacious mansions and temples, and villages and cities filling the land” (108–9).

A Rapid Tour’s particular account of the material progress of “The American” suggests not merely a version of architectural manifest destiny but also a racial hierarchy of built forms. Other writers at midcentury would make this hierarchy even more explicit. Here it is helpful to examine the widely circulating pattern books that were exerting considerable cultural influence in the U.S. in the 1840s and 1850s. In A Home for All: or a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building (1848), for example, architectural innovator Orson Squire Fowler (who popularized the mid-nineteenth-century fad of the octagon-shaped house) theorized that human races, like animal species, build according to their innate physical and mental characteristics. “The residences of the various tribes of animals bear a close analogy to their characters,” Fowler explains. “Thus, low-bred, coarse-grained inferior animals make inferior homes, of which worms, moths, etc., furnish examples. So, too, foxes, squirrels, ground-hogs, snakes, eels, etc., are low-minded and inferior, and creep or run upon the ground, and accordingly burrow in the
earth. Yet their habitations, like their characters, far surpass those of animals below them, while the beaver, higher in the scale of mentality, builds him a better habitation.” On and on this scale goes, until Fowler—who was also the midcentury’s most famous phrenologist, and thus quite accustomed to reading character (and race) out of form—concludes: “Throughout all nature the abodes of all animals correspond perfectly with their characters, so that the latter can be safely predicated from the former.” This is “equally true of man,” Fowler insists. “The half-human, half-brute orang-outang constructs a rude hut of sticks and bushes, while the more advanced Bosjowan [Bushman] builds a habitation a little better, but of the lowest class of human architecture, as he is at the bottom of the ladder. The Hottentot, Carib, Indian, Malay, and Caucasian, build houses better, and still better, the higher the order of their mentality.”

Even midcentury pattern books that do not appear overly concerned with race turn out to be terraced by an array of racial assumptions. In his immensely influential volume *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), for example, Andrew Jackson Downing pauses to clarify his use of the term “English” in describing a certain building type:

In saying that this is a farm-house in the English rural style, we do not mean that it is a copy of any building in England; but that in designing it we have seized upon that manifestation of rural and domestic beauty in architecture which the Anglo-Saxon race feels more powerfully and more instinctively than any other; and of which the English, who have had so much longer time than we have to work out these finer rural instincts, have given such admirable examples.

This is only one passage of many in Downing’s writings that emphasizes the significance of America’s Anglo-Saxon heritage and the importance of racial instinct in establishing a national architecture in the U.S.” In other texts of the period ideas about race and architecture at times emerge more defensively. In the final paragraph of his review of the history of ancient and modern architecture, for example, Oliver P. Smith in *The Domestic Architect* (1852) feels compelled to exclude the architectural practices of non-Western races from his discussion of the built environment of more civilized nations. “It might be proper to remark, before closing this article,” observes Smith, “that there are many different forms or fashions of building prevailing in various countries, that have no strict conformity to the styles herein noticed, yet none possessing sufficient merit to take rank in the schools of architectural
science.” Smith could perfectly well stop here, but instead he names names: “The Chinese, the Turks, and people of other distinct political divisions of the earth, have each their fashions of building; yet they are possessed of little in the line of Architecture worthy of imitation in a country of common civilization.” In this context “distinct” appears not simply to mean separate, but more pointedly different, in kind or type. (Similarly, the “domestic” of Smith’s guide’s title might be said to allude not merely to matters of the house but also to matters of the country, the national “home.”) Indeed, given Smith’s deep concern with the relationship between architecture and national morality—“Nothing has more to do with the morals, the civilization, and refinement of a nation,” he insists in his preface, “than its prevailing Architecture”—his anxious exclusion of Chinese and Turkish “fashions” anticipates both the racial theories and the politics of those who would soon agitate for restrictions on foreign immigration to the U.S. In an ironic twist, despite Smith’s antipathy for such “merit[less]” architecture, he includes in the very last plate of his book, without comment, designs for both a Turkish minaret and an “elevation in the Chinese style”—suggesting that even such nonconforming modes can, in the end, have some place in the domestic architecture of a nation “of common civilization.”

The socio-spatial complexities of American slavery presented a different set of challenges to pattern book writers. On the comparatively rare occasions that pattern books treat southern building forms—most texts of the era, typically published in the North, concentrate on structures for the northern and middle states—their authors generally avoid any direct mention of slavery. But their circumlocutions betray an acute awareness that racial servitude both affects and is affected by the built environment. In Samuel Sloan’s two-volume guide, *The Model Architect: A Series of Original Designs for Cottages, Villas, Suburban Residences, Etc.* (1852), the appearance of the first southern design (of only two) requires a preliminary account of regional differences. “There are many reasons why the principal features of the buildings North and South are and will be essentially different,” explains Sloan. “Here, land is an object, and the architect is compelled to compress his plans into the smallest possible space; our climate requires a house that will prove equally habitable in the sultry days of June and July, and during the severe weather of December and January; and our habits need but one tenement,—kitchen, servants’ apartments and dwelling all being under the same roof.” But northern constraints dissolve down South. “On the contrary,” Sloan notes, “the southern gentleman is not circumscribed in the construction of his house, or the laying out of gardens and lawns, by the walls or fences of
his neighbors, and the number of laborers at his command, the entire year, render him less chary in the indulgence of his tastes in these particulars, than he would be, if, to keep them in order, required a constant drain upon his purse.” It is not clear whether the phrase “to keep them in order” refers to the house, gardens, and lawns or to the euphemistic “laborers,” but the effect is the same: for certain landowners in the south the availability of slave labor makes extravagant construction (and ongoing maintenance) a social rather than an economic issue. Indeed, as though in ignorance—or contorted denial—of the slave economy, Sloan’s final price estimate for each southern house includes labor costs at the going rates for Philadelphia masons, carpenters, and bricklayers, as if one expected a southern slaveowner to hire northern workers to build his home. As we will see in chapter 1, this evasiveness about the economics of slavery will characterize other pattern books of the era, including Downing’s.

At times the very language of the charged debate over the south’s “peculiar institution”—as Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina famously characterized slavery in the late 1830s—seems to insinuate itself into pattern book descriptions of southern houses. The Model Architect is no exception. In his discussion of the second expressly southern design, for example, Sloan explains the dual rationale for the customary detached kitchen: not merely the southern climate (it is felt to be too hot to have the kitchen attached to the main house) but also “the peculiarities of construction required by the social and domestic habits prevailing in those sections of the country.” The frequent recurrence of this suggestive term in this particular context perhaps signifies not only the silent acknowledgment of slavery’s distorting pressure on the southern built environment but also the pattern book authors’ reluctance to call slavery by its real name. Treating slavery as merely a “social habit,” virtually no pattern book will even mention the presence of black bodies in their accounts of southern landscapes, effectively erasing race from view much as nineteenth-century slaveowners increasingly sought to segregate their plantations into predominantly white and black spaces. When black bodies do appear, as in Gervase Wheeler’s Rural Homes; Or Sketches of Houses Suited to American Country Life with Original Plans, Designs, Etc. (1851)—another text that lingers over the “peculiarities” of the southern kitchen and other servant spaces—they emerge not quite as occupants of space but, in Wheeler’s case, as elements of the picturesque. In his chapter titled “Southern Homes,” Wheeler declares: “The kitchen buildings must be much lighter, and more spacious than anything that would be contrived for a northern home;—in fact, the domestics require, as it were, a distinct house,
and a separate establishment.” Despite his own reliance on euphemisms for bondage (“domestics”) and his use, like Smith’s, of the term “distinct” to mark racial difference, here Wheeler almost grants slaves agency through inhabitation (“separate establishment”). But this possibility is quickly undercut by the next, and last, sentence of the paragraph. “Nothing could be made prettier,” Wheeler concludes, “than a roomy block of kitchen buildings, with the little cots of the colored servants artistically grouped around.” And in truth, actual slaves still do not quite appear here. It is only the pretty little cots Wheeler wants in view, not their occupants.

Tell Us about These Pictures

One of the most fascinating architectural texts to emerge in the pattern book era, however—C. W. Elliott’s *Cottages and Cottage Life* (1848)—actually takes a stand against slavery. Elliott’s book is unusual for more than its politics. At first glance *Cottages and Cottage Life* looks like a conventional house pattern guide. Exhaustively subtitled, like so many of its genre (*Containing Plans for Country Houses, Adapted to the Means and Wants of the People of the United States; with Directions for Building and Improving; for the Laying Out and Embellishing of Grounds; with Some Sketches of Life in This Country*), Elliott’s octavo volume contains ten lithographic plates of carefully drawn house elevations, each accompanied by floor plans, detailed descriptions, and, in most cases, an estimate of the cost to build. But as the last clause of the subtitle hints—“with Some Sketches of Life in This Country”—*Cottages and Cottage Life* is more than a pattern book: it is also a work of fiction.

Indeed, setting aside the plates, a brief preface titled “Introductory Observations upon Building,” and an illustrated appendix of “Particulars” on such topics as woodwork, flower beds, and fruit trees, by far the bulk of Elliott’s 226-page text is devoted to a “continuous narrative” of one family’s life “in the country.” Which is not to say the architectural and narrative elements are simply cobbled together. Instead, Elliott weaves the house patterns into the novel, turning many of them into homes that appear in the story. In fact the conceit of the narrative itself is that it answers a young boy’s demand that his father “Tell us about these pictures,” a “small portfolio” (1) of architectural drawings made years earlier by the young boy’s grandfather and comprising the houses depicted in the book’s ten plates.

As conceits go, this seems a surprisingly sophisticated twist for a genre still taking shape and whose most significant treatise—Downing’s *Architecture of Country Houses*—would not appear for two more years. Elliott, who studied
horticulture and landscape gardening with Downing in the late 1830s before moving to Cincinnati, where he wrote *Cottages and Cottage Life*, appears to have recognized early on the fundamental role of storytelling in the guidebook genre. After all, pattern books do not merely draw plans; they sketch ways of living. This was particularly true of the architectural advice manuals appearing in the 1840s and 1850s, which are fictional in the very best sense: they make new worlds imaginatively possible. In merging the technical with the fictional, *Cottages and Cottage Life* both understands and exploits the ways that, beneath all the builders’ details, midcentury pattern books are profoundly interested in helping readers picture themselves not just in new homes but, as it were, in new situations. As Dell Upton notes, Downing in particular regarded the country house not merely as a living space but as a therapeutic site for the modern family, a place to restore the “moral values and psychic energy” weakened by the assaults of urbanism, capitalism, and industrialism.18 Thereby, one might say, hangs a tale.

Contemporary reviewers found Elliott’s approach appealing. Professional and general interest journals alike, including the *American Agriculturist, Literary World, New Englander*, and *National Era*, as well as Downing’s own *Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste*, praised the book’s unique combination of science and story. The glowing review published by the *Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review*, which pinpoints Elliott’s multiple achievements, may serve as an example:

> Interspersed throughout this beautifully printed volume, which, by the way, would adorn the centre table of one of these tasty residences, we have a series of sketches of “life, love, and duty” in the cottage, evidently the product of a mind that not only understands the science of architecture, but the philosophy of home, and of all that makes home desirable and happy. In a word, the work combines the useful and the agreeable, the pleasant and the profitable; and is admirably well adapted to the tastes and habits of our people.19

At the same time, there is something a little odd about the “tasty” house plans in Elliott’s book. Downing seems to note as much in his own review when he observes “the plan of the author, so far as we are able to gather it, . . . appears to have been rather to draw the attention of readers generally to the subject, than to furnish a careful or complete practical work on rural architecture.”20 Downing may simply have been preparing his readers for the far more encyclopedic volume he himself was in the midst of writing.21 But by
questioning how “careful” Elliott’s designs are, Downing may also have been trying politely to signal the ways in which almost every one of the house plans in Cottages and Cottage Life has an unusual quirk.

The very first plan, for example, features a “bold and prominent” two-story tower with space for a bedroom and then also “an observatory, laboratory, or the like” above a dramatic arch that doubles as a carriageway. Even the description that accompanies the illustrative plate—which doubles as the frontispiece for the volume itself—allows that the arch, as pictured, may not be “sufficient to sustain the weight” (xiii). Similar idiosyncrasies appear in nearly every plan. Plate V is highlighted by an immense octagonal parlor. Plate III features a large book-lined alcove extruding from the living room. Plate VI includes a freestanding tower with two rooms arranged above a water closet. Plate X recommends enclosing a portion of one of its twin piazzas to make a bathroom.

Perhaps the most unusual plan in the book concerns the “snug” house in Plate II, which is almost entirely focused on a novel arrangement for the keeping of bees (Fig. 2). “In the corner of the living room,” Elliott’s description reads, “will be seen a place for bee-hives, separated from the room by a glass partition, which gives a view of their operations from within. Shutters should be provided for the outside to protect them from cold, heat, and storms” (13). But this is not just an arrangement for watching bees or protecting them. Rather, it is designed so the bees might at times share the living space with the human inhabitants. “In the winter,” Elliott suggests, “they might be fed from within, and indeed be allowed to enter the room” (13). Although ideas about “bee space” and bee culture were undergoing significant revision in the mid-nineteenth century, there are no records of any such domestic beekeeping arrangement being attempted or even hypothesized in the U.S. in the 1840s. It is possible Elliott took inspiration from Scottish landscape architect J. C. Loudon’s Encyclopaedia of Gardening, whose 1835 edition describes beekeepers on occasion inserting a hive into the wall of a cherry-house or a peach-house “so that the body of the hive may be half in the house and half in the wall, with two outlets for the bees” (613), but there is nothing even in Loudon’s extensive work to suggest bringing bees into the parlor.22

Each of these unusual elements marks the degree to which Elliott’s designs press against the limits of the genre—so much so that one wonders if Elliott is poking fun at the mania for “country cottage” advice manuals even as he purports to write one. Indeed, the description of the plan in Plate I hints as much. “This is the largest house in the collection,” reports Elliott, “and one of a good deal of pretension. It can in no way be called a cottage” (xiii).
Even more strikingly than the architectural idiosyncrasies sprinkled through his house designs, Elliott introduces into the chapters of his novel precisely the kinds of social and political tensions the pattern book genre tends studiously to avoid. At various points in the narrative the characters discuss, for example, slavery, religion, and class; marriage, domesticity, and

gender roles; interest rates, tariffs, and stock speculation. There is a subplot about abduction and the threat of rape. An out-of-work laborer loses his health, his wife, his child, and his home before turning to robbery. There is a sense among many in the novel that there are multiple crises ahead. This is a far cry from the concerns of the typical “country cottage” handbook; yet what is so clear as the various plots of *Cottages and Cottage Life* unfold is that each potential crisis is connected in some way to the midcentury house. The cottages in Elliott's book are not simply safe refuges from the complexities of the modern world but are intricately linked to those selfsame complexities. This is not to say Elliott is fully in control of all these matters, either narratively or ideologically. As novels go, *Cottages and Cottage Life* is a pretty good design handbook. What is important here is Elliott's keen awareness that in the late 1840s discussions of domestic architecture and the built environment were not self-contained but inevitably touched on the most pressing social, political, and cultural issues in the U.S. That Elliott explored these points of contact in a hybrid genre of his own making, the pattern book novel, further suggests that, to at least one architectural practitioner, literature was a potentially provocative site for their exploration.

Living in Cincinnati during the turbulent 1840s surely influenced the development of *Cottages and Cottage Life* as well. As biographers of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who lived in Cincinnati from 1832 until 1850, have long noted, the proximity of the burgeoning “bordertown” city to the slave state of Kentucky—with, as Joan Hedrick observes, “its race riots, commercial trading, runaway slaves, disease, and death”—strongly affected Stowe's sense of social justice. One suspects that living in Cincinnati may have had a similar effect on Elliott, whose only publication before *Cottages and Cottage Life* (as best the record shows) was a catalog of fruit trees. In fact Elliott's life in Cincinnati overlapped considerably with Stowe's. They lived, for example, in the same part of the city, Walnut Hills, where Elliott likely pursued his career as a horticulturist and landscape gardener. Elliott was also a member of the Semi-Colon Club, the elite literary society to which Stowe belonged and in whose company she had produced her first writings. These connections have to do with more than mere proximity or serendipity, for Elliott and Stowe, I have determined, were also related by marriage: Elliott was the younger brother of Elizabeth Elliott Foote, the wife of Stowe's favorite uncle, Samuel, in whose Walnut Hills mansion the Semi-Colon Club held its meetings. (Stowe would likely have known Charles Elliott even without this connection, for Elliott's other sister, Sarah, had married James Handasyd Perkins, another Semi-Colon Club member, to whom Stowe was attracted early in her days in Cin-
cinnati.) Reading the socially and politically aware “sketches of life” that constitute Elliot’s novel, with their attentiveness to the intricacies of domestic life as well as the stain of slavery, the constraints of gender, and the stratifications of class, one cannot help suppose they may have first been shared with and perhaps even shaped by Stowe, Foote, Perkins, and such other members of the club as antislavery activist and politician Salmon P. Chase.

If Cottages and Cottage Life does not in the end assemble as thorough a commentary on race and the built environment as the one Stowe would offer only a few years later in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Elliott’s text nonetheless shares Stowe’s understanding that architecture has social and political dimensions. In Elliott’s story, a city family, newly wealthy, seeks life “in the country; expecting there the happiness and repose which the town could not yield” (4). Although the narrative promises these country sketches “will, beyond all question, prove dull and uneventful—taking their hue from the life which is common there” (4)—country life turns out to be rather unsettling for “Uncle Tom” Ellison, his brother “Uncle John,” his daughter Grace, and his nephew Ned. (Although the head of the family shares the same name as the man who would become Stowe’s title character, the Ellisons are white and free, not black and in bondage.) None of the local builders, for example, is impressed with the plan for the Ellisons’ new house, which happens to be modeled on the pretentious structure in Plate I of Elliott’s book. Grace is alternately perplexed by a new kitchen servant’s rural ways and besieged by an eligible bachelor who turns out to be a kidnapper and possibly a rapist. Ned, perhaps a stand-in for Elliott himself, flounders professionally until he finally decides to study landscape gardening with a man who may be a fictional version of Downing. Politics, both national and local, repeatedly intrude on the story. Casual conversations quickly turn to taxes, the right to vote, and “the bankin’ system” (131). An ambitious lawyer, father to the bachelor-kidnapper, persuades Uncle Tom to run for county office, then undermines him in order to grab the position, and its possibilities for graft, for himself. Uncle John shows the others how the countryside is plagued by the same “social evils” (139), such as poverty, that they thought they had left behind in the city. Of the four main plotlines—will Uncle Tom build his house? will he be elected to office? will Grace marry? will Ned figure out his life’s work?—none comes to fruition until the novel’s epilogue, and even then some still fail. The principal narrative concludes with Uncle Tom not merely usurped by the deceitful lawyer but swindled by his broker and dead from a stroke. After her father’s death Grace is unhinged by grief and insists on leaving the countryside. Although she eventually marries Ned—who has finally decided to become a
landscape gardener—in the frame tale Ned is presented to readers as a widower, suggesting Grace has died sometime after their third child is born. Perhaps “happiness and repose” is not the fate of cottage life after all.

The debate over slavery erupts in the middle of a chapter in which Uncle Tom, Uncle John, Ned, and two neighbors discuss the myriad frustrations of house building and politics—and indeed helps propel the text toward an analysis of race and architecture. Exasperated by the resistance of the local building trade to his house plan, Uncle Tom is even more exasperated by rumors threatening his budding political candidacy. Asked by John whether what he has heard is true—that Uncle Tom has declared himself in favor of slavery—Tom responds with a vehement denial: “I never thought it,—never said it,—and never will!” (155). Apparently the ambitious lawyer who first recruited Tom has been twisting his words. “What did you say?” asks Uncle John.

“I don’t think of any thing, unless it was, ‘that, were I living in a slave-holding country, under some circumstances, I should not hesitate to own slaves.’ No, sir, if I had a thousand slaves, I would make use of my influence among my neighbors, and preach and pray that they might be led to unite with me in measures for the extinction of the practice, upon the face of this earth,—that I said, and will say any where.” (156)

Uncle John is as vehement an opponent of slavery as his brother. “It is curious and incomprehensible, the tenacity with which [southern politicians] hang on to what they all know to be the greatest of moral, social, and political evils. They are monomaniacs” (156). When one of the Ellisons’ neighbors wonders why the debate produces so much fuss—“why [can’t] they . . . be left alone” (156)—John’s answer shows a clear understanding of the way race structures the built environment. It also cuts to the heart of what, to John, it means to “build” a nation. “You have not been on the Ohio river?” he replies. “Well, sir, it is almost literally true, that from Wheeling to Cairo,—from its source to its mouth,—the one bank is bursting with life, vigor, and hope; the other, attenuated with weakness and wilderness. The one marches (good or evil as you may think) onward to wealth and power—the other sinks into decay and death” (156–57). John predicts Kentucky will thrive without slavery once the politicians are swept out, in the process helping to push the “great West” into the forefront of American economics and politics. “The west is becoming, or has become,” John asserts, “the ruling power in this country.”
Cincinnati, in particular, “is the center of the west,—therefore, the center of
the world; and you had better calculate your longitude accordingly” (158). If
it is not entirely clear whether Elliott’s sketches are actually set in the West
(the fact that John has to describe the banks of the Ohio River to his neigh-
bors makes it clear the novel does not take place in Cincinnati, for example),
it is passages like these that give Cottages and Cottage Life a political explicit-
ness—and a desire, like Uncle Tom, to speak its politics “anywhere”—wholly
absent from the architectural advice book genre. (John’s politics are even
more radical than Tom’s. In this same chapter he expresses a proto-Marx-
ist hope that one day the “producing classes” will “take their position in the
front rank” at the expense of owners and other “factors.”) If, as certain textual
details suggest, Elliott’s sketches are actually set in the East—perhaps even
along Downing’s own Hudson River—then Cottages and Cottage Life serves
notice from the heart of pattern book country that the genre’s silence on the
racial politics of architecture could be ignored no longer.25

Where Will You Reside Next?

Although Elliott’s hybrid text inspired no direct imitators—Cottages and
Cottage Life remains the only American pattern book novel—in the years
following its appearance the racial politics of architecture would become a
more frequent, and more compelling, topic for American writers. Elliott’s
Cincinnati neighbor and in-law Stowe, for example, as we shall see in more
detail in chapter 1, sparked an often rancorous debate about the built envi-
ronment of slavery with the publication in 1852 of Uncle Tom’s Cabin—a
book whose very title foregrounds the buildingscape of bondage. Many of
the responses to Stowe’s novel, both fictional and otherwise, pointedly depict
a more benevolent physical environment than the one Stowe imagines, for
example, at Legree’s plantation. In the mid-1850s Harriet Jacobs would begin
work on Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), a narrative that not only
provocatively repurposes what Valerie Smith has aptly called slavery’s “archi-
tectural close places,” such as Jacobs’s secret garret, but also, as Ann Gelder
has shown, conspicuously revises the pastoral cottage ideology of the mid-
century domestic architecture reform movement as epitomized by Downing.26
And as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 1, during this same
decade escaped slave Hannah Crafts would demonstrate a highly sophisti-
cated awareness of the racial politics of antebellum space in the manuscript
of her novel, The Bondwoman’s Narrative.
As literary interest in exploring the relays between race and architecture deepened in the U.S., so too did cultural assumptions about the relationship between selves and structures. A brief look at two intriguing artifacts of late nineteenth-century material culture, both with links to the pattern book genre, helps make the depth of those assumptions more clear. In the first of these artifacts, a late 1860s board game, for example, one finds human faces—several of which appear to represent different racial and/or ethnic types—suggestively paired with distinct forms of architecture. Manufactured in Pittsburgh and “designed to supply a want long felt, of an innocent, highly entertaining and instructive amusement for the young of both sexes in the home circle, at social parties, picnics, &c,” Smith’s Pictorial Parlor Oracle consists of a square board with a metal spinner. On the board are six concentric rings, each ring representing a different game (Fig. 3). Although the
directions do not specify the order of play, players may well have started at the outermost ring (a simple number game) and then worked their way toward the center. The second, third, and fourth rings, which feature small lithographed images in each of their squares, pretend to provide information about the person at the spinner. The second ring, for example, asks: “What is a prominent trait in your character?” and offers twenty-four possibilities, each a comparison to an animal—“wise as a serpent,” “vain as a peacock,” “harmless as a dove,” and so on. The third ring then depicts an array of architectural structures as possible answers to the question “Where will you reside next?” Many of the images in this third ring resemble the architectural elevations typical of Downing’s *Architecture of Country Houses* and other pattern books, from their picturesque, tree-accented frames to their tiny foregrounded human figures.

Part of the game’s thrill, of course, is seeing what the Oracle predicts for you. Will you reside in a Farm House? The White House? A Log Cabin? Under a Cart? And while there is no necessary link between this ring and the fourth—which depicts twelve different male faces in answer to the question “What is your ideal of beauty?”—game players would very likely make the link between these two rings themselves, as the layout of the board matches one face with each structure. A dapper gentleman with a stylish mustache, for example, appears directly below the square “City Residence.” A long-haired, piratical-looking figure is matched with the sailing ship depicted in “Ocean.” The man depicted below the square, “Under a Cart,” with his round face, low forehead, and dull expression, mimics popular physiognomic representations of an imbecile. Thus when someone spins to discover where he will “reside next,” the joy or disappointment of landing on a particular type of architecture is doubled by the Oracle’s implicit claim that if you reside in this space you are also probably this kind of person. In fact, the overall effect of the juxtaposition of these two rings is an uncanny merger of pattern book representations with the face studies common to phrenology. (Although Orson Fowler—the phrenologist/architect/comparative race theorist behind *A Home for All*—did not invent this game, he certainly would have understood it.) And while none of the faces depicted is African American, there are unmistakable racial and/or ethnic typologies invoked in many of the images. The face below the “R R Shanty,” for example, resembles common nineteenth-century caricatures of Irish immigrant railway laborers, from the figure’s bulbous nose, to his dark skin, to his cartoonishly bestial fea-
If Smith’s Pictorial Parlor Oracle depicts architecture as a racial trait, a second popular artifact, the late-century phenomenon known as the scrapbook house (also called house albums, collage albums, or paper doll houses) suggests ways that even the creation of imaginary houses often depended on ingrained ideas about racialized space. Flourishing between 1875 and 1920, the scrapbook house, which was part of the broader late nineteenth-century scrapbooking craze, represents the broad impact of the pattern book as a cultural form, especially in the postwar years as mass-market American women’s periodicals such as *Godey’s Ladies Book* began to include more and more house plans as regular features for their readers. (One historian estimates that *Godey’s* published “some 450 house designs” between 1846 and 1892.) Scrapbook house makers used clippings from trade catalogs and magazines, including *Godey’s*, along with a variety of supplemental craft materials such as tissue paper and doily strips, to turn empty account books, ledgers, or scrap albums into miniature homes, typically by decorating each page (or double-page spread) as a single room. Although their decorative details might differ, certain features tend to remain consistent from house to house (Fig. 4). The face linked to the structure “Hotel” has what appears to be the stereotypically hooked nose and fleshy features of a German Jew and seems to wear a form of skullcap. The figure beneath the “White House,” on the other hand—situated directly between the Jewish figure and the Irishman—has the blond curls and delicate features of a stereotypical white American.

house. Most scrapbook houses were made by women, often by mothers for daughters, or by mothers and daughters together, and were usually intended as backdrops for paper doll play, although in many cases images of people can also be found glued directly onto the pages. Most of the houses unfold in a common pattern, moving first through the relatively public spaces of the home—front halls, parlors, libraries, dining rooms—before reaching the more private recesses of bedrooms, dressing rooms, and bathrooms. Scrapbook houses also tend to imagine rather grand homes, often in excess of twenty or more rooms. The dominant decorative ethic similarly tilts toward profusion. Since decorative clutter was by no means unusual in middle-class Victorian homes, rooms like these are at once representations of and fantasies about late-century abundance, consumption, and collection.28

They are of course also representations of, and fantasies about, the ways race relations are inscribed within the built environment. Much like the midcentury pattern book, race is marked in the scrapbook house, in most instances, by its apparent absence. The homes on display are presumptively white spaces, at least as far as the human occupants are concerned. Many of the physical objects in various rooms, on the other hand, particularly those of “Oriental” or “Turkish” provenance, following the Victorian fashion for racially themed interior decoration, have racial codes attached to them. When explicitly raced figures do appear in scrapbook houses—an Irish maid in the parlor, say, or a black cook in the kitchen—they almost always do so in the spaces (and the roles) to which they are stereotypically confined. This convention was apparently so common that when in the early 1900s, trying to capitalize on the popularity of the homemade scrapbook house, publishers began marketing prepackaged commercial scrapbook houses to children, many of these homes came already supplied with a precut “mammy” figure to paste into the kitchen along with the pots and pans.29 As Beverly Gordon has noted, the racist assumptions of the prevailing culture “were fully embedded” in scrapbook houses.30

A closer look at one handmade scrapbook house, however, suggests that some individual house makers (and/or users) may have had more complicated relationships to these implicitly raced homes. An elaborate house by an unknown maker in the holdings of the Winterthur Library designated as Folio 252, for example, does indeed have a black cook in its kitchen (Fig. 5).31 At first glance her image appears to reinforce persistent racial stereotypes. Wearing an apron and standing to the left of a central stove, she is smiling broadly and appears to be gesturing—though precisely to what is not clear: the pots on the stove? the table set with food? the shelf of neatly arrayed
dishes?—with her arms out and her palms up. Her round face, exaggerated lips, and headscarf trade eagerly on debasing minstrel representations. The very color scheme of the room—in which the bright orange window shades match the orange in the cook’s dress and also the tablecloth—seems to identify her more as just another object in the kitchen than as an individualized human being. (In fact, upon closer inspection, the cook’s dress and the tablecloth are not simply the same color but appear to be made out of the same material.) At the same time, other details give the cook a potential for agency and individuation rarely accorded scrapbook house servants. Unlike a different domestic worker who appears two pages earlier in the house, for example—a white servant flipping pancakes in a small walk-in “China Closet” just off the dining room—the cook in the kitchen is not depicted in the act of laboring but perhaps instead in the moment just before she sits down to eat her own dinner. Indeed, despite the minstrel-like exaggerations of her face, in the context of this otherwise empty kitchen her smiling gesture may be performed for no one’s satisfaction but her own. The cook certainly occupies a more prominent position in this room than do most scrapbook house ser-

Figure 5. Image of kitchen, collage album, Folio 252 (ca. 1880–ca.1900). Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.
Unlike many of the images pasted into scrapbook houses, it is possible to identify the exact source of the cook’s picture: she has been cut out of a late nineteenth-century trade card for stove polish (Fig. 6). In fact this trade card, which advertised the popular Rising Sun brand, is the source not only for the cook but also for the table set with food and the stove in the middle of the page. The trade card makes the cook’s gesture more clear: in the original image she is welcoming another character, the black male figure leaning in at the door, into the room, for his dinner. “Come in Ephraim!” the cook says in stereotypical black dialect. “Ise not mad with you dis time, case yer sent me de genuine RISING SUN STOVE BLACKING; an’ it shines de stove in good shape. An’ here’s yer dinner all ready.” As the cook’s words suggest—“Ise not mad with you dis time”—this trade card is actually the second in a sequence. In the first card of the series (which this house maker has not used), the cook is livid with Ephraim for bringing her an inferior brand of polish. Subtitled “No Dinner?” the first card’s caption reads: “Look yere, old man! What kind o’ stove blacking you call dat? Ise been rubbin’ on dat stove all mornin’ an’ it don’t gib it a polish worth a cent. You jest git de RISING SUN STOVE POLISH right away, or dar’l be trouble. You think I got time to ’speriment with such mud?” (In this first card the kitchen table stands empty, since the cook has had no time to
prepare any food.) In its original context the image of the black cook is thus unmistakably racist, from her minstrel features and dialect to the demeaning way in which the Rising Sun brand metaphorically links her blackness with the blackness of the stove and the polish itself. And yet can the act of removing the image from its original source—not just cutting it out of the trade card but then pasting it into an imaginary home as this scrapbook house maker has done—reconfigure the meaning of the image as well as the narratives in which it might operate?

According to Ellen Gruber Garvey, it just might. In her work on Victorian trade card culture, Garvey suggests that clipping images out of trade cards and rearranging them in albums according to the designs of the maker rather than the advertiser can indeed shape new meanings, allowing one to “move characters almost magically from their original relationships and old frames into new narratives.” In this case we might then imagine that the process of being moved from her original context to her new location in Folio 252’s kitchen made the cook available to her assembler for story lines other than those in which the trade card advertisement rigidly constrained her. And yet as Garvey notes, even as relocated images “take on an independent existence,” they “nonetheless [continue] to refer to the original advertising source.” And so perhaps Folio 252’s black cook, despite being resituated, has not necessarily been rescued or reimagined, particularly if her mockingly humorous commercial origins are inevitably called up for the user of the scrapbook house. The frame of this new kitchen, in other words, may be just as disempowering or demeaning as the original trade card.

And yet given the context of Folio 252 as a whole, one cannot help but sense some more particular interest, on the part of this house maker, this book “author,” one might even say, in exploring—in however limited a way—the texture of the lives of the help of the house. More so than many other examples in the genre, Folio 252 appears quite interested in domestic help. Not simply because maids and cooks appear in the book itself (there are actually fewer domestic workers in Folio 252 than in some other scrapbook houses, which Gordon notes sometimes include a “battery of servants”), but because this house maker devotes considerable space to rooms in which servants might not merely work but also live, including several maid’s rooms, a separate servants’ dining room, and a seamstress’s room. Not all of these rooms are complete, and some appear to be missing—including pages torn out—or belatedly transformed. One room labeled “Maid’s Room,” for example (the name of each room is usually written on the overleaf of the previous page), is actually finished as a sumptuous artist’s studio. The room labeled
“Servants Dining Room” is actually finished as a bedroom. And while it is impossible to know what decisions guided the final composition of the book, it seems useful to think not only about the images contained within its pages but also about the possible relationship of the house maker (or recipient) toward its contents. In *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*, Bill Brown provocatively suggests that in interpreting material culture we might pay more attention to the ways “objects mediate relations between subjects” and “subjects mediate the relations between objects.” “How,” in other words, Brown asks, “are things and thingness used to think about the self?” Along these lines, we might consider the ways that Folio 252’s maker or recipient, through the construction of and/or play with the album, might have negotiated either a lived or an imaginary relationship to the particular persons and positions represented in the house, recognizing that these dollhouse figures are in some sense both objects and subjects. What kinds of stories might have played out on these pages, in these rooms, in this house? Could the artist’s studio actually have been intended as a maid’s room? What kind of maid would that be? (Or, in the kitchen, what might the cook now be saying?) Through its particular design, Folio 252 at least raises the possibility of an imaginative, even potentially empathetic inquiry on the part of the scrapbook house maker into the lives, needs, and narratives of the house’s domestic laborers—a possibility generally foreclosed by the commercial versions marketed to children in the early 1900s, which tended to instruct the purchaser exactly where to place, and thus also how to use, each numbered object and person. Indeed, although we can often only guess at the stories that handmade scrapbook houses were used to tell, they remain provocative artifacts in the study of race, architecture, and writing precisely to the extent to which they function as sites for the page-by-page unfolding of narratives that both employ and at times seem to push against cultural assumptions about race and the built environment.

**A Floor Plan**

In the chapters that follow I highlight a series of equally provocative texts and contexts to explore the ways in which American writing between roughly 1850 and 1930 concerned itself, often intensely, with the racial implications of architectural space, primarily but not exclusively through domestic architecture. As the foregoing sections have argued, race has been a central component of the concept and practice of all branches of architecture—by which I mean the creation, disposition, and also representation and imagination...
of the built environment—since at least the dawn of the pattern book era if not before. By focusing my chapters on the years 1850–1930, I mean to situate this book during the period not only in which architecture came of age professionally in the U.S. but also in which ideas about architecture became a prominent part of broader conversations about American culture, American history, American politics, and (although we have not always understood this clearly) American race relations. Each chapter, moreover, takes as its primary context a critical stage in this history: the rise of the midcentury “cottage design” pattern book (chapter 1); the powerful nostalgia of the late nineteenth-century Colonial Revival (chapter 2); the turn-of-the-century explosion of the bungalow as both domestic icon and profitable export (chapter 3); and the early twentieth-century embrace by American middle-class households of “Oriental” decorative furnishings (chapter 4). This study thus not only takes seriously but indeed concretizes Dell Upton’s trenchant observation that “architecture is an art of social storytelling, a means for shaping American society and culture and for ‘annotating’ social action by creating appropriate settings for it.” *Sites Unseen* argues not only that literature can “shape” and “annotate” culture in similar ways but that literary texts—precisely for their ability to bring stories and structures alive—are particularly good sources for examining what we might call, after Craig E. Barton, the “complex social and cultural geography” of the always already raced American architectural imagination.

In highlighting the overlapping relationship between literature and architecture as sites for social storytelling, I am thus also adapting for this study the approach of Diana Fuss, who in her recent study of architecture, writing, and interiority usefully challenges the “too easy bifurcation between literal and figurative spaces” found in most studies of architecture and literature. Where Fuss examines the ways that “architecture and literature work in tandem for the writer to create a rich and evolving sense of the interior,” *Sites Unseen* explores the social and cultural geographies that narrative and architectural spaces, in equally provocative conjunction, can also make visible. In the chapters ahead we will thus frequently attend not only to the narrative features of architectural space—the ways a floor plan, for example, can encode, as in the plot of a novel, the unfolding of a particular temporal and spatial experience—but also to the architectural features of narrative space. Chesnutt’s conjure stories, in which the frame tale of almost every narrative not only depicts the porch of a plantation-era mansion but also functions as the “porch” of the story itself—a highly controlled and mediated social space where the inside and the outside of the story (and the house) meet—
offer only one example (chapter 2). In other chapters, different homologies between narrative and architectural form emerge, from Hannah Crafts’s reconfiguration of the midcentury pattern book into a template for her own narrative reorientations (chapter 1), to Olga Beatriz Torres’s insertion of English words into the linguistic landscape of her Spanish letters as though in imitation of the striking buildings that orient her to American society (chapter 3), to the ways the design of a Frank Lloyd Wright interior may uncannily resemble the plot of a mystery novel (chapter 4).

Another recurring concern in this study is domestic space. Although in this book I largely follow Upton’s methodology in defining “architecture” broadly rather than narrowly—“I use ‘architecture,’” Upton writes, “to stand for the entire cultural landscape, including so-called designed landscapes, urban spaces, and human modifications of natural spaces”—the chapters that follow take many of their most important measurements in and around the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American home. There are many reasons for this focus, including the presence of a large body of critical and historical literature that has helped make this space so powerfully visible for analysis. At the same time, I return to the home with new questions and in the process discern new forms and practices. This is particularly true in the second half of the book, in which, drawing on models provided by such critics as Amy Kaplan and Kirsten Silva Gruesz, and such historians as Kristin L. Hoganson and Mari Yoshihara, I trace a range of international and transhemispheric influences on American building practices that demonstrably shaped both the built and affective environments of American houses while also calling into question the very ways we presume to distinguish the domestic from the foreign.

If *Sites Unseen* does not prioritize gender in the same way many studies of American domesticity do, this is in part because I hope to show that race is as central to our understanding of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century spaces and structures as gender has already proven to be. Nonetheless, this study identifies multiple sites at which the intersection of race and architecture is also provocatively crossed and complicated by gender, from the sexual violations that so often structured the spaces of slavery to the not infrequently feminized “embrace” of “the East” through architectural and decorative tropes and practices. Though the profession of architecture in the U.S. came to be dominated by men, American women, particularly during this formative period, played critical roles in the discussion and dissemination of architectural designs as well as the theories of home space those designs sought to articulate. As noted earlier, *Godey’s Ladies Book* and
other mass-circulation women’s periodicals were among the most important sources for the distribution of house plans in the nineteenth century. Women were thus shapers as well as consumers of pattern book ideology, especially in the absence of a national architectural press, which would not fully emerge until later in the century.40 As putative superintendents of domestic space, moreover, women (particularly middle-class white women) often had the responsibility of regulating the home’s implicitly racialized zones of labor and access, tasks eased (or complicated) not just by floor plans but also, as we shall see, by region. Women of color, on the other hand, particularly during slavery, often sought to claim the spatial rights—both inside and outside the house—typically denied them by their social, legal, or economic position.

One additional category of analysis about which this study has tried to think carefully, both in the layout of the plan of chapters and in the local arguments within each section, is geographic location. I have sought, for example, to distribute my texts and contexts widely, both within and outside the boundaries of the U.S., from the South, to the Gulf, to the Far West, and finally to Hawaii. While recognizing that there remain regions (and races) this study does not adequately address, my hope is that the chapters that follow will help not only to identify but also to open for further examination new spaces in this extraordinarily rich interdisciplinary field.

Chapter 1, “Cottage Desire: The Bondwoman’s Narrative and the Politics of Antebellum Space,” investigates the sustained engagement of escaped slave Hannah Crafts’s 1850s novel with the socio-architectural philosophy of the dean of the midcentury pattern book genre, Andrew Jackson Downing. At once claiming and revising Downing’s conception of the ideal cottage as her own desired domestic space, Crafts narrates—through an ingenious literary repurposing of the pattern book’s model of architectural construction—a search for black homeownership that is inextricably linked to self-ownership. This chapter attends not just to Downing, whose evasiveness about slavery in a text like The Architecture of Country Houses betrays itself in often surprising ways, but also to Charles Dickens, whose depiction of Esther Summerson’s housekeeper-to-homeowner happiness in Bleak House provides an alternative model for Crafts’s narrator’s personal and spatial self-reclamation.

Chapter 2, “Piazza Tales: Architecture, Race, and Memory in Charles Chesnutt’s Conjure Stories,” considers the late nineteenth-century African American writer’s obsessive return to the plantation porch as a meditation on the failed racial and spatial politics of the post-Reconstruction South. Attending in particular to the largely ignored middle phase of Chesnutt’s conjure tale production, I argue that Chesnutt’s carefully framed stories
index an acute understanding of the ways social relations are shaped by (and leave their impress on) the built environment. This chapter uncovers a revisionist historicism in which Chesnutt appears to dare readers to discover that the plantation piazza—perhaps the chief architectural marker of southern white racial superiority—is actually a creolized form whose polycultural origins owe as much to West African and Caribbean vernacular traditions as they do to the white colonnades of classical antiquity. If African Americans were often excluded from public spaces and “white” buildings at the turn of the century, Chesnutt shows powerfully how those same Americans have been claiming ground, in their own ways, since the days of slavery.

Where the first two chapters share a focus on the built environments of slavery and segregation, both actual and remembered, the last two chapters bring into relief equally evocative examples of race, architecture, and American writing in explicitly hemispheric and international turn-of-the-century contexts. Chapter 3, “Imperial Bungalow: Structures of Empire in Richard Harding Davis and Olga Beatriz Torres,” examines three texts that together interrogate the buildingscape of empire: Davis’s travelogue *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America* (1896), his popular romance *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897), and *Memorias de mi viaje (Recollections of My Trip)*, the little-known 1918 epistolary memoir of Torres, who emigrated to the U.S. in 1914 during the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution. All three books share a specific interest in the bungalow form, which though typically celebrated, particularly in the U.S., as the material incarnation of democratic ideals, actually emerges from within a far more complex narrative of global invention and appropriation, which these works help lay bare. Proposing a new reading of these texts as “Gulf” narratives—as concerned less with specific national demarcations than with the more fluid political and cultural geography of the hemispheric Gulf region—this chapter highlights not only the points of contrast between Davis and Torres but also the unexpected moments in which they find common ground. One of my goals through this comparison is to bring a multivoiced and specifically material context to Caroline Levander and Robert Levine’s broad call for a hemispheric American studies committed to “excavating the intricate and complex politics, histories, and discourses of spatial encounter occurring throughout the hemisphere” that have generally been obscured in more nation-based U.S. inquiries.41

The fourth and final chapter, “Keyless Rooms: Frank Lloyd Wright and Charlie Chan,” explores two strikingly different uses of “Oriental” space (and Asian decorative otherness) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the mid-1890s, still fascinated by the Ho-o-den, the half-scale rep-
lica of an Asian temple he had seen mounted on the Chicago World’s Fair’s Wooden Isle, Wright began designing homes with the horizontal lines and open floor plans characteristic of Japanese architecture. By 1905 Wright himself would travel to Japan, whose twinned aesthetic of openness and simplicity he continued to incorporate into his own work. “No dark pockets” is how one architectural historian has described Wright’s sense of what he had learned from Asia. In stark contrast to Wright’s aesthetic, however, lay popular representations of “Oriental” space; one thinks, for example, of Sax Rohmer’s Fu-Manchu stories or the “Oriental” tales of pulp fiction magazines. In these depictions, “Oriental” spaces are confining rather than open, “inscrutable” rather than simple; “all dark pockets” is how one might describe the mainstream American sense of Asian interiors. Possible exceptions to this general rule, however, are Earl Derr Biggers’s Hawaii tales of Charlie Chan. In the very first Chan novel, *The House without a Key* (1925), Biggers tries to imagine “Oriental” settings that reveal secrets rather than conceal them. Enlisting metaphors of crumbling walls and expansive gardens, Biggers counters stereotypes of Asian space and décor (even as he creates others of Asian character) in stories that owe more to Wright’s blueprints—and less to Rohmer’s—than one might expect.

*Sites Unseen* then concludes with a brief coda, “Black Cabin, White House.” After analyzing the bizarre appearance of two dilapidated slave cabins in a late nineteenth-century pattern book—offered as a “contrast” to the more modern (read: white) Queen Anne specimens that follow—I close with a compact history of our nation’s whitest house, currently home to the first African American president and his family. An apt site with which to close this study, the story of the White House overlaps provocatively with nearly all the salient histories in this book, from its mode of construction, to the implicit (and sometimes explicit) racialization of its social spaces, to the stories that have used it as a potent site for their own imaginings. Taking us back in time to the early 1800s, and then ahead to the present moment, this concluding discussion thus also helps point to new terrain while offering new ideas for producing future sociocultural analyses of the built environment informed by questions of race and writing.

It bears repeating, at the close of this introduction, that the chapters in this study take up authors, texts, and sites that for the most part lie outside the typical investigations of architecture and literature. I have done this deliberately, in order to highlight the need for fresh perspectives in this interdisciplinary field. This does not mean that the terms and topics of this study are themselves marginal. Quite the contrary: I believe they are not only cen-
tral to the field but that our having overlooked them for so long has contributed to the general myopia about the importance of race to American literary representations of the built environment. At the same time, I do not mean to suggest that the writers and texts in this study are the only ones to which we might turn in order to develop a more productive investigation of race, architecture, and American writing. Indeed, much work remains to be done, both “inside” and “outside” the traditional spaces and canons of American writing, and I hope this study will help spur more investigations into a variety of materials and periods.\textsuperscript{43} The chapters presented here are intended as illustrative examples of what such investigations might look like, not as an exhaustive survey. Offered at a moment in our own history in which, on the one hand, some have declared the architectural profession to be undergoing a racial “crisis”\textsuperscript{44} and, on the other hand, a nation watches as the first African American family settles into the White House, not as servants but as occupants, \textit{Sites Unseen} ultimately underscores the need to make race itself a more salient factor in our studies—now and in the future—of the powerful contact points among architecture, culture, and American society.