

“Perfectly White”: Light-Skinned Slave and the Abolition Movement 1835-1865

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ABSTRACT

This project looks at American abolitionists use of light-skinned slaves to prove to Northerners slavery was an abomination. This project is also a study of the social constructions of race and the meanings of skin color in Northern and Southern American societies. This research draws mostly upon primary sources including anti-slavery newspapers, images, slave narratives, and slave testimonies. The stories of light-skinned slaves in this thesis challenged the neat assumptions of what it meant to be white or black and deeply disturbed white Americans. The descriptions and images of these former slaves blurred the lines between black and white and made Northerners, and in some instances Southerners, rethink how they decided a person's racial classification. Light-skinned slaves were living proof of the evils of the American slave system and they were one of the tools abolitionists used to help end slavery.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This project uses newspaper articles, slave testimonies, slave narratives, etchings, and photographs to show how American abolitionists used light-skinned slaves to fight against slavery. The stories of light-skinned slaves in these sources point to the rape of slave women and the mistreatment of slaves and slave families on Southern American plantations. Abolitionists used these slaves and their stories to prove to Northern audiences that slavery was evil and a system that should not be allowed to continue. Light-skinned slaves were living proof of the evils of the American slave system and they were one of the tools abolitionists used to help end slavery. Also, the descriptions and images of these former slaves blurred the lines between black and white and made Northerners, and in some instances Southerners, rethink how they decided a person's racial classification. Light-skinned slaves did not easily fit into a white or black racial categories and this made nineteenth century Americans redefine what it meant to be white or black.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Aimee Barrett and Brooklyn Atkins. I could not have completed this work without their understanding, support, and motivation.

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Introduction

*When the war began two things were inevitable: first, that the loathsome secret history of the slave system in this country would be exposed; and, second, that the appalled and indignant common sense of the people would see that no honorable peace was possible except upon condition of the annihilation of the system.*¹

“Slave Children,” *Harper’s Weekly*, January 30, 1864

By the time “Slave Children” appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* the American Civil War entered its fourth year of hostilities. American abolitionists spent decades fighting against the South’s “peculiar institution” using a variety of strategies to convince Northerners slavery was immoral and unjust. Now the country was at war over their cause and the end of slavery was within their grasp. The introduction of the *Harper’s Weekly* article, “Slave Children,” made no mention of children, but instead laid the blame of war at the feet of the South’s “peculiar institution.” The author promised to expose the evil history of the slave system and pointed readers to a “terrible illustration” which showed the true outrages of slavery. The title of the picture was “Emancipated Slaves: White and colored.” The caption may have perplexed Northern audiences for how could slaves be both “white and colored?” The article, and the letter to the editor from C.C. Leigh that accompanied the article, described four of the children as intelligent and as white as “our own children.”² They also scolded Southern slave owners for keeping the “white slaves” in violent and cruel conditions. The authors lamented that these so-called gentlemen of the South condemn their own children to a life of bondage. Leigh added that

¹ “Slave Children,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Vol. 8 No. 370, January 30, 1864, accessed on April 10, 2016, Internet Archive <https://archive.org/stream/harpersweeklyv8bonn#page/66/mode/2up>.

² Ibid.

the children were proof of the sinful transgressions of the Southern slave owning class and that the children exposed the vile “secrets of the slave system,” which preyed on slave women and children.³



Figure 1: Wilson Chinn; Charles Taylor; Augusta Broujey; Mary Johnson; Isaac White; Rebecca Huger; Robert Whitehead; Rosina Downs EMANCIPATED SLAVES, WHITE AND COLORED.—The children are from the schools established in New Orleans, by order of Major-General Banks.

Major General Nathaniel P. Banks freed the New Orleans slaves and then ordered Colonel George H. Hanks to escort them to the North for the express purpose of raising funds for schools that served emancipated slaves. In 1863 the group of newly freed slaves toured the Northern states stopping in cities and towns to raise funds for the school program. All the slaves

³ Ibid.

drew attention but the four children who appeared to be white attracted the largest audiences.⁴ C.C. Leigh gave additional details about the three adults and five children featured in the engraving. Individual descriptions of all eight slaves were provided for readers. “All but white,” “perfectly white,” “almost white,” and “white” were the phrases chosen to describe the light-skinned slaves featured in the engraving. Copies of the original photograph of the children who to all appearances were white were mass produced and sold to abolitionist audiences of the North. The photograph’s primary goal was to raise money for the support of schools for emancipated slaves but the emotional impact the photos had on middle class Northern audiences was striking.⁵

In this thesis, I argue that abolitionists used “white slaves” to prove to Northerners slavery was an abomination, and in doing so they also contributed to the formation of racial identities. Surprisingly both white and black abolitionists turned to light-skinned slaves to garner sympathy and support for the antislavery cause. “White slaves” may not have garnered more support from Northern blacks but black and white abolitionists may have viewed these slaves who appeared to be white as a means of attracting more support for their anti-slavery cause from Northern whites. These “white” men, women, and children served as living proof of the sexual abuses slaves underwent at the hands of Southern whites. Presumably they also terrified white Northern audiences who worried for the security and freedom of themselves and their families as they saw enslaved individuals who could easily “pass” for white and heard of their sufferings at

⁴ *Harper’s Weekly*. Vol. 8 No. 370, January 30, 1864, 66, 69, 71. Carol Goodman, “As White as Their Masters: Visualizing the Color Line,” Suffolk University, 2013. On Mirror of Race, accessed on March 22, 2016. <http://www.mirrorofrace.org/carol.php>. The Mirror of Race Project is a digital collection of photographs, films, and essays about the formation of race in the United States. The project’s focus is to allow viewers to confront their own assumptions about the representation of race and how contemporary beliefs about race were very different than those of nineteenth-century Americans.

⁵ Ibid.

the hands of wealthy Southern slaveholders. Stories and images of “white slaves” also placed abolitionists within an ongoing and ever-changing discussion about race in nineteenth-century United States.

Mixed race, or light-skinned slaves appear in abolitionist newspapers, slave narratives, and lectures throughout this time period. While some publications featured male “white slaves”, most of the accounts of light-skinned slaves depicted by antislavery activists were female and in many cases adolescent girls were the focal point. These light-skinned girls provided concrete evidence of a previous interracial affair and they were also often the sexual targets of slave holders. Abolitionists focused on the girls’ heredity to demonstrate to Northern audiences the lustfulness of Southern white men and the ever-present threat of rape female slaves faced. The sexual desires of Southern white men and the sexual abuse of slave women revealed the hypocrisy of Southern claims to paternalism. “White slaves” served as evidence of the mistreatment of slave women, in the form of rape, and the sins of the slave owning class of the South. White Northerners also realized how close they looked to the “white slaves” of the South. Most whites did not believe slaves were like them, but if Southerners could not tell if a person was a slave, i.e. black, then what was to keep Northerners safe from slavery? Abolitionists’ utilization of light-skinned slaves blurred the already hazy line between white and black and further complicated Northerners racial categories.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter I uses eight abolitionist newspapers, two published by whites and six published by African Americans to show the use of “white slaves” as an antislavery tactic. The chapter traces the use of the phrases “white slaves” and “perfectly white” from 1835 – 1865. Chapter II examines instances of whiteness present in slave narratives and slave testimonies. This section uses both fictional and non-fictional accounts of

slavery and “white slaves” to highlight whiteness in antislavery narratives. Chapter III analyzes etchings, engravings, frontispieces, and daguerreotypes of “white slaves.” This section shows how abolitionists used images to connect their Northern readers to the evils present on the plantations of their Southern compatriots. Finally, the Epilogue not only summarizes the findings but also points to ways the modern antislavery movement uses similar techniques to fight against human trafficking. This is an effort to show that the lessons of the abolition movement and the tactics used by their proponents are still in use and relevant today.

Literature relating to the abolitionist movement is robust.⁶ Beginning with the Civil Rights Movement historians started to include underrepresented groups in their historical inquiries and abolitionist studies are no exception. Attending to women and their roles in societal movements was one way in which historical scholarship began to include overlooked groups and individuals. This thesis adds to the ongoing conversation about women’s roles in antislavery movements and discussions of gender. Several works have shown the increasing roles women played as both moderate and radical activists in the fight against slavery.⁷ While women were

⁶ For an in-depth overview of the state of the field of abolitionists history see: Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (Yale University Press, 2016); Caleb W. McDaniel, "The Bonds and Boundaries of Antislavery," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 1 (2014): 84-105.; See the following for overviews of the nineteenth-century Abolition Movement: the first two works highlight major shifts in scholarship occurring with the rise of social history movement in the academy, while the other sources offer a look at more recent works: Martin Duberman, ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds., *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997); *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, ed. Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer (New York: New Press, 2006); Andrew Delbanco, Darryl Pinckney, and Wilfred M. McClay, *The Abolitionist Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) Many other informative works exist but these highlight decades of scholarship on a deeply studied topic; For works on early abolitionism see: Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Paul J. Polgar, "To Raise Them to an Equal Participation": Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African American Citizenship," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 2; and Brycchan Carey, *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1658-1761* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁷ Examples of the examination of women’s roles in the abolitionist movement are: Julie Roy Jeffrey’s *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North

crucial players in the abolitionist movement, my study is more interested in women as characters in the stories of slavery and their emotional appeal. Abolitionist publications targeted both male and female readers and the inclusion of light-skinned slaves in their stories and images had an immediate effect on the involvement of women in the fight against slavery. Many of the subjects depicted in slavery stories and featured in abolitionist etchings and daguerreotypes were women and young girls. Abolitionists played upon Northerner's fears of unrestrained sexual passions and the sexual exploitation of their young slave women with these images and tales.⁸ The stories often alluded to the insatiable lust of slave masters and the helplessness of their young, light-skinned, female targets. By exposing their readers to the harsh realities of slavery, especially those of female slaves, abolitionists implored their female audience to act for their "friends and sisters."⁹ Rather than focusing on women as actors in the abolition movement this thesis is a work of intersectionality which explores ideas about manhood and womanhood, especially as they pertain to race and slavery.

Several works seek to explain the strategies employed by abolitionists to reach readers and recruit people sympathetic to the plight of slaves. Ford Risley takes an in-depth look at the abolitionist publications in his work *Abolition and the Press*. Risley notes the importance of the press in keeping the issue of slavery in the public consciousness and maintains that the audience grew when these publications released articles and images containing controversial language and images. "White slaves" were controversial images and many Northerners felt the language

Carolina Press, 1998); Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005).

⁸ Carol Lasser, "Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric," *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 1 (2008): 113.

⁹ Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

describing their condition and the sexual abuses of slave women should not be written about or read. This thesis examines articles from eight Northern abolitionist newspapers and several personal narratives. Risley's theories regarding the power of the press and its connection to its audience serve as a base for my research. Richard Bell's *We Shall Be No More*, includes an interesting chapter which examines abolitionists' scandalous use of suicide to "try to stir evangelical readers to immediate" action to end slavery. He notes shifts in the strategies of abolitionists as moderates and radicals employed different tactics to garner support for their cause. Bell also notes the constant need of abolitionists to connect their stories to the wants of their readers. Bell uses poetry, rhetoric, and images to depict the changing methods of antislavery campaigns. His study offers valuable insights in how to best track and explain changes in strategies by both moderate and radical antislavery activists.¹⁰ Like Bell, my study looks at the rhetoric of whiteness through articles, books, speeches, stories, and images to demonstrate strategies employed by antislavery activists to connect with their audiences. Both Risley's and Bell's work inspired my desire to link the "white slaves" in abolitionists' publications to Northern audiences and to examine what meanings these stories projected to their readers.

My research project is also a study of the social constructions of race and the meanings of skin color in Northern and Southern societies. Barbara Jean Fields discussed the variety of ways humans "reinvent and re-ritualize [race] to fit our own" beliefs. Her work deals with the evolution of racial ideology in both the past and the present. Fields shows how racial ideology was constantly reinforced and reshaped in Southern slave societies as a means of control by the

¹⁰ Richard Bell, *We Shall be No More: Suicide and Self-government in the Newly United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 203.

white racial minority. She also discusses how white Americans used this ideology to separate themselves from people of color, both free and slave. Her work influenced historians to look at race not in biological differences but as a socially created and constantly adapted concept. Fields' theory on race will help guide my study about the use of different shades of color in American antislavery movements.¹¹

To add to this discussion of race and ethnicity I will use the work of scholars outside the field of history. Rogers Brubaker's series of essays on racial construction in America provides a sociologist's perspective on race and ethnicity. His essays show that race and ethnicity are not natural existing things but are rather perspectives humans use to see the world, interpret their surroundings, and help them navigate through the social world. He also notes the danger of compiling a study which classifies individuals into groups. After all, as a diasporic people slaves and freed blacks were also individuals and may not have "claim[ed] cultural commonality."¹² This is of interest to my study of whiteness since lighter skinned slaves fit into different racial groups in the 1800s. Some passed as white, others were considered black, and many fit into different groups during their lives.

While Brubaker's study is one found outside of historical scholarship other historians have offered similar perspectives on racial construction in America. Ariela Gross examines the legal history of race and identity in America in her work *What Blood Won't Tell* and in several other journal articles. Gross's studies showed race and identity as imaginary things created by humans to fit people into a prescribed social order. These constructs often have negative

¹¹ Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (May/June 1991): 95-118.

¹² Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004).

consequences for minority individuals seeking citizenship and racial justice in a highly-racialized society.¹³ Gross maintains that “racial identity...cannot help but make itself known” and that in any moment in time there were flexible bases for the determination of someone’s racial identity. These bases of racial determination were difficult to describe and no consensus existed in how best to decide a person’s race. The “white slaves” discussed in this thesis fit into Gross’s theories of flexible racial determination. Many of these slaves “passed” as white to escape slavery and almost all appeared white in abolitionists’ descriptions and imagery. Just as the individuals involved in the trials of racial identity Gross studied, the abolitionists and their publications featured in my project were also involved in the formation of racial constructs for nineteenth-century Americans.

Similar to Gross, Walter Johnson, in *Soul by Soul*, shows the subjectivity involved in characterizing slaves’ whiteness in his examination of antebellum slave markets. Johnson notes how slave traders and buyers ranked and categorized slaves per their physical characteristics. A slave’s shade of skin was important since slave owners believed different hues of skin color indicated suitability for different jobs. Johnson also argued by participating in this racial categorization process slave buyers and slave traders reaffirmed whiteness for both themselves and all whites. The racial categorization exhibited in slave markets demonstrates the constructive and subjective nature of racial categories and the dangers of assigning all similarly shaded people to a particular group.¹⁴ The antislavery stories in this study demonstrate how abolitionists were

¹³ Ariela Julie Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009); Ariela Gross, “Of Portuguese Origin: Litigating Identity and Citizenship Among the ‘Little Races’ in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Law and History Review* 25, no. 3 (2007): 467-512.; Ariela Gross, “Litigating Whiteness: Trials of Racial Determination in the Nineteenth-Century South,” *The Yale Law Journal* 108 no. 1 (1998): 109-88.

¹⁴ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

involved in the construction of race from the 1830s to the 1860s. Like the buyers and sellers on the slave markets and the jurors in Gross's court cases, abolitionists contributed to and complicated ideas of race, especially for Northern audiences. These "white slaves" forced whites to rethink and adapt their own ideas of whiteness and what it meant to be white. Both Gross and Johnson help inform my study as it looks at racial identity and determination for both the "white slaves" and white Northern readers.

I will also use studies of whiteness to help define the meaning of color and to help gauge the impact whiteness had as an abolitionist tactic.¹⁵ *Off White* is a collection of essays primarily by scholars in the fields of psychology and education which helps explain whiteness as racialized process, makes the claim "white is a color," and asserts white identity is essential to any racial study.¹⁶ George M. Fredrickson adds a historical perspective on the concepts of color and race. He examines the ways whites viewed blacks, including a study on Lincoln's racial views. His work spans four decades of scholarship and highlights the transformation of historians' views about race and color during the antebellum era.¹⁷ This thesis draws from these studies of whiteness theory, racial identity, and racial determination. "White slaves" did not fit into a clear racial category and Northern whites of the antebellum era struggled to place these individuals in

¹⁵ For more information about whiteness studies see: David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (Vol. 133. New York: Verso, 1991.) For other works in whiteness studies also see: Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (Routledge, 2009) and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.) Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 154-173.

¹⁶ Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Linda Powell Pruitt, and April Burns. *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance* (Routledge, 2012.)

¹⁷ The following works of George Fredrickson will be important to my study of whiteness and race in the abolitionist movement. George M. Fredrickson, "A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality," *The Journal of Southern History* (1975): 39-58; George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987); Fredrickson, George M. *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

a racial category. These former slaves, despite their appearance, were not considered white by Northern or Southern whites or even African Americans, but as my study demonstrates they could fit into multiple racial groups at the same time. Abolitionists complicated Northern ideas of whiteness by showing Northern audiences slaves who did not easily fit into a white or black designation.

Mary Niall Mitchell uses daguerreotypes and images to show the power whiteness had over Northern audiences. She argues that images of “white slaves” presented nineteenth-century viewers with several complex problems. First they played on the anxieties of Northerners, many of whom feared thousands of freedmen moving North. Second, they showed viewers the path toward peaceful emancipation. While the mixing of races was not a popular subject, pictures of white children who were slaves complicated the issue of race and color. Lastly, Mitchell believes that black children, even those who had lighter skins than others, were “both muse and metaphor” for the future of late nineteenth-century America. These children represented the first generation of freedmen and the complex social, political, and economic consequences emancipation brought with it.¹⁸

This study of “white slaves” uses some of the same images Mitchell used in her analysis, but looks at them in a slightly different way. Like Mitchell, I am concerned with what images of “white slaves” meant to Northern audiences, but I am also interested in the rhetoric of whiteness and how it played into abolitionist tactics. Mitchell primarily focused on images of slavery and race in her work and less on the accompanying language describing “white slaves”. This work delves into whiteness over a thirty-year period and focuses on how it helped the antislavery

¹⁸ Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future After Slavery* (NYU Press, 2010), 4-10.

movement draw support. Finding “white slaves” and “perfectly white” African Americans in antislavery newspapers, slave narratives, slave testimonials, and abolitionist imagery demonstrates white images and rhetoric were a powerful tool for antislavery activists. The language and images used to describe “white slaves” enabled authors to indirectly speak about the sexual deviant behaviors of Southern slaveholders and pointed to the sins of slavery. Sex, especially interracial sex, was not a subject many nineteenth-century Americans were comfortable speaking or reading about, at least not publicly.

The rape of slave women by Southern whites, and the subsequent offspring these sinful and illegal sexual acts produced, led to a mixing of the white and black races. Abolitionists used this mixing of races, known as amalgamation until the anonymous publication of the pamphlet *Miscegenation*, to show Northern audiences the evils of slavery and the dangers it posed to both white and black families. *Miscegenation*, a political propaganda tool for Southern Democrats, was originally thought to be the work of a Republican abolitionist but was actually the product of two Democrats, George Wakeman and David Goodman Croly. The pamphlet encouraged readers to practice miscegenation and was wildly controversial for the time. Southern Democrats seized the opportunity to accuse Northern abolitionists of interracial sexual relationships, show the dangers of the antislavery movement, and promote their subjugation of the African American race.¹⁹ While abolitionists used “white slaves” as a tool to prove to Northerners the ongoing, generational miscegenation occurring in the South, Southerners used this and other opportunities to support their proslavery ideology.²⁰ Slavery apologists in the South justified the system as an

¹⁹ Sydney Kaplan, “The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864,” *The Journal of Negro History* 34 (1/4): (1949): 274-343. See also: David Goodman Croly, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, (Hamilton & Company, 1864).

²⁰ Patricia D. Hopkins, “Seduction or Rape: Deconstructing the Black Female Body in Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,” *Making Connections* 13 no. 1 (2011): 4-20.

ethical and paternal way to treat what they viewed as an inferior race. Proslavery authors did not seek to turn the opinions of Northern abolitionists but instead sought to justify and unify the South's use of slaves by presenting an argument backed by the scientific truths and moral philosophies of the time.²¹ Throughout the era of this study Northern abolitionists and Southern slavery apologists sparred verbally and in print over the issue of slavery. Miscegenation was at the crux of this argument and a crucial tactic for Northern abolitionists. Almost every plantation in the South produced light skinned slaves and antislavery writings and speeches sought to use this against slaveholders.²² The people and the stories which follow highlight the ongoing rape of slave women by Southern whites and the interracial offspring produced by the American slave system.

This thesis also adds to the historiography of race in America. Abolitionists are not often associated with ideas of how concepts of race formed and transformed in the years leading up to the Civil War. Abolitionists' ideas of color were fluid and at times even hypocritical. It is natural to assume abolitionists held progressive views regarding race but by in large they did not view blacks as equals. They fought for the end of slavery which did not necessarily mean racial equality. By complicating racial ideas abolitionists also complicated the implicit link between race and slavery – whiteness equaled freedom while blackness equaled slavery. The stories of “white slaves” in this thesis challenged the neat assumptions of what it meant to be white or black and deeply disturbed white Americans. The “white slaves” presented to Northern

²¹ Faust, Drew Gilpin, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). For more information see: Chapter 18 “Our Slavery Question” in O'Brien, Michael, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

²² The 1860 census classified 588,532 persons as mulattoes. “Miscegenation: A Story of Racial Intimacy,” in *The Encyclopedia of African-American Heritage* by Susan Altman (Facts on File, Inc. New York, 1997) accessed on March 15, 2017, http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/miscegenation-story-racial-intimacy.

audiences through antislavery publications helped define race in the North. The descriptions and images of these former slaves blurred the lines between black and white and made Northerners, and in some instances Southerners, rethink how they decided a person's racial classification.

Chapter 1

Abolitionist Newspapers and Whiteness

In 1855, a recently freed slave, a child of six or seven years named Mary Botts, arrived in Boston as part of an abolitionist campaign to raise awareness in the fight against slavery. Abolitionists incorporating freed slaves into their activist campaigns was not a new phenomenon but there was something surprising about Mary Botts – she was white. By all accounts Mary was “so white as to defy the acutest judge to detect in her features...the slightest trace of negro blood.”¹ For decades abolitionists printed stories about light-skinned slaves to highlight the evils of slavery and the lustfulness of Southern men, and now they had a face to put with these stories. Abolitionists hoped Mary’s appearance would reach middle-class Northerners on a much more intimate level than their stories of “white slaves” could ever hope to attain. Charles Sumner even claimed Mary’s presence would have an impact greater than any sermon or speech he could deliver against slavery. Mary’s story and description, along with reproduced daguerreotypes, were continually printed and circulated in abolitionist publications.

The press was perhaps the most powerful instrument of abolitionists and their fight to end slavery.² Quaker groups began to print antislavery publications as early as the late 1700s. Even more publications sprung up after the turn of the century and by the late 1830s a vibrant abolitionist press existed in several Northern states. Massachusetts and New York were two of the main hubs of antislavery publications. William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator* and Lydia

¹ Mary Niall Mitchell, "The Real Ida May: A Fugitive Tale in the Archives," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 15 (2013): 70.

² For information on the impact of the abolitionist press see Ford Risely, *Abolition and the Press: The Moral Struggle Against Slavery* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008) and also Chapter 2 of Rodger Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

and David Child's the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* were both white abolitionist publications born out of the American Anti-Slavery Society. They became two of the most popular and longest lasting abolitionist publications, and perhaps accomplished more for the movement than any others.³

White abolitionist publications, however, were not the only ones to join the fight against slavery. Several African American newspapers were also founded from 1830-1860, including *The Colored American/Weekly Advocate*, the *Frederick Douglass Paper*, *The North Star*, *The National Era*, *Freedom's Journal*, and the *Provincial Freeman*. These papers allowed African Americans to share their ideas with both white and black abolitionists. By publishing original and reprinted articles the editors were not only able to rouse followers and newcomers in the fight against slavery but also to work toward the vision of a "black community linked by print."⁴

Where many mainstream publications avoided the topic of slavery altogether, antislavery papers began publishing speeches, stories, slave narratives, meeting minutes, and other information related to the movement. These papers allowed activists, spread throughout the North, to communicate with one another and keep abreast of any new events or important developments in the movement. White and black publications printed their own unique articles but they often shared stories and articles of interest with one another, as was the standard practice of just about all newspapers at the time. Some of the papers had philosophical differences, such as the use of violence to end slavery, but in many ways the editors used similar tactics. They grounded their arguments in religious rhetoric, attacked slavery as a sin, highlighted

³ Ford Risley, *Abolition and the press: The moral struggle against slavery* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

⁴ Todd Vogel, ed. *The Black press: New literary and historical essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 25.

the violence of the “peculiar institution,” told stories of families being ripped apart, and stressed the sexual depravity of slave owners by pointing out examples of “white slaves.” While not always seeing eye-to-eye about the ways and means to achieve their goal, both groups were fighting for the same cause – the end of slavery.

Two white and six black abolitionist publications provide the evidence base for this chapter.⁵ Light-skinned slaves were a point of emphasis for both black and white antislavery activists. The phrase “white slaves” appeared in thirty-three unique newspaper articles from 1835-1865 with the phrase “perfectly white” appearing thirty-two times in the same time span. Most of these columns, speeches, or meeting minutes were reprinted in several different publications during the same timeframe. Taken individually the statistics are not impressive with each phrase appearing a little more than once per year on average. When taken together, however, the two phrases begin to tell a complex story of abolitionists’ use of whiteness in the fight against slavery – a story that begins in the mid-1830s and does not conclude until the Civil War is over and slavery abolished. The two phrases and what they represent are the driving force behind this project.⁶

The following story is a perfect example of the power of the abolitionist press and the use of color and whiteness in the fight against slavery:

⁵ The sources for the chapter are available through Accessible Archives, a subscription based searchable database of several historical newspapers. The articles which follow were found in eight Northern abolitionist newspapers, two white owned and operated and six owned and operated by freed people of color. The papers include: *The Liberator* (1831-1865/white), *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (1840-1870/white), *The Colored American/Weekly Advocate* (1837-1840/black), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper/ Douglass’ Monthly* (1851-1863/black), *The National Era* (1847-1860/black), *The North Star* (1847-1851/black), and *the Provincial Freeman* (1847-1851/black)

⁶ I conducted several key-word and key-phrase searches on the Accessible Archives database before finally settling on “white slaves” and “perfectly white.” I first searched “mulatto,” “octoroon,” “quadroon,” and other phrases or words possibly related to a slave’s ancestry or skin color. These searches all provided too few, too many, or completely unrelated results. During these searches, I came across the phrase “white slaves” and from there found references to “perfectly white” slaves or former slaves.

Many years ago a Northerner went down to Louisiana to start a new life as a plantation owner. Shortly after setting up his business and confirming its success “he followed another custom there; taking a Quadroon wife.” This was not a legal marriage, the law of the state forbidding interracial unions, but still the couple lived as husband and wife and had three daughters together. The wife worried for her children because she was the child of a slave and in the eyes of the law all offspring followed the condition of their mother. She begged her husband to legally free her and her children and he promised to look into the matter. Unfortunately, he neglected his promise and unexpectedly died before freeing his children. His wife would soon meet the same fate. His brother was appointed executor of his estate and he traveled down from New Hampshire to settle his brother’s debts. He intended to take his nieces home with him “as they were to all appearances perfectly white.” The brother was astonished to learn in the eyes of the law his three teenage nieces were slaves. The creditors insisted the girls must be sold as they were “a first rate article.” The girls were sold at high prices and separated from each other and their fates are unknown.⁷

This story of three “white slaves” trapped in the South as victims of a slave society appeared in several abolitionist publications in the 1830’s. The article ends with the following warning:

“Let it not be supposed that this is a solitary case. Such cases must be frequent and inevitable under the system of slavery. There are thousands of white slaves at the South; females young and beautiful. They are ‘a first rate article in the market.’”⁸

⁷ “Read and Ponder,” *The Colored American*, January 20, 1838, Accessible Archives, accessed on March 14, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=2.6.1.0.0>

⁸ Ibid.

Stories like this were printed in abolitionist publications throughout the antebellum period. For my study the truth of the story is not as important as its meaning to abolitionists and their readers.⁹

The tale of three young white females being sold into slavery first appeared in a London abolitionist printing in 1837. It then made its way to the United States through the international network of abolitionists. Like many abolitionist tales it is full of religious rhetoric and critiques of the patriarchal society of the Southern states. These critiques came in many forms, some subtle and others blatant, but the ultimate goal was the elimination of slavery in the United States. Color was one of the techniques abolitionists used to show the sins of slavery and the dangers of the twisted version of the patriarchal family system existing on many plantations. In the January 20, 1828 edition of *The Colored American* presented its audience with the thousands of slaves, “females young and beautiful” of the South.¹⁰ This was also the first appearance of the term “white slaves” in the American antislavery publications used in this study.

This moving story of the three young girls torn from freedom’s grasp and thrust into slavery has all the hallmarks of a typical abolitionist tale. Young females who to “all appearances were perfectly white,” families being ripped apart by slavery, the illegal marriage of a white man and a “quadroon” woman, the impending slave market where the girls would be sold as “first rate articles,” and the evangelical ending of the slaves’ plight were all significant themes employed by abolitionist publications.¹¹ These tactics were wrapped in a veil of color, or rather

⁹ “Read and Ponder,” *The Colored American*, from the *Boston Recorder*, New York, January 20, 1838, Accessible Archives, accessed on March 15, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=44&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.44.0.0>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

the absence of it. The girls' father is breaking the law by living as man and wife with a mixed-race woman, even though "she had only the slightest possible tinge of color."¹² After the death of their father, the sisters were to be brought North and integrated into society, one they would have easily been accepted by since they were by all appearances "perfectly white."¹³

At first the story ignores the subject of Southern lust and miscegenation, but it soon hints at the girls' fate as they are sent to the slave market. Here they would most likely be separated from each other and sold "for the vilest of purposes," to become not only slaves but concubines for their new masters.¹⁴ In turn the white female slaves would produce more white children who would take the condition of the mother and become slaves themselves. In many cases these children, especially the females, would then be sold by their own fathers to other slave owners and would meet the same fate as their mothers, according to abolitionists.¹⁵ The fact that the story gives the readers no names for the unfortunate souls is of little importance. In fact, the entire tale may have not occurred at all and yet it was important enough to the movement to appear in at least three separate abolitionist publications, on two distant continents, in both white and black publications, over a two-year period.

In the papers "white slaves" and "perfectly white" were the most consistently used phrases of color when white and black abolitionists described slaves and slavery to their audiences. Both terms appear repeatedly through the years 1838 – 1865. At first it may appear

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Michael D. Pierson, "Slavery Cannot Be Covered Up with Broadcloth or a Bandanna: The Evolution of White Abolitionist Attacks on the 'Patriarchal Institution'" *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 3 (2005): 390.

natural that a white publication would use whiteness to attract and connect with readers, but the majority of Garrison's *The Liberator* subscribers of close to 3,000 were African American.¹⁶ This begs the question, why would antislavery presses with large African American readerships be interested in publishing stories that highlighted the light skin of slaves? A closer examination of the articles containing whiteness will help shed light on the subject.

The phrase "perfectly white" appears even earlier in these antislavery publications. In a lengthy 1835 speech entitled "The Declaration of American Independence" published in *The Liberator*, the orator laments that the flame of our independence shines more and more dimly because we have "fed its flames with human blood, instead of the pure oil of liberty."¹⁷ The speaker goes on to say:

"Some of the most delicate complexions in the land are to be found among our colored population. I have frequently been shocked, on meeting persons of both sexes, of perfectly white complexions, to be told that they were slaves— shocked, not because I deemed it a more heinous crime in the sight of God to enslave a white than a black man, or to lacerate a white than a black woman, but because it revealed the utter insecurity in which the liberty of all my countrymen was placed, especially those whose skins are less transparent than others."¹⁸

This excerpt speaks not only about the white slaves but also to a larger point of emphasis to the abolitionists – if a white person can be unfree, what does that say about the security of our white liberty? By focusing on the light complexion of slaves who despite their white appearances were not freemen the article points to the tenuous state of "the liberty of all [his] countrymen."

¹⁶ Sreitmatter, *Voices of Revolution*.

¹⁷ "The Declaration of American Independence," *The Liberator*, September 5, 1835, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 1, 2015
<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=15&AADocStyle=&AASyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=4.182.15.1.1>

¹⁸ Ibid.

This implicitly ties the use of whiteness to the fears and feelings of both white and black Northerners. This was a time of fear for many freemen living in the North as the first Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 allowed for the recapture of escaped slaves, and in many cases freemen were sold back into slavery. The law and its enforcement varied from state to state, which ultimately led to the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. This act explicitly protected slavery and the rights of slave owners to their private property, which included any slaves who had escaped to the Northern Free States. It was also a period of change for many whites in the North as more and more people were forced to rely on wage labor. Northerners often expressed their anxiety towards wage labor by comparing the work to slavery because they were dependent on their employers and their wages. Abolitionists were among the first to equate wage work with freedom and “free labor.”¹⁹ It should also be noted the author, possibly Garrison as he wrote much of what appeared in his newspaper, is also quick to point out that he is shocked at the loss of freedom not solely because the victim appears white. This shows a certain sensitivity and awareness to what he had to know was a largely African American readership and hints at the tenuous freedom of Northern working-class whites. Support against slavery was needed from all levels of society if the institution was to end and Garrison and other activists were constantly attempting to gain more supporters.

These phrases first appeared in antislavery publications in the 1830s, but they were by no means a frequent occurrence during the decade. “White slaves” appeared in the available publications only in 1838, and “perfectly white” appeared only four times from 1837-1839. While it may not seem the article is loaded with sexual imagery by today’s standards, the

¹⁹ John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic: Volume 1, Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850. Vol. 1.* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

rhetoric in the story about the three “white” sisters was sexually charged and explicit for an early nineteenth-century audience. Young and beautiful light-skinned slaves being sold at high prices for “the vilest of purposes” was a scandalous tale for most readers during this era.²⁰ These abolitionist publications spoke about a taboo subject at the time – sex. These printings were radical for the time because sex, especially interracial sex, was simply not an appropriate topic for public conversation or consumption.²¹

The four “perfectly white” instances from the 1830s specifically point out the amalgamation taking place between the slaves of the South and their masters. In one instance the author points to the gradual lightening of slaves in the South. In an article appearing in *The Liberator*, on March 1, 1839, the story of a Dr. Nelson from Missouri is relayed to the readers. While giving a lecture to raise funds for his missionary college Dr. Nelson recalls a visit to the South and the rapid mixing of “the black and white races.”²² He goes on to say that the slaves’ lightening complexions were “strikingly observable” and that he knew former slaves who were now settled in Free States who were so “perfectly white” no one suspected them of being former slaves.²³ The instances described so far hint at the reasons for the lightening of slave’s skin tones but it is not until Dr. Nelson speaks of the young men of the South that he shocks his audience and the readers of *The Liberator*. It was not until he relays how “accustomed” he became of hearing young men “boast so generally of profligate connexions with slaves” that his story

²⁰ “Read and Ponder,” *The Colored American*.

²¹ Gregory D. Smithers, *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), 552.

²² “Communications,” *The Liberator*, March 1, 1839, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 15, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=6&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=3.20.6.0.0>

²³ Ibid.

speaks directly to the ongoing sexual relations between slaves and slaveholders.²⁴ Undoubtedly Dr. Nelson's lecture would shock many listeners and readers. He even remarks how he could not believe such tales until he heard them repeatedly and saw with his own eyes the varying degrees of color among Southern slaves.

The allusions to sexual misconduct and the specific, detailed instances of slaveholders having sex with slaves present in these publications at such an early date was not a surprise. Abolitionists, like Garrison, Douglass, and other editors of antislavery presses found in this sample, were not representative of the average American, or antislavery activist, during this time period.²⁵ Many abolitionists chose to operate within the given legal and social parameters of the time. Men like Garrison and Douglass, however, choose tactics which many of their peers saw as radical. These radical abolitionists chose to fight directly against the South and even challenged the societal norms of the North. Their tactics included agitation of proslavery supporters and politicians, attacks on the oppression of women in society, calls for disunion, and in some instances they even advocated violence.²⁶ Given the radical stances of these activists towards the institution of slavery and those who perpetuated its existence, including a discussion of a subject as taboo as sex, and in this case interracial sex, in their publications was a tactic worth trying and continuing if it gained support for the cause.

Throughout the 1840s the two phrases would appear in the eight papers, albeit on a very limited basis. "White slaves" was found in seven instances, while "perfectly white" was only

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

²⁶ Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 3-4.

used three times in the decade. All three articles that use “perfectly white” in the 1840s were published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. The first, published on August 18, 1841, entitled “A, B, C of Abolition” details several stories of light-skinned slaves caught in the bonds of slavery. The first is a story of a Bostonian who dislikes abolitionists. The Bostonian sees a white man driving a team of horse on a visit to Georgia and is shocked to learn the man is a slave due to his “perfectly fair complexion.”²⁷ The next is the story of Mary Gilmore, a Philadelphian of Irish descent who was tried as a slave (no details are given about the outcome). Then the story of a “white man” being judged a slave in a Missouri court. A youth of around ten years of age sued for his freedom in a Lincoln County court on the basis he was white. The paper notes that “all the physiological marks of distinction, which characterize the African descent, had disappeared.”²⁸ These marks included his fair hair, blueish green eyes, well-formed head, a straight tibia, and small lips among others. Physical characteristics of light-skinned slaves and freedmen were extremely important when courts heard cases contesting an individual’s race or status as “free” or “slave.”²⁹ The young man was eventually proven to be the offspring of a mulatto slave woman and thus he was found to be a slave. The final tale is about a physician who settled in the Deep South and met and married a young woman. After some time he received a visitor who notified him he had married one of his slaves. The young doctor was shocked and offended but the visitor quickly proved his claims and demanded payment of \$800 or that he put his wife up for sale at auction. The doctor paid the man and he then notified his wife who told

²⁷ “A, B, C of Abolition,” August 19, 1841, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 1, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=23&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFromList.jsp&AACheck=1.182.23.0.0>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ariela Julie Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

him that was her very own father.³⁰ This last account points directly to a sexual relationship between slave and master and the devastating effects it has on families. In this case the woman is treated as property by her father who demands payment for her and not as a daughter. If her husband had not stepped in and paid the ransom she would face the auction block where she would presumably meet the same fate as that of her mother. All of these stories in this one article speak directly to the dangers of miscegenation and the institution of slavery which perpetuates these immoral relations. Light-skinned slaves are not safe from their master and neither are their offspring, and if slaves so “perfectly white” are not safe then how is any white Northerner?

In 1840s newspaper articles from *The Liberator* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* these same themes continue where the phrase “white slaves” was used. One of the more inflammatory publications is a letter to Gerrit Smith from a Tennessee correspondent published on May 12, 1842, in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. The letter begins:

“DEAR SIR—Slavery in principle is not confined to color at the South. Many, who are slaves, are as white as I am. Where the offspring has been for generations from a white father, until all trace of African blood has disappeared, yet, while they are the descendants of a slave, they are bought and sold like cattle; and, if women, often at a much higher price for being white. Had these despots the power, they would just as soon sell Northern laborers for slaves, as the negroes.”³¹

The tone of the letter is accusatory. The writer claimed that the South’s “peculiar institution” eliminated the presence of color for many slaves in the South, and if given the opportunity the power hungry slaveholding states would inflict the same kinds of sins on Northerners. The letter

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Extract of a Letter to Gerrit Smith from one of his Tennessee Correspondents,” May 14, 1842, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 1, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=91&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.91.0.0>

implores readers to consider if your skin cannot protect you in the South then how long will it be before the same can be said for those in the North? The letter goes on to attack the cotton industry and the tariffs which help protect Southern growers at the expense of both slaves and Northern manufacturing. In fact, much of the letter has little to do with the skin color of slaves but the opening allusion to the sexual sins of slaveholders grabs readers' attention and holds it throughout.

A story appearing in both the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and *The Liberator* in 1848 another sinister tale of Southern sin is depicted. A correspondent from a Concord, New Hampshire paper the *Democrat and Freeman* writes from Georgia:

"I have been made astonished since I have been in Appalachicola to see so many "white niggers" and mulattoes — "creoles," they call them. The farther South you come the more white slaves you will find. It would be a low estimate to say that three-fourths of the slaves in the Southern States have white blood in their veins, and one-sixth of them have more than one half white blood. Many attempt to justify Slavery on the ground that the "niggers" are another and inferior race. If none were slaves but full blooded Africans there would at least, be three-fourths less than there now are. This excuse, however, is one peculiar to the North. I never hear it given here. Men do not attempt to justify it on the ground of "race" or "colour." This would not do here; for if the slaveholder denied their slaves as belonging to the human family, of course, they must deny that their children do also. I do not make the insinuation without some knowledge of the matter. I know it, and it is publicly known that masters do cohabit with their slaves—raise children by their slaves and sell their own flesh and blood as slaves. No man who has ever lived at the South, or knows anything of the Southern character will attempt to deny it. In towns of two or three thousand inhabitants, (by towns I mean what would be called in New England, villages,) almost every single man, and many married ones, keep a black mulatto woman, and as a mistress —do it openly and unblushingly, too. The offspring become slaves to the owner of the mother. Such things are common and well known, and the reputation of such men, rarely, if ever, suffers from such an imputation."³²

³² "Confessed at Last," November 16, 1848, *National Antislavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 15, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=178&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.178.0.0>

The author of the letter openly attacks the men of the South and the institution of slavery. The tone is more vehement and accusatory than any published piece in the evidence base up to this point in time. He even gives low estimates about the number of slaves with a mixture of blood and then goes on to state it is of little consequence in the South. Next he attacks the sanctity of the family. Slave owners breed with their slaves and then either keep their own children as slaves or sell their own flesh and blood, asserting that their children do not belong to any “human family.” If the letter was not inflammatory enough up to this point the author then claims Southern men, both married and single, have some type of sexual relationship with slaves. The letter shows readers the evils of slavery, the perpetuation of sin in the form of adulterous relationships, and the destruction of the family and as evidence of all these he points to the whiteness of Southern slaves. As the decades wore on and the abolitionist movement grew, gained traction, and attracted new followers, attacks like this would increase in number. Whiteness, and the implied sins associated with it, remained a tactic in the fight against slavery.

The 1840s showed a rise in the appearance of whiteness in antislavery presses and the 1850s continued this trend. “Perfectly white” appeared in nineteen unique articles during the decade and references to “white slaves” were found in fifteen separate instances. This increase in whiteness as a tactic in the abolition movement corresponds with a rise in the popularity of the movement. During the 1850s the antislavery movement gained more followers and supporters and also saw an escalation in direct attacks on the South’s “peculiar institution”, in particular the paternal notions of slavery and the slave master.³³

³³ Smithers, *Slave Breeding*, 558.

An article entitled “Morals of the Plantation,” published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, on December 10, 1853, examines the number of “pure-blooded negroes” on the plantations of Mississippi and Louisiana. A visiting Northerner speaking to a manager and an overseer about the number of “white slaves” relative to the number of black slaves on plantations found “it was not uncommon to see slaves as white as that; so white that they could not be distinguished from pure-blooded whites.”³⁴ Upon further questioning the manager reveals the plantation he works now is the only one he had ever been on where there was only one “white slave.” He goes on to state that three out of four slaves on plantations in Mississippi are “pure-blooded” with the other quarter being “mulattoes or white slaves.”³⁵ The overseer estimates that this percentage is the same on plantations throughout the states of Mississippi and Louisiana. The Northerner then inquires what would happen if the young “white slave” dressed herself well and ran away. He proposes that since she shows no signs of having African lineage she would never be “suspected of being a slave.”³⁶ The overseers are quick to point out that the young girl’s manners and language would surely give her away, but reluctantly admit this may not be the case if she was raised as a house servant. In this article the father of the young slave went unmentioned and the overseers were not questioned about this fact, the Northerner most likely knew better than to ask such questions on a Southern plantation. The article makes no mention of sex and amalgamation and yet it is as central to the story as slavery itself. Abolitionists attacked the slave owners and overseers’ lustfulness with an article without the slightest bit of sexual

³⁴ “Morals of the Plantation,” December 10, 1853, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 15, 2015
<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=250&AADocStyle=&AASStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.250.1.1>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

undertones. The “pure white” slave girl and the title “Morals of the Plantation” was all that was necessary to show the readers the sin present on Southern plantations.

In May of 1854 several antislavery publications, both white and black, printed the article “What Becomes of the Free Colored People,” written by John Gaines of Cincinnati. Mr. Gaines makes some sensational generalizations about the free colored people of the North and the slaves of the South. He claims all people of color seek to rid themselves of their lineage and try to mix with whites and white society. Gaines asserts that mulattoes only try to marry with blacks the same shade or lighter than themselves. These claims would draw pointed responses from Frederick Douglass who attacked *The National Era* for publishing such false statements about slaves and free colored people. One of Gaines’ claims Douglass did not contest was the statement he made about slaves becoming whiter faster than the free colored people of the North. Gaines claims “will be confirmed by the experience of every Southern man. It is quite common to see slaves who are as white as their masters, with straight hair and European features.”³⁷ Douglass either agreed with this assertion or felt it was not necessary to dispute the claim since images of white slaves and interracial sexual relations were by this point a common tactic of abolitionists.³⁸ The original article would appear in at least two black antislavery publications and several other white abolitionist newspapers. It is noteworthy in Douglass’s many responses to the article and Gaines’ claims of the desire of freedmen to join the ranks of whites, he never counters the claims of Southern slaves becoming more white than their free Northern

³⁷ “What Becomes of the Free Colored People?,” May 5, 1854, *The National Era*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 10, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=268&AADocStyle=&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.268.1.1>

³⁸ Ronald G. Walters, “The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism,” *American Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1973): 177-201.

counterparts. Douglass merely states the slave may become white but he will never become free.³⁹

The Compromise of 1850, and with it the Fugitive Slave Law, provided abolitionists more fuel to attack the institution of slavery and the issue of miscegenation was ever-present. Several articles published during the first half of the decade detail fugitive slave court cases, kidnapping cases, and other tales of the evils of slavery spreading Northward. Newspaper articles published under the title “Another Ida May” tell of whites and white-looking people being captured and sold into slavery. The story of Ida May appeared earlier in abolitionist publications. Ida May was a young white Irish woman who was captured and sold into slavery. Her story must have struck interest and empathy among Northern readers as years later editors would print stories of “white slaves” captured under the Fugitive Slave Law as “Ida Mays.” In one such article, originally printed in the *Boston Telegraph*, then reprinted in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the story of a family of six “white slaves” and their recapture and subsequent sale in Virginia. Charles Sumner and several of his friends would eventually buy the family of slaves and prevent them from re-entering slavery.⁴⁰ Sumner and his associates became particularly interested one of the young slave girls, Mary, who was around the age of seven and “one of the fairest and most indisputable white children that [they had] ever seen.”⁴¹ Sumner would send Mary and her brother Oscar to Boston to serve as an example to even the “hard-hearted

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Another Ida May,” May 17, 1855, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 15, 2015
<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=281&AADocStyle=&AASStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.281.1.1>

⁴¹ Ibid.

Hunker[s]” of slavery’s grip on young children.⁴² In fact, before Sumner sent her and her brother North he sent a daguerreotype he had made in Richmond for abolitionists to show to the state Legislature “as an illustration of slavery.”⁴³ The picture has the desired effect as Bostonians anxiously awaited the arrival of these two “white slaves.”⁴⁴

Cases of escaped slaves who were “perfectly white” and recaptured under the Fugitive Slave Law were numerous, but the case of Amanda Jane in a Rockingham County, Virginia court had a most peculiar outcome. Amanda Jane and her two children, who by all accounts was “perfectly white,” were released from slavery based on their appearance, even though the defendants had proven she was the daughter of a slave and had never been freed.⁴⁵ The story first appeared in the mainstream press as the implications of the court case could potentially have lasting effects on future fugitive slave cases. The *Standard* and the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* both quickly picked up the story and used it as further evidence of the evils of slavery and the sinful ways of Southern slave owners. Amanda was the slave of Michael Kissner and “she [had] degraded herself in her servitude, and has become the mother of two fine looking little illegitimate children.”⁴⁶ Both she and the children had fair skin, straight hair, blue eyes, and

⁴² “Letter from the Hon. Charles Sumner,” March 17, 1855, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 15, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=281&AADocStyle=&AASStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.281.1.1>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Mary Niall Mitchell, “The Real Ida May: A Fugitive Tale in the Archives,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 15 (2013): 57.

⁴⁵ “A White Woman Released from Slavery,” November 13, 1851, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 1, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=42&AADocStyle=STYLED&AASStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFromList.jsp&AACheck=1.182.42.0.0>

⁴⁶ Ibid.

other features associated with whiteness and the jury determined she was white in the face of all factual evidence to the contrary. The writer shows that the lustfulness of the master “degraded” the slave, making her a victim and actor in the sexual act which resulted in her white children. The white children keep the lustfulness of white Southerners within the readers’ grasp and the fact that the family structure suffers from the sins of slavery. As ideas of family structures changed in the North and many no longer saw it as merely a patriarchal institution, abolitionists would use illegitimate white slave children as illustrations of the degradation of the family.⁴⁷

By the late 1850s through the end of the Civil War, abolitionists used young white children to garner support for their fight against slavery, with a focus placed on young light-skinned girls. Abolitionists used the girls in an attempt to instill a sense of fear in their readers for the safety of their own children. Not only did these young, fair-skinned girls now demand much higher prices in the slave markets, but they also showed Northern parents that “no white child [was] safe now from the kidnappers” operating under the protection of the Fugitive Slaves Laws.⁴⁸ Most newspaper articles about fair-skinned slaves centered on children, teenagers, and young women who were “perfectly white.” The stories culminate with the capture of New Orleans during the war and the emancipation of several slaves in the city. These slaves included a group of five children found in the confines of slavery and “three of the children were perfectly white.”⁴⁹ Like Mary Botts, several of these “white slaves” were brought North by abolitionists

⁴⁷ Pierson, “Broadcloth or Bandana,” 386.

⁴⁸ “Without Concealment,” February 21, 1857, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 10, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=333&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFromList.jsp&AACheck=1.502.333.0.0>

⁴⁹ “Aid for Freedmen,” December 5, 1863, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 15, 2015,

and they generated much excitement among the Northerners who clamored to see the freedmen from Louisiana. Two of the children, Rebecca Huger and Charles Taylor, were fathered by Brigadier Generals who served in the Confederate Army. The paper notes that “such facts, however astonishing here, are among the commonest at the South.”⁵⁰

Abolitionist newspapers used stories of “white slaves” to prove to their audiences that slavery was an abomination. Their stories of “perfectly white” slaves were designed to reach middle-class Northerners on a personal level. From 1835 – 1865 various white and black antislavery presses printed stories about slaves who bore little if any resemblance to their African ancestors. By the telling and retelling of these stories abolitionists showed Northerners the effects of slavery on the institution of the family, the degradation of slave women, the lust of Southern men, and the dangers “white slaves” and the Fugitive Slave Law presented to the safety and security of their own families. For if Southerners could send men North to retrieve their property legally what would stop them from forcing a white person into slavery, especially given the difficulty Northern and Southern men and women now had in determining one’s color and racial identity. Light-skinned slaves as an antislavery tactic presented concrete evidence of the atrocities of slavery but it also complicated Northern ideas of what it meant to be white. Light-skinned slaves and freedmen tried and in some cases succeeded in proving themselves “white.” People of color who passed as white added new complexities to Northern whites who believed in clear delineations between races. These individuals and others of “non-white” ancestry proved to white Northerners that pure whiteness was not easily defined and that their assumptions that

<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=124&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFromList.jsp&AACheck=1.182.124.0.0>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

whiteness equaled freedom and blackness presumed enslavement could indeed be false. Ancestry defined someone's lineage but unlike physical and societal appearances, ancestry could be difficult to prove.⁵¹ When abolitionists presented white Northern audiences with "white slaves" they challenged these previously held notions and classifications of race.

⁵¹ Ariela Julie Gross, *What blood won't tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Chapter 2

Whiteness in Slave Testimonials and Narratives

“I would ten thousand times rather that my children should be the half-starved paupers of Ireland than to be the most pampered among the slaves of America. I would rather drudge out my life on a cotton plantation, till the grave opened to give me rest, than to live with an unprincipled master and a jealous mistress. The felon's home in a penitentiary is preferable. He may repent, and turn from the error of his ways, and so find peace; but it is not so with a favorite slave. She is not allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime in her to wish to be virtuous.” – Harriet Jacobs¹

By the time Harriet Jacobs published these words in 1862 allusions to the sexual abuse of slaves were commonplace in abolitionist publications. Though rarely referring directly to the outright rape of African slave women, these publications used miscegenation to show the evils of slavery and the sins of the slaveholding class. The licentiousness of slave masters and their subsequent “light skinned” offspring were two aspects of Southern slave life antislavery activists sought to highlight through the words of the slaves themselves. Through slave narratives and testimonies abolitionist presented their readers with what Dwight A. McBride called a “real slave experience.” Slaves and former slaves had intimate access to the inner workings of slavery. Through their own experiences and through the lives of other slaves, which they either witnessed or who shared their stories with them, these men and women provided first-hand accounts of the evils of slavery. In slave narratives and testimonials, the slave was who the reader had to look to for the truth. The slave was the insider and all others, even abolitionists authors who wrote for

¹ Harriet Jacobs, 1813-1897, *The Deeper Wrong, Or, Incidents In the Life of a Slave Girl* (London: W. Tweedie, 1861).

illiterate slaves, were outsiders. In this way slaves held a position of power as the purveyor of truth.²

The first half of the nineteenth century saw expansive growth in the publication of slave narratives and testimonials that stressed the physical suffering of slaves. Impassioned speeches offered by Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina and Sarah Grimke, and others spoke to the demoralizing and shameful effects of slavery for both slaves and masters. Lydia Maria Child's book *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, published in 1833, aimed for the hearts of individuals in an effort to elicit sympathy and support for those in bondage by pointing out the degradations slaves faced.³ These activists, as well as scores of others, paved the way for the testimonials and narratives that followed for the next few decades.

One of the ways abolitionists sought to expose the sinful lust of the slaveholding class was to show the mixing of races prevalent in the South. Calling for the immediate abolishment of slavery, like many abolitionists did, was considered radical by people inside and outside of the movement. Writing and speaking explicitly about sexual abuses and liaisons between slave and master would have been too radical for the time, although some abolitionists would push the limits of their audiences' sensibilities. One way antislavery authors and publishers could avoid this was by pointing out the number of white and light-skinned slaves present throughout the South. Slave testimonials and narratives usually began by introducing the slave and then examining their parental lineage, which often included non-African bloodlines. Even in stories where the main character is not of "mixed blood" other slaves who are white or light-skinned are

² Dwight A. McBride, *Truth, Abolition, and Slave Testimony: Impossible Witness* (New York: UP, 2001), 100-102.

³ Christine Levecq, *Slavery and Sentiment: The Politics of Feeling in Black Atlantic Antislavery Writing, 1770-1850* (Lebanon, NH: UPNE, 2008), 190-191.

pointed out and become peripheral characters in the narratives. Using John Blassingame's *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*, the fictional tale of Archy Moore, and the slave narratives of Henry Bibb, Harriet Jacobs, and Louisa Piquet this chapter surveys the use of whiteness by white and black abolitionists to help prove slavery was an abomination and draw support for the antislavery movement. The use of light-skinned slaves as an antislavery tactic complicated ideas of race and racial classification in the North. When Northerners heard stories of "white slaves", slaves who by all appearances could be their own children, being violent mistreated and forced into a life of servitude, it was natural for them to question what it meant to be white and whether there were more than two racial categories. Abolitionists brought to the forefront individuals who physically looked white and who, in some cases, were accepted by white society.

The slave testimonies found in Blassingame's *Slave Testimony* concerning slave speeches, and newspaper and magazine interviews contain within them several stories of light-skinned and white slaves. These speeches were given by former slaves to Northern antislavery audiences. In them they recounted their lives as slaves and their eventual escape to freedom and captivated audiences with their dramatic, humorous, and emotional accounts. Most of these former slaves would not go on to become professional orators on the abolitionist speech circuit, nevertheless their stories made their audiences laugh, cry, shout, stomp their feet, and clap their hands. While the speeches entertained audiences, their primary purpose was to garner support for the abolitionist movement and antislavery presses published transcripts of these accounts to help them reach as wide of an audience as possible. Abolitionists used these firsthand accounts to

show Northerners the evils and sins of the Southern slave system. Stories of whiteness and “white slaves” were prevalent throughout the years covered by this study.⁴

The 1840 narrative of former slave James Curry begins with an account of his parental lineage. Immediately James notes his mother was the offspring of a white man and a slave woman. The white man gave his mother and her brother away when the children were very young. James’ mother was torn away from her mother at a tender age, presumably because of her mixed blood and what it implied to her master. Curry goes on to tell his audience about the evils of slavery and how difficult life was for his mother and his siblings claiming “there is no sin which a man can commit, that those slaveholders are not guilty of.”⁵

Other slave testimonies began with similar accounts of their white lineage. Thomas Hughes tells his audience about his attempts to find his father – a white, wealthy planter. He finds his father and attempts to track down his mother and sister who were sold by the white man. His father was indifferent to their fate, so much so he had not even taken the name or location of the man who bought his former concubine and daughter.⁶ Another former slave, John Anderson, begin his speech with a description of his parents. His father was “almost white” and served on a steamboat which allowed him to escape slavery.⁷ By describing a slave’s family background and skin color these testimonials proved miscegenation was present on Southern plantations. These depictions are tame compared to some of the more radical testimonies given

⁴ John W. Blassingame, *Slave testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press 1977), 123.

⁵ James Curry, “James Curry’s Narrative,” in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 128-140.

⁶ Thomas Hughes, Interview, in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 212.

⁷ John Anderson, Interview, in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 353.

live and published in abolitionist newspapers, but still they showed the evils and dangers of slavery.

Freedman Lewis Clarke's *Leaves from a Slave's Journal* offered a back and forth exchange between the former slave turned abolitionist and his audience. Throughout his lecture the audience asked questions and cordially interrupted him from time to time asking for more detail or further explanation. He tells his captive audience of how jealous Southern whites can become of intelligent slaves and white slaves. Intelligent slaves make whites feel a sense of power over someone who has mental capabilities equal or above that of whites, while the whiter the slave, "the grander they feel." Clarke claimed the whiter a slave was the lower he was kept by his master. He believed this kept the "white slave" from knowing his rights and claiming his freedom. He provides his audience an anecdote of an "*all white*" slave – who he refused to call by name perhaps in an attempt to insure he (Lewis) was not returned to slavery – whose master continually beat in an attempt to keep him "down right hard."⁸ This episode showed the spectators both slavery's brutality and that skin color matter not to slave owners in the South. It also subtly pointed to the interracial liaisons which created these "white slaves."

First, Clarke offered his audience the experience of white male slaves held in captivity. He then turned his attention to the plight of female slaves. He began his tale by asking the present onlookers to imagine their own sisters, wives, and daughters under the absolute "power of a master" and how they might feel in their powerless, captive state. To drive his point home he tells of his own sister who was a very pretty girl and "whiter than [he], for she took more after the father." His master repeatedly called on his sister, even though she continually rebuffed his

⁸ Lewis Clarke, "Leaves from a Slave's Journal," in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 154-156.

advances. Their mother encouraged her to remain “decent” in the face of such trouble. Her reward for denying the sexual advances of her master was to be sold to a master in Louisiana where she died of “hard usage.”⁹ By asking his audience to picture their own families as slaves Clarke’s story of his sister surely made an emotional and logical impact on those listening to his speech. Unlike earlier when he was interrupted, albeit politely, and asked for more detail, no such instances occurred during this part of his speech.

Up to this point Clarke had merely related the sins of the master to his listeners. He soon turned his attention to the effects that slavery, and the adultery accompanying it, had on white women in the South. He told them about the suffering of children in slavery and how this can be dreadful “if the mistress suspects that the child is a little too nearly connected with the master.” He says it’s natural for them to feel this way but the slave mother and child often pay dearly for the transgressions of the master. His own mistress had such a young slave girl who she would kick and “beat her head up against a chimney.” The child eventually died from these beatings. A Southern white woman murdered a seven-year-old slave child because of the affair her husband had with its mother. Adultery, murder, and the destruction of the family all captured in one example. Slavery was the cause of such sin and brutality. The audience remained silent.

Madison Jefferson’s interview from 1841 again spoke to the evils of slavery, and, in particular, the effects slavery had on female slaves. Jefferson, an escaped slave from the estate of George Neale’s farm in New Virginia, maintained that “neither the innocence of youth, or the virtue of womanhood [was] respected” by slaveholding whites. As an example, he cited the fact that slave men and women who lived as husband and wife (though not legally) were constantly

⁹ Ibid, 156.

broken apart “by the unbridled licentiousness of the masters, overseers, & c.” As proof, he pointed to the number of mixed race slaves in the South, who in spite of their whiteness are treated as “pure blacks.” If a slave woman dared to deny her master’s wants she was “repeatedly whipped to subdue” her. If the beatings still failed to make her comply she would be sold even further South. He tells about the time his young master, a member of the Methodist church, raped one of his slaves while she was dazed by a blow from her master.¹⁰ Jefferson’s account was shocking and possibly even considered indecent for the time, given his vivid description of the beatings and sexual abuses inflicted on slave women. Nonetheless, his interview spoke to the lustfulness of slave owners and the brutality of slavery. His account showed slavery turned whites into monsters at the expense of blacks and, often times, the result was a mixed race, light-skinned offspring.

Short testimonials were not the only tool abolitionists used to highlight the ever-lightening skin color of African slaves. Slave narratives presented readers with longer, more detailed depictions of slave life and the hardships that accompanied it. An early example of this type of literature was *The Slave or Memoirs of Archy Moore* written by Richard Hildreth and first published in 1836. Hildreth relates the story of Archy Moore’s life in bondage through the slave’s own eyes and words. Readers learn that Moore is the offspring of his owner, Colonel Moore, and that Archy is white and “prided [himself] upon his color, as much as any white Virginian...”¹¹ This is merely the beginning of the slave’s depictions of the sins of the master and the evils of slavery. Archy soon falls in love with another “light-skinned” slave, Cassy.

¹⁰ Madison Jefferson, Interview, in Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 221

¹¹ Richard Hildreth, *The Slave or Memoirs of Archy Moore* (Boston: [s.n.] 1836), 41. HathiTrust.org, accessed on December 3, 2016, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/shcgi/pt?id=uc1.b3832025;view=1up;seq=49>

Cassy as it turns out is also the daughter of Colonel Moore through another female slave, not Archy's mother. The two are in fact half siblings.

Archy and Cassy wanted to marry but the law did not recognize slave unions, so they decide on their own to make their marriage as official as any slave marriage could become. Shortly afterwards Colonel Moore begins to make sexual advances toward Cassy. Cassy tells Archy about the Colonel's advances and how shameful she felt as she declared "Oh Archy! ... he is my father!"¹² Surprisingly, Hildreth did not hold back on the details of his story and was not afraid of upsetting readers and their sensitive nature when "depicting the depravity of slavery."¹³ Given their circumstances, Archy and Cassy decide to run away from Master Moore. Unfortunately, the couple is quickly betrayed by a lower class Southern white and the two are returned to the Colonel. Master Moore decides the best thing to do is to separate the two lovers and he sells Archy at a slave auction. The two lovers are now separated and the beginnings of a slave family are torn apart by the South's "peculiar institution."¹⁴

Despite their separation, the two lovers find their way back to one another when Archy spots Cassy at an outdoor church meeting. The two are reconciled and allowed to visit one another while living on neighboring plantations. Cassy relates the story of her plight to Archy and describes how she successfully fought off the advances of Colonel Moore, slave kidnappers, and a slave trader before finally being rescued by a group of Southern ladies. The two are seemingly safe from separation until Archy's master suffers an economic catastrophe and Archy

¹² Ibid, 54.

¹³ Evan Brandstadter, "Uncle Tom and Archy Moore: The Antislavery Novel as Ideological Symbol," *American Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1974): 162.

¹⁴ Ibid, 163.

is sold and never sees his wife again. The two lovers, half-siblings yet husband and wife, are torn apart by the evils of slavery. This is where Hildreth's first volume of *The Slave* ends, with our white hero and his "light-skinned" bride still in bondage and separated from one another and left to an unknown fate.¹⁵

Archy's story does not end here, however. Volume two of Hildreth's tale, also published in 1836, catches up with Archy at his new home on a plantation in South Carolina.¹⁶ Here he meets Thomas, a very stout and very intelligent slave and the plantation's overseer. Thomas is one of the more interesting characters of the narrative and he and Archy would eventually escape slavery only to be caught and then escape yet again. Archy's light color saves him on more than one occasion as he is able to mix in with white people and is even mistaken for a white man traveling with his slave Tomas. Their actions eventually caused Archy and Thomas to eventually separate, with Archy making his way north and readers left to wonder about Thomas's fate.¹⁷

Interestingly, in a later publication of the book in 1856 the two volumes are compiled into one and the title of the book is changed to *The White Slave or Archy Moore, Memoirs of a Fugitive*. Archy is now not just a slave who is white in color but he is a "white slave."¹⁸ This was not the only change in the narrative in the two decades separating the publications. The passages describing Archy's parental lineage and the fact he is "proud of his color" all remain the same but abolitionist readers could not ignore the "white slave" in the title of the latest publication,

¹⁵ Ibid, 162-164.

¹⁶ By 1840 the two volumes were combined into one book.

¹⁷ Ibid, 164.

¹⁸ Richard Hildreth, *Archy Moore, the White Slave: Or, Memoirs of a Fugitive* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856) HathiTrust.org, accessed on March 3, 2016
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/shcgi/pt?id=mdp.39015022685328;view=lup;seq=7>

and neither could pro-slavery supporters.¹⁹ Archy's whiteness, once buried in the pages of Hildreth's work, was now placed on the frontispiece. Miscegenation took front stage two decades after the original publication and whiteness and white slaves in antislavery publications were ever-present.

The tale of Archy Moore fascinated antislavery audiences. Several newspapers, including Garrison's *The Liberator*, ran excerpts from the narrative and word spread of Hildreth's book. Archy, however, was not a real slave. In fact, the entire story was a work of fiction and Richard Hildreth was not involved with any abolitionist groups at the time of its original publication. Hildreth was best known for his works on American History and not his fiction. Archy Moore changed this as he captivated abolitionists with his tale of slavery, sexual abuse, and the search for freedom. It did not matter to abolitionists that Archy never existed and that the details of his life were entirely fictional. Men like Garrison and others used the story to draw support for the antislavery movement. Archy, the white slave, showed both abolitionist audiences and others the dangers and evils of slavery, and the book demonstrated how slaves, even those who could pass as white, were mistreated and abused by their Southern masters.

While it may not have mattered to abolitionists the story of Archy Moore was a work of fiction, and this fact was exploited by proslavery activists. Many of these men set out to discredit Hildreth's work and that of all the slave narratives. In an effort to thwart such attempts, abolitionists began placing letters from prominent Northerners who assured the work's authenticity in the introductions to slave narratives. Henry Bibb's slave narrative, first published in 1849, had a ten-page introduction containing dozens of letters and signatures verifying the

¹⁹ Ibid.

truth of the books content. Henry Bibb's account of slavery, told in his own words, contains several instances of white and light-skinned slaves, their parentage, and stories of the sexual abuses of Southern masters.

Bibb's account begins as he traces his parental lineage for readers. He introduces us to his mother, Mildred Jackson, who "was also so fortunate or unfortunate, as to have some of what is called the slaveholding blood flowing in her veins."²⁰ Bibb claims this may have helped his mother live a better life to some small degree but it did not prevent all of her children from being auctioned in slave markets throughout the South. Bibb states "it is almost impossible for slaves to give a correct account of their male parentage."²¹ His mother told him his father was James Bibb of the Bibb family from Kentucky – and he was white. While Bibb does not begin his narrative with details of the sexual encounters between whites of the South and slaves he does offer readers a look into the parental lineage of his family, one full of white fathers for at least two generations.

While a very young child Bibb was separated from his mother and sent to work at various positions for various people with all his earnings kept by his master Mr. White. He goes on to describe his life as youngster and eventually he meets a young "mulatto girl" and the two fall in love and wish to marry. He tells readers that there is no marriage of slaves in the South and a law recognizing slave marriage rights is "unknown in the history of American slavery."²² Bibb then exclaims that it is "to the disgrace of our country that every slaveholder, who is the keeper of a

²⁰ Henry Bibb, b. 1815. *Narrative of the Life And Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* 3d stereotype ed. (New York: H. Bibb, 1850, 1849), 14.

²¹ Ibid, 14.

²² Ibid, 38.

number of slaves of both sexes, is also the keeper of a house of ill-fame.”²³ He continues to blast slaveowners and the institution as a breeding ground of sin where slaves live in an “open state of adultery” because of “licentious white men.”²⁴ Bibb goes on to lament the fact that he is a father and husband of slaves claiming he and his wife’s newborn child will be the last slave he ever fathers.

In a state of despair over his lot as a slave Bibb decides his only option is to run for liberty, but doing so meant leaving his wife and child behind. Slavery continues to separate slave families even when they are not sold apart from one another. Bibb boards a steamboat bound for Cincinnati, Ohio and makes his break for freedom. He is ever afraid he will be recognized as a slave but his skin color allows him to mingle in with the crowd where it is “difficult to distinguish [him] from a white man.”²⁵ He is happy that his kinship with whites allows him to elude capture but at the same time he laments the fact that “while in their midst they have not only robbed me of my labor and liberty, but they have almost robbed me of my dark complexion.”²⁶ With one statement Bibb showed how slavery took away his own skin color and he was neither black nor white. Obviously, he passed for white but this would not be the case if and when he revealed his true identity. If this happened in the South he would be promptly returned to a life of servitude, and if it occurred in the North he would never have been accepted as a white. Bibb was uniquely recognized, by himself and others, with both whites and blacks.

²³ Ibid, 38.

²⁴ Ibid, 38.

²⁵ Ibid, 48.

²⁶ Ibid, 49.

His complexion, and that of other light-skinned slaves, made whites and blacks alike question the racial classifications of the time.

While in Cincinnati Bibb met several abolitionists who assisted him by making small monetary donations to the fugitive. He was hesitant to accept help from white folks but they assured him they were friends. Once Bibb felt comfortable in the presence of his new friends – the abolitionists – they began asking him questions. They wanted to know if it was true that “someone as near white as [himself] could be a slave?” They also were astonished to learn that Southern “men would make slaves of their own children!”²⁷ Unfortunately, for Bibb, his time in bondage was not completely behind him yet.

Bibb, with the aid of abolitionists, set out to free his young family from slavery and in doing so he was captured, re-enslaved, and eventually sold to a master in the Deep South. He would never give up on his plans for freedom and his whiteness helped him on several occasions. His master in Louisiana, Mr. Garrison, was especially cruel to his wife. Garrison loved to paddle female slaves more than he loved to eat.²⁸ Garrison was a slave trader and found that due to Bibb’s propensity for flight and his desire to keep his family together he had trouble selling Bibb for a suitable price. He kept Bibb and other slaves locked up in a prison while they awaited sale. This further hampered his ability to sell Bibb and his wife and child. Garrison gave Bibb the task of finding his own master on the streets of New Orleans. He dressed Bibb in some of his own clothing and sent him out in search of a new master. This allowed Bibb certain advantages as he had some say in who he approached about buying him. He wanted to get out of the Deep South to a more Northern slave state because it would make his and his family’s eventual escape from

²⁷ Ibid, 60-61.

²⁸ Ibid, 106.

slavery easier to accomplish. He approached a man from Tennessee about the prospect of purchasing the entire Bibb family, but because of his clothes and white complexion he was mistaken for a slave trader. He did not try to get the man to purchase him because he already knew the man would believe him to be “too white” to be of use as a slave.²⁹ The next day he found a cotton planter looking to purchase slaves – Francis Whitfield – but Mr. Whitfield was reluctant to buy Bibb and his family because he was “a little too near white.”³⁰

Regrettably, Bibb convinced Whitfield to purchase him and his family despite his whiteness. Bibb soon realized he had never experienced a slaveholder as cruel as his new master. This would hasten his desire for escape. In his subsequent escape attempts Bibb easily blended in with whites on trains, steamboats, in hotels, restaurants, and other places. His role as a house servant helped him learn the mannerisms of the Southern slaveholding class, but it was his white skin that allowed him to sit at their tables and ride their vehicles to freedom.³¹ Bibb’s whiteness was a result of the sexual depravities of Southern slave holders and antislavery readers were astutely aware of Bibb’s complexion. His light skin and his uncanny ability to “pass as white” fascinated Northern audiences but they would never view him as white. Bibb’s narrative was very popular. Excerpts of his book were printed in abolitionist newspapers and he toured the North making appearances and speeches at abolitionist rallies.

In 1861 Reverend Hiram Mattison wrote and published *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Slave Life* and like Henry Bibb’s story Louisa’s tale contained descriptions and stories of whiteness. Picquet was illiterate so she required an author to make her story known.

²⁹ Ibid, 107.

³⁰ Ibid, 109.

³¹ Ibid, 109.

She was at first reluctant to tell her tale but she needed money to buy her mother's freedom. This combined with Mattison's abilities of persuasion convinced her to work with the abolitionist and let her story be heard. This set up an interesting dynamic within the narrative as Picquet was motivated by her own personal and financial needs while Mattison, a dedicated abolitionist, had his own "political and narrative objectives."³² The work read more like an interview than a story and Mattison's leading questions were quite noticeable. Picquet's answers and Mattison's question offer a unique perspective of abolitionist publications and white skin plays a major role in *The Octoroon*.

Mattison begins by introducing his audience to Louisa and offers a detailed physical description of the former slave. Louisa was "of fair complexion and rosy cheeks, with dark eyes, a flowing head of hair with no perceptible inclination to curl, and every appearance, at first view, of an accomplished white lady."³³ He even tells his audience that no one would believe she was of African descent even when informed of her lineage. Immediately Mattison stresses Louisa's whiteness to his abolitionist readers and by doing so he presents her as a living example of the evils of slavery. Mattison may have worried that Louisa Picquet was too white for in the next paragraph he assures the reader that Louisa's speech is full of "plantation expression and pronunciation" and she cannot read or write.³⁴ Mattison guaranteed his audience that she spent the majority of her life in slavery, even though she was to all appearances white.

³² Stephanie Li, *Something Akin to Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 78.

³³ H. Mattison, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Slave Life* (New York, 1861), 5. "Documenting the American South" Accessed on February 23, 2016), <http://docSouth.unc.edu/neh/picquet/picquet.html>

³⁴ Ibid, 5.

After establishing Louisa's appearance and status as a former slave Mattison questioned her about her parents and unsurprisingly her mother was "pretty white."³⁵ Picquet's parental lineage demonstrated to antislavery audiences that the sins of slave masters went back generations. Louisa's answer to Mattison's question regarding her mother's skin tone was telling. She said her mother was indeed white but stressed that she was not "white enough for white people."³⁶ Her statement revealed the complexities and difficulties of race in the time of slavery. Louisa mom was white but not white at the same time. This was also true of Louisa herself. Even Northern audiences would not consider her white because she was of African heritage, and yet her skin color and that of other slaves were central to abolitionist publications.

Chapter four of Mattisons work was entitled "A White Slave Love Adventure." It was about a male slave "T-" who was "more white than [Louisa]" and he wished to marry her, but circumstances caused him to run away from his master.³⁷ His master kept a light skinned female slave who he called on at his leisure. While his master was not married he only saw the young concubine at his office and only then would T- would go and fetch the girl. Another slave proceeded to get jealous of T- and thought he was treated netter by his master because of his white skin so he told his master T- was seeing his mistress. This was why T- had to run away. T- tried to convince Louisa to join him and told her they could easily escape because they could both pass as white. She decided not to go because she could not read or write and thought this would end up getting the two caught. Both Louisa and T's whiteness offered them a means to escape but it also created animosity amongst the slave community as darker slaves became

³⁵ Ibid, 7.

³⁶ Ibid,7.

³⁷ Inid, 8.

jealous of the preferential treatment of lighter slaves. Slavery and the mixing of races turned Africans against one another not just whites against blacks.

Louisa would eventually be sold by her master at a slave auction. In this section of the text Mattison asks her if there were others at the auction “white like [her]?” She answered, “plenty.”³⁸ Now Mattison present white slaves sold on the auction block with the women stripped above the waist so perspective buyers can get a better look at the merchandise. Louisa was sold to Mr. Williams from New Orleans and she soon learned what he had planned for her. She was to be his house servant and also his personal companion, but he promised to treat her well if she behaved. Louisa bore four children with Mr. Williams. Mattison asked if these children were “mulattoes” to which she exclaimed “No sir! They were all white” and “looked just like him,” so much so the neighbors began to gossip.³⁹ It became so bad for Louisa she asked to be sold but Williams would not part with her. Mattison presented his audience with a “white slave” forced into an adulterous relationship with no way of refusing her masters advances. And the result of this affair was four white children who would follow the condition of their mother into bondage.

Mattison then presses Louisa to tell him and his audience if she felt she “was doing right by living...with Mr. Williams.”⁴⁰ Louisa responds by relating a story about another white slave, Lucy, she knew as a child. Lucy had five or six children who were all “right white,” and Lucy lived with their father without being married to him. This was how Louisa learned what adultery was and she lamented having to spend her days living in a state of sin and there would “be no

³⁸ Ibid, 17.

³⁹ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 20.

chance for [her]...and [she'd] have to die and be lost.”⁴¹ Mattison’s direct questions exposed Louisa’s and Lucy’s whiteness and that of their children, but it was the voice of the former slave herself that lamented her sinful life of adultery. This was a result of slavery and the lustful intentions of the Southern slave holding class. Slaves were forced to live in marriages which were unlawful in the eyes of the United States legal system and in the eyes of God. The religious rhetoric of abolitionists was inextricably linked to the rhetoric of whiteness. Whiteness implied sin for both the slave and the slave owner.

Mattison offered his readers a synopsis of Louisa Picquet’s life in his “Conclusion and Moral of the Whole Story.” Here in his own words, the words of an abolitionist and not that of a former slave, he recounts the “darkest and most prominent feature[s] of the whole narrative.”⁴² In a numbered list he describes ten instances of miscegenation, all of which Louisa experienced or witnessed herself. Each episode highlighted the behavior of so-called Southern “gentlemen” and their scandalous relations with slaves. Each story mentioned the “white children” resulting from these adulterous affairs. Mattison then asked his readers “if such are the glimpses of Southern domestic life which a single brief narrative reveals, what must the remainder be, which is hidden from our “Abolition” eyes?” Answering his own questions Mattison exclaimed that “those tell-tale mulatto, and quadroon, and octoroon faces! They stand out unimpeached, and still augmenting as God’s testimony to the deep moral pollution of the Slave States.”⁴³ Mattison

⁴¹ Ibid, 22.

⁴² Ibid, 50.

⁴³ Ibid, 50.

issued an outright indictment against the South's "peculiar institution" and he used the testimony of a former slave, her light skin, and her white children to complete his mission.

Much like Louisa Picquet's narrative, Harriet Jacobs used stories of white slaves and whiteness to depict the evils of slavery in her narrative *The Deeper Wrong or Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* written by herself and edited by Lydia Maria Childs. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents* provides a firsthand female perspective of the trials and tribulations of slavery and was unique among slave narratives. Previous slave narratives and testimonies of formerly enslaved women were captured and written by men or women other than the female slave who suffered through the life depicted. This placed Jacobs in a position to deliver a scathing account of Southern slave owners and the practices of their "peculiar institution." The legitimacy of her narrative was immediately questioned and the validity of its contents contested until the early 1990's, one hundred and thirty years after its original publication.⁴⁴

Jacobs opens her narrative with a discussion of her lineage and like many other slave narratives she has "Anglo-Saxon" blood in her family.⁴⁵ Her parents were both "mulattoes" and her maternal grandmother had a fair complexion. She even states that one of her uncles, her mother's brother, was "nearly white" having inherited her grandmother's complexion. The fathers of the children are not mentioned in her narrative, but given Harriet and some of her relatives were slaves and they had fairer skin and other features of their slaveowners they had to

⁴⁴ Robert L. Hall, "Massachusetts Abolitionists Document the Slave Experience," in Donald M. Jacobs, *Courage and Conscience: Black & White Abolitionists in Boston*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 75. For a more recent work whose author demonstrates the veracity of Jacobs' narrative see also: Harriet Ann Jacobs and Jean Fagan Yellin. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself. Vol. 119*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents*, 13.

have white blood running through their veins.⁴⁶ Jacobs shows the sexual sins of the slaveholding class in the first few pages of her narrative by simply telling readers about her relatives and their complexions.

Jacobs' next mention of white slaves comes when she describes a disturbance between two slaves, husband and wife, though not legally. The man was mercilessly whipped for arguing with his wife about the father of their newborn child. Both slaves were black but "the child was very fair."⁴⁷ The beating did not stop the man from arguing with his wife and their master, Dr. Flint, was forced to sell the both of them. When the slave woman was handed over to the traders she exclaimed, "You promised to treat me well." Dr. Flint chastised her for letting her tongue go too far, for as Jacob adds the mother forgot "that it was a crime for a slave to who was the father of her child."⁴⁸ The sexual appetite of Dr. Flint was on full display for abolitionist audiences and not only did the doctor commit adultery but a slave family was also torn apart because of the sins of the master and the white child was the damning evidence.

Jacobs next tells her readers she witnessed the terrible death of a young slave mother and her child during childbirth. The young slave girl was dying after giving birth to a "nearly white" child and her mistress was mocking her as she pleaded for the good Lord to take her to heaven.⁴⁹ The dying girl's mother notices the baby has died and hopes her daughter will soon join her in heaven. To this the mistress says that there is no place in heaven for her type and a bastard child. In this story the slave master is not the focus, but rather the behavior of the mistress was noted.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 24.

The sins of the master turned his wife into a jealous “fiend” who could show no compassion to a dying slave, her dead baby, or to the slave’s mother. The mother is left without child or grandchild but “[thanks] God for taking her away from the great bitterness of life.”⁵⁰ The master could not escape the evidence of a white child as proof of his sinful behavior and that behavior turned Southern women into bitter fiends with little to no compassion for the lives of their slaves. Abolitionists offered stories like this to their readers to prove slavery had devastating effects on women as well as men.

Whiteness and light skin, however, were not always a negative thing for a slave to possess. Jacobs tells the good fortune her uncle Benjamin had in his quest for freedom. Dr. Flint tried to sell Benjamin but was asking for too high a price for the male “nearly white” slave. This provided Benjamin with the opportunity to gain his freedom and it was an opportunity he did not waste. He immediately fled to Baltimore by train and “for once his white face did him a kindly service” for no one suspected “it belonged to a slave.”⁵¹ Benjamin was able to blend in with the whites on the train and in Baltimore. His flight for freedom was successful and his whiteness aided in his attempt. Many slaves employed this tactic as a way to escape the South and avoid detection once safely in the North. Slave narratives included depictions of slaves passing as white to show the success “white slaves” had fitting in with both Southern and Northern white society. At the same time these stories showed the interracial mixing brought about by slavery, tacitly pointing out the sins of Southern whites.

Slave narratives and testimonials allowed abolitionists a means to connect with their audiences on a more personal level. By having slaves tell their stories in their own words, when

⁵⁰ Ibid, 24.

⁵¹ Ibid, 39.

possible, their stories were more believable and likeable. In many cases the authors of these narratives took up the antislavery cause themselves and were both abolitionists and former slaves. Even the fictional tale of Archy Moore is told from the slave's point of view, which enabled the main character to speak directly to the reader. The examples of "white slaves" in these stories show the sexual depravity and sin existing on Southern plantations. Some of the personal narratives merely hinted at interracial sexual relations by describing a slave's parental lineage and the various degrees of skin color in their family. Others were blunter and told detailed stories of slaveholders who raped their slaves then afterwards, in some cases, sold their own children. White male slave owners and their female concubines were not the only ones affected by the adulterous affairs. White women often turned their anger towards the white offspring who were products of their master's sins. Their husband's transgressions turned virtuous white women into jealous, vengeful mistresses. At times they demanded the children be sold which in turn tore apart slave families. Slaves of varying degrees of whiteness demonstrated the sins that accompanied the South's "peculiar institution," and abolitionist writers and publishers used these to help prove slavery was an abomination.

Chapter 3

Images of Whiteness

The literature and rhetoric located in slave narratives and testimonials was not the only tool abolitionists used to fight against slavery. Images found within these texts had a powerful and immediate effect on readers and had the potential to reach illiterate audiences and have a lasting effect. Publishers originally used etchings pressed onto paper to illustrate antislavery publications, but as the technology behind photography advanced making photos more affordable they turned to daguerreotypes for their works. Abolitionists eventually created carte-de-visites, or CDVs, showing images of slavery in the hopes of drawing support for the movement and bringing about the abolishment of slavery. The importance and the power of images in the abolitionist movement of the mid 1800s cannot be overstated. Philosopher Jean Luc-Nancy's theory of the power and importance of imagery helps demonstrate the power "white slave" images had on abolitionists' audience. Luc-Nancy claims that images, whether written, painted, or photographed, touch people in ways no other medium can, and in doing so draws them in and gets them involved.¹ Getting people inside and outside the antislavery movement emotionally and physically invested was one of the main goals of abolitionist publications. This chapter looks at abolitionists' attempts to sway Northern readers to the antislavery side of the movement using imagery. Just as the famous "Am I not a man and a brother" broadside of a shackled, kneeling slave, and its female counterpart "Am I not a sister and a woman," were powerful images of the abolitionist movement the following images sought to expose the evils of slavery and the abuses of Southern slave owners.

¹ Jean Luc-Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

Photography was a major technological breakthrough for the antebellum period and had far-reaching consequences. With the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839 photography soon changed the way Americans saw themselves and others as individuals and citizens.² Given the impact photography had on American life it was no surprise that the new technology was adopted and used by antislavery activists. Photographs could not and did not “accomplish radical social change on their own,” but when paired with firsthand stories of the evils of slavery, antislavery rhetoric, and other abolitionist tactics they proved a formidable instrument. Frederick Douglass called the late 1800s the “age of pictures” and photography was the culmination of this era of imagery.³ Abolitionists used all the tools available to garner support for the antislavery cause.

As antislavery publishers and authors began using engravings and photographs in their works others used photography for scientific purposes. In 1850, Louis Agassiz, an immigrant scientist who prior to his arrival in America worked with fish fossils, commissioned a series of fifteen photographs of seven slaves from the South. The purpose of these detailed images was to analyze the physical characteristics and differences between whites and blacks and by doing so “prove the superiority of the white race.”⁴ Agassiz believed that races were created separate from one another and each was its own unique species. This belief gained considerable traction in the

² Maurice O. Wallace, and Shawn Michelle Smith. *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American identity* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 1-3. For more examples of the importance of photography in the abolition movement see: Jessie Morgan-Owens, “‘Another Ida May’: Photography and the American Abolition Campaign.” *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 47-60; Barbara Krauthamer and Deborah Willis, “Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery,” *Visual Resources* 29, no. 4 (2013): 374-377.

³ Ibid, 5.

⁴ Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art*, 9, no. 2 (1995): 40.

mid-1800s both in the United States and abroad. Agassiz's and other scientists' work justified the system of slavery in the South and his photographic evidence of white superiority offered Southern and Northern audiences' scientific proof. The power of daguerreotypes was undeniable, visual proof through the outward appearance of race.⁵ Images, when used racial by scientists, reinforced previously held beliefs of what it meant for someone to be "white" or "black" and the presumption of "free" or "enslaved." Northern audiences used a person's physical appearance to help determine racial classification. Images showed a person's physical characteristics – facial structure, hair, skin color, etc., but it also showed other characteristics, clothing style for example, which could help determine if a person was perceived as white or black. Just as Agassiz selected the slaves for his study and they were all notably absent of any shade of whiteness, abolitionists chose light-skinned slaves to show the sins of Southern slavery. These images conflicted with Northern audiences preconceived notions of race, whiteness, and slavery. Abolitionists would use this new technology to as visual proof of the devastating effects slavery had on the individual and families. Their images of "white slaves" complicated Agassiz's claims of racial superiority and white supremacy and proved how difficult it was for even a supposed expert to racially classify individuals by the color of their skin.

The specific evil of slavery was the rape of enslaved women and these pictures served as "explicit substitutes for the words that had not been printed and the speeches not yet spoken" by abolitionists about these crimes.⁶ The images confronted readers with not just white faces, but the white faces of slaves, and in doing so they spoke to the sexual abuses of Southerners on female slaves. The pictures were often at odds with their titles as well. These titles described

⁵ Ibid, 48-50.

⁶ Barbara McCaskill, "'Yours Very Truly': Ellen Craft--the Fugitive as Text and Artifact," *African American Review* 28, no. 4 (St. Louis University, 1994): 516. doi:10.2307/3042215.



Figure 2: Daguerreotype circa 1855 picturing a young slave girl, most likely Mary Botts, Julian Vannerson. Photo I.256. Massachusetts Historical Society.

their subjects as “octoroons,” “slaves,” and other words associated with blackness and subjugation, and yet readers and viewers saw a white, fair complexioned individual looking back at them. The etchings and photographs found in slave narratives, newspapers, and on the CDVs powerfully exposed the corruption of slavery and the race mixing present throughout the South to both literate and illiterate audiences. Imagery was perhaps the most powerful weapon in the abolitionists’ arsenal and they did not hesitate to use all the available images to prove slavery was an abomination and garner support for the antislavery movement.

Although daguerreotypes first appeared in 1839 they did not become popular or remotely affordable for years. Figure 2 represents one of the earliest images of a “white slave child” known to exist. Though historians cannot say with one hundred percent certainty that the image is Mary Mildred Botts, most agree the picture is of her.⁷ Mary was a former slave whose family was purchased and then freed by abolitionist Charles Sumner. This image is the original daguerreotype Charles Sumner had produced to send ahead to Northern audiences to draw interest to the upcoming tours he had planned for Mary the “white slave child.” Sumner sent Mary’s physical description and picture North in a letter in March of 1855. The words he used to describe her were mentioned and analyzed in chapter one of this study. In his letter, he described the child as being fair skinned and he also claims she is white. The picture was sent along as proof of her whiteness.⁸ Sumner’s tactic worked as many Northerners, both abolitionists and others, anticipated the arrival of Mary. More mainstream newspapers described the picture to their readers. Boston and New York newspapers called Mary “a most beautiful white girl,” and named her the “Real Ida May” after the fictional account of a young white female caught in the vice of slavery.⁹

In the photo, Mary appeared to be white to both Northern and Southern audiences of the time. She had fair skin and little to no curl in her hair. Her hair was wavy but does not curl like the hair many Northerners of the time associated with men and women of African descent. By

⁷ This is based on the numbers of mirror image daguerreotype reprints still in existence today, many of which have written on them “Mulatto slave girl raised by Charles Sumner” and Mitchell’s *Raising Freedom’s Child*.

⁸ “Letter from the Hon. Charles Sumner,” March 17, 1855, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Accessible Archives, accessed on December 15, 2015, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/print?AADocList=281&AADocStyle=&AASStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.502.281.1.1>

⁹ Mitchell, *Raising Freedom’s Child*, 74.

this time many educated, middle-class, Northerners were familiar with the new science of racial classification popularized by Agassiz and others. Mary's features were nothing like the images of Africans and blackness these scientists used to classify and separate races. By the standards described in the science of racial classification based solely on physical characteristics, Mary was indeed white and most Northerners would have seen a white child in the photograph and not one of African descent.¹⁰ The fact that Mary was white but was described as a slave, which denoted blackness to readers, made her image much more powerful to abolitionists. It surely made audiences question their own beliefs about race and it complicated, if not debunked, the social and scientific beliefs in racial separation. Not all Northerners believed Mary was a freed slave child. Papers in the Boston and New York questioned stories of "white slaves," especially papers in competition with those claiming Mary's whiteness. One of these papers called Mary a "bogus slave," and other light-skinned slave's legitimacy was questioned by Northerners who opposed the antislavery cause.¹¹ Despite these criticisms the child's whiteness was hard for many

¹⁰ Wallis, "Black Bodies."

¹¹ Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child*, 85.

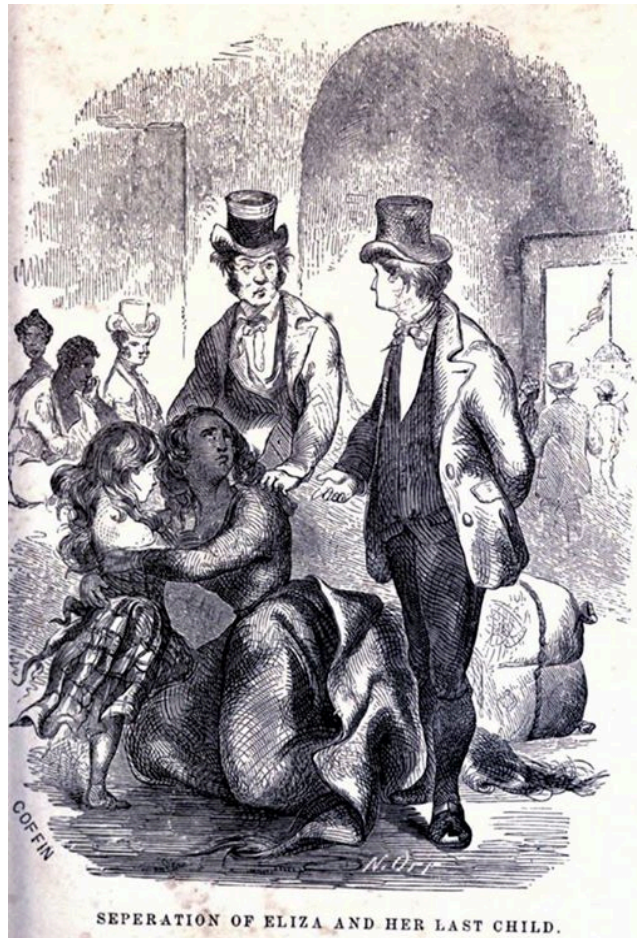


Figure 3: Separation of Eliza and her Last Child, from Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave*

Northerners to deny. Abolitionists eventually adopted daguerreotypes as the primary method of disseminating antislavery images, and in particular the images of “white slaves.” Many publishers, presses, and authors, however, still used other forms of imagery to augment their antislavery writings. The engraving in Figure 2 depicts a scene from Solomon Northrup’s narrative *Twelve Years a Slave*. The image shows the tearing apart of a slave family in a slave auction house as the slave mother and child are sold to different masters by a slave trader. The image is a wood engraving created by Nathaniel Orr whose work appeared in over 175 books

over his career.¹² Slave trader Theophilus Freeman kept a slave pen in New Orleans where he sold slaves at auction. Days before the scene depicted in the image Eliza's son Randall was sold to a plantation owner and taken from his mother. At the next auction, Solomon, Eliza, and another slave were bought by another Southern gentleman but he had no need for a child as small as Eliza's daughter. Eliza desperately pleaded with the gentleman to purchase her daughter. At last her new owner agreed to buy her child but Freeman refused to sell her saying "she was a beauty—a picture—a doll—one of the regular bloods."¹³ Eliza refused to leave her child but Freeman forcefully separated the two and as the mother was ushered away from her child the last she heard of her infant's voice was her pleading for her mother to "come back—don't leave me—come back, mama."¹⁴

The story itself is an emotional and heart wrenching tale of the ways slave traders and slave owners treated slaves in the South. It was powerful enough to stand on its own but the accompanying engraving made Eliza's story even more potent. A closer look at the engraving reveals even more details about Eliza's plight and the evils of slavery. The door to the auction house is left open in the image and a stately building stands in the opening. The building appears to be an official state building with the American flag mounted atop the domed structure. This could be the Louisiana capital building with slaves being sold right underneath the seat of government for the state. The structure, however, resembles the capitol building in Washington

¹² "Sorting Out John William Orr and Nathaniel Orr," Graphic Arts Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Accessed on March 15, 2016.
<https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/2016/02/11/sorting-out-john-william-orr-and-nathaniel-orr/>

¹³ Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*, (1853) 88. Electronic Edition. Accessed on "Documenting the American South" on February 23, 2016), <http://docSouth.unc.edu/fpn/Northup/Northup.html>

¹⁴ Ibid, 88.

D.C., the national seat of government and the upholders of the Constitution. Perhaps the artist took liberties with the details of the image or perhaps he was directed by abolitionists to include the capitol building. Either way the audience sees slaves being auctioned off under the great flag of our nation and the seat of freedom. Even the bale of cotton in the immediate background hints at the fate of the slave sold to Louisiana plantations – years of hard labor on a Deep South cotton plantation.

Several slaves and slave owners appear in the image as well. All of the slaves except for Eliza's young daughter are shown with dark complexions, but the child is white. Eliza's daughter is white because her father was a white man. The traders and prospective slave purchasers are also all white men dressed in finer close and adorned with top hats. Both Eliza and her child are wearing finer clothing than one would expect to see on slaves in a Louisiana auction house. This is explained early in the narrative as Eliza and her family were offered more opportunities than most slaves and she had also lived under the promise of freedom for many years. The clothing of the mother and daughter is remarkably close to what the slave holding class would wear. The young child's dress either slipped or was torn off her shoulders during the struggle to stay attached to her mother and revealed perfectly white skin. The child's skin tone is so white in the picture that it appears to be even lighter and purer than the skin of the white males. There is hardly a blemish on the child's skin while the slave trader and the slave buyer have marks on their face and necks. The innocence of Eliza's daughter is clear, as clear and pure as her white skin. It was no accident the child appeared to be white. Abolitionists used the vulnerability of slave families and young children to show their audiences slavery had destructive effects on family units. They also used white children to show the previous sins of slave masters. Northern middle class audiences would empathize with the young child who was separated from her only

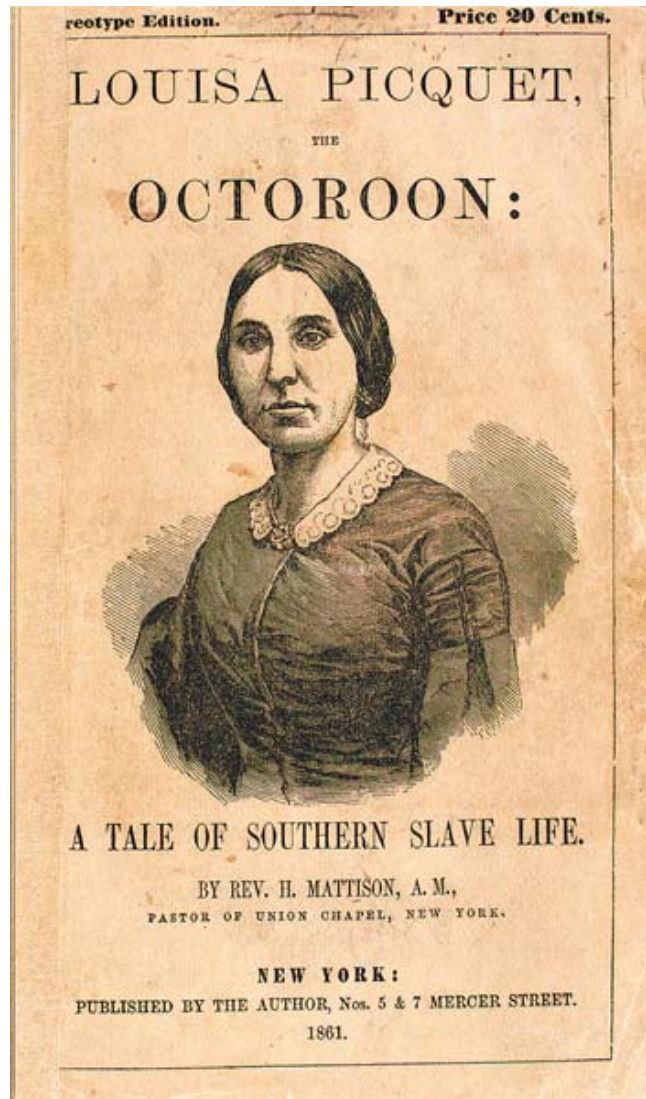


Figure 4: Louisa Picquet's Frontispiece from *The Octoroon*

remaining family and valued over other slaves because she was a white female slave. The engraving was surely an impactful piece of antislavery propaganda and one that played with reader's emotions, especially those with small children who shared the young girl's complexion.

Engravings portraying scenes from within slave narratives were not the first images readers saw when they read these books. Many abolitionists, publishers, and authors placed frontispieces at the beginnings of their books to provide readers a visual representation of the person writing or telling the story of their time in bondage. These images came in the form of engravings and daguerreotypes and connected the reader to the narrator on a more personal level.

Reverend Mattison and Louisa Picquet's narrative *The Octoroon* greeted readers with a white face in Louisa's frontispiece. Mattison solicited the image from Louisa in order to show his audience the "moral corruption" slavery brought about.¹⁵ He introduced the engraving at the beginning of the narrative claiming the image is a "tolerable representation...though by no means a flattering picture" of Louisa Picquet.¹⁶ Gabrielle Foreman maintains this description points to the desire by Mattison to depict Louisa as an object of desire, and Louisa's determination to resist his intentions.¹⁷ In spite of Mattison's and Picquet's wants readers were confronted with a white face at the start of the narrative which offered readers a picture of the disgrace of miscegenation.

Louisa was shown in proper middle-class attire for the period with a button up dress with long sleeves and hardly any skin is visible other than her face. The dark color of the dress makes her skin appear even lighter. Her dark hair was drawn back without a single strand out of place and hardly any perceivable curl visible. To all appearances, the woman pictured was a respectable white woman. Yet immediately above the image was the word "Octoroon." Abolitionist audiences and others knew precisely what an octoroon was, a person with one-eighth African blood and seven-eighths white.¹⁸ This confronted readers with a dilemma about who the woman pictured represented. Was she a white woman or an enslaved woman of African descent? Again, according to Mattison, the image depicts a woman without any African heritage.

¹⁵ P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Who's Your Mama? 'White' Mulatta Genealogies, Early Photography, and Anti-passing Narratives of Slavery and Freedom," *American Literary History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 515.

¹⁶ H. Mattison, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Slave Life*, New York, 1861, 5, accessed on "Documenting the American South" on February 23, 2016, <http://docSouth.unc.edu/neh/picquet/picquet.html>

¹⁷ Foreman, "Who's Your Mama?" 516.

¹⁸ Mattison described what an octoroon was to his readers just in case there was any who did not know the meaning of the word and its importance to the story and his cause.

He claims in his intro that “no one, not apprised of the fact, would suspect that she had a drop of African blood in her veins.”¹⁹ To prove to readers that Louisa is indeed a slave he notes her illiteracy, her use of Southern vernacular, and her in depth knowledge of slave life on a Southern plantation. In spite of all of Mattison’s proof of Picquet’s African heritage her image in the engraving suggested the opposite of what the title maintained, that Louisa Picquet was a black woman and former slave. Abolitionists chose their words carefully.²⁰ In the case of Picquet, “octoroon” was chosen to contradict the appearance of a “white” woman. Mattison goes on to prove to readers using “facts” both the word and individual qualities of Picquet to show she may appear white but was a slave and was not only black but a child of a white Southern.

The wood engraving of Louis Picquet offers audiences a portrait of someone who they would not directly associated with slavery without the additional storyline. If a reader were to merely look at the engraving of Louisa it was likely they would see a white woman and fellow American citizen. Rhetoric scholars, such as Lynn Casmier-Paz maintain that when confronted with images of seemingly white women, men, and children audiences would not associate these people with “a beaten, raped, humiliated, and subservient class of servile human beings.”²¹ While Louisa may by all appearance be white she was in fact a slave born from a slave mother and a white father. Since children followed the condition of their mother Louisa was a slave. This also implicitly tied her to blackness to both Northerners and Southerners despite her “near white” appearance. For abolitionists, like Mattison, images of white and light skinned slaves

¹⁹ Mattison, *Louisa Picquet*, 5.

²⁰ Michael D. Pierson, "Slavery Cannot Be Covered Up with Broadcloth or a Bandanna: The Evolution of White Abolitionist Attacks on the Patriarchal Institution." *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 3 (2005): 391-394.

²¹ Casmier-Paz, Lynn, "Slave Narratives and the Rhetoric of Author Portraiture," *New literary history* 34, no. 1 (2003): 107.

were an ideal way to open up their stories about the evils of the South's "peculiar institution."

These images pointed directly to the rape of slave women and the sexual desire of Southern men in a very indirect way. Offering readers images of white slaves authors were able to "talk" about racial mixing and the degradation of the patriarchal family structures without mentioning the taboo subject of sex. In addition to this the image showed Northerners the precariousness of their own liberty, for if women as white as Louisa could easily be considered slaves in the South, then how safe was their own liberty. This was a particularly strong message leading up to and during the Civil War. Louisa's image alone was a powerful tool for abolitionists, but when paired with her story and that of her mother's it enabled them to reach new audiences and raise money and support for the fight against slavery.



Figure 5: Ellen And William Craft, Unknown - *The Liberator* newspaper (1831-1865)

Images appeared in abolitionist newspaper stories as well as inside of slave narratives. Garrison's *The Liberator* featured Ellen and William Crafts (pictured in Figure 4 above) likeness in more than one article detailing the couple's daring escape from slavery. The couple used

Ellen's whiteness to pass their way through the South and escape to the free states. Slave catchers pursued the Crafts and threatened to capture and return the couple to slavery. After several speaking engagements on the abolitionist lecture circuit the Crafts eventually decided it was in their best interest to leave the country, having heard rumor of slave hunters hoping to capture and return the couple to Georgia. They spent the next several years of their lives working towards the abolition of slavery from their new home in England. During their escape, Ellen dressed as a white man and William acted as her slave as they traveled Northward staying in the nicest hotels and often traveling in first class accommodations. The Crafts also had a few very close calls along the way because neither William nor Ellen were literate. The couple's escape captivated audiences as people clamored to hear their story firsthand.²²

The contrast between the Crafts as pictured in figure 3 was striking and the image made the unlikely story of their escape believable to Northern audiences. Ellen was a descendant of a slave woman and a white slave owner. She had a very light, almost white complexion and suffered greatly at the hands of her jealous mistress because of her mother and father's adulterous liaison. In the image, it appears as if a white woman is featured beside a black man. This may not have struck many whites as being unusual, but a white woman traveling North alone with a black man could have jeopardized their escape plans.²³ This is also the reason Ellen dressed as a man to escape slavery. A white woman traveling North with a male slave would have certainly drawn unwanted attention from whites they passed along the way. The couple is also dressed in fine clothing suitable for those occupying a middle-class status. By showing the

²² William Craft, Ellen Craft, and R. J. M. Blackett, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, (London: William Tweedie, 1860) Accessed on March 15, 2016 on <http://docSouth.unc.edu/neh/craft/craft.html>

²³ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 2.

Crafts well-dressed in the image abolitionists hoped to show their readers a light-skinned woman and her darker husband. Their dress also implied a level of class and good moral standing. The narrative reads like a traditional slave narrative but the story was what made the Crafts narrative so appealing and unbelievable at the same time. According to William, his wife was “as white as anyone.”²⁴ To audiences looking at the woman pictured beside the black man Ellen appeared to be white even though she was a former slave. The Crafts slave narrative provides a picture of Ellen dressed as she was during their escape. The Image shows what looks like a man with a fancy suit, cloak, top hat, and walking stick. The man had dark but relatively straight hair and very light skin. Ellen looked the part of a nineteenth-century white traveling North out of the South. The images helped to support their remarkable story while all the while reminding abolitionist readers about the interracial mixing occurring throughout the South and as direct result of slavery. Here they faced a white woman who successfully fooled other Southern whites that she was not a slave but a free white man. Ellen’s physical appearance was that of a white woman, or man depending upon how she chose to dress, and she acquired her whiteness through the evils of slavery. Barbara McCaskill notes that as an African American dressed as white man or woman Ellen not only ignores and confuses others perceptions of gender, but she also “scrambles the identities of haughty mistress and humble slave.”²⁵ Ellen’s image, and that of other former slaves with white or light skin, spoke to the miscegenation taking place in the South through the rape of slave women by white men. Without saying a word Ellen’s image confronts readers with a presumably white woman who was subject to all the evils of slavery and complicated and questioned racial classifications of the time.

²⁴ Craft, Craft, Blackett, *Running a Thousand Miles*, 2.

²⁵ Barbara McCaskill, "Yours Very Truly" (1994).

The images in slave narratives and their frontispieces were powerful tools in the fight against slavery. As the daguerreotype of Mary Botts demonstrated, visual images alone offered persuasive arguments against slavery. In 1854 Andre Adolphe Disderi invented the carte-de-visite, or CDV, and the smaller relatively inexpensive form of photography would help revolutionize photography and make the medium available to a greater number and class of people. CDVs were two-and-a-quarter by three-and-a-half inches and “capitalized on the new reproducibility of photography.” These images could be massed produce in a short time period and by the 1860s many Americans had images of their loved ones on CDVs either in photo



Figure 6: LOC Collection

albums in their homes or on their persons.²⁶ Abolitionists looked for opportunities to exploit this new technology to draw support for their cause.

One such chance came in 1863 when Major General N.P. Banks liberated five children and three adults from slavery when the Union captured New Orleans. These former slaves were sent North under the care of Colonel George Hanks to raise money for the education of freed slaves. The former slaves would make appearances across the North and were prominent features at abolitionist meetings. They were also dressed in fine clothes and photographed. The CDVs reproduced from these photos were then sold to raise money to support recently freed slaves and their education. The first stop for the recently freed slaves was New York City and crowds hastened to see the group, especially the children.²⁷ The five children, Isaac, Augusta, Rosa, Rebecca, and Charley interested audiences most on the group's first stop in New York. Isaac and Augusta had darker complexions than the other three children. Initially abolitionists staged some photographs of the children all together to sell to their audiences. They also used Isaac, the child with the darkest complex, to show the contrast in the skin color of the group. In a popular print they positioned Isaac beside Rebecca and demonstrated to audiences the difficulties of determining who was a slave and who was not. The picture also proved the intermingling of races occurring on Southern plantations. The children presented abolitionists an opportunity to reach Northerners on a deeper more sympathetic level through the use of young children.

²⁶ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: WEB Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 65-66.

²⁷ Mitchell, M.N., "Rosebloom and Pure White," Or So It Seemed. *American Quarterly*, 54, no. 3, (2002): 369-410. Mitchell's argument about the girl's receiving the most attention is based on the fact that more CDVs of Rebecca and Rosa survive than any of the other slaves.

While the events in New York made it clear the children of the group were of most interest to Northern audiences it would not be long before abolitionists noticed their onlookers paying close attention to the lighter, white complexioned children. By the time the group travelled to their next stop, Philadelphia, Isaac and Augusta were no longer part of the group. The three children, one boy and two girls, with white complexions, Rosa, Charley, and Rebecca delighted the audiences in New York so only these slave children went on tour. As the group traveled more and more photographs were arranged and more CDVs were reproduced and sold.²⁸ Figure 5 depicts one of the more provocative sittings for Rosa, Charley, and Rebecca. The three “white slaves” are cloaked in the American flag in a pictured entitled “Our protection.” The title conveys to audiences that these former slaves need the protection and support of Northern citizens. The flag as a symbol represents the free states of the North during the Civil War. The children are hence wrapped in freedom and it is the Union and its citizens who would protect them from slavery. The picture could easily represent Northern white children and the protection all children needed from the enemy lurking in the South. This interpretation is quickly quelled by the supplementary caption “Slave Children of New Orleans.” This addition left audiences and purchasers without any doubt that these children were the freed slaves from New Orleans they had read and heard about through both abolitionist and more mainstream newspapers of the North.

²⁸ Ibid, 370-371.



Figure 7: LOC Collection

Of the many photographs and CDVs produced featuring the freed slaves of New Orleans more pictured Rosa and Rebecca than any of the other “white slave” children. Charley was featured more than Isaac and Augusta, but more surviving prints exist of “white slave” girls than any others.²⁹ Charley posed for pictures by himself but was often shown posing with Rebecca and Rosa. Like the CDV of the three children and the flag the two photos on the left on Figure 6 show three presumably white children, but again the captions read “Slave Children of New Orleans.” In both of these CDVs the flag is absent and fancy clothing, shoes, and capes replaced the symbol of freedom and of the Union. The children are all dressed in appropriate attire for middle-class Northern children and without the caption it would be difficult for a viewer to tell the children were slaves. Charley’s hair is a lighter shade than Rebecca and Rosa and it is neatly presented without a single piece out of place. The two girls hair, while darker than Charley’s, is drawn back and carefully manicured in one photo while in the other the girls adorn hats which cover their hair. This was most likely due to the fact Rosa’s hair was slightly curly and Northerners, and Southerners for that matter, might associate curly hair with African heritage. As

²⁹ Ibid, 169-170.

the other images and descriptions of slaves show abolitionist authors and publishers presented their audiences women whose hair has “no perceptible curl.”³⁰ Hats were a piece of middle and upper class attire but in this case they may have served to hide the curls in Rosa and Rebecca’s locks. The two pictures of the lone female child, Rosa in one and an unnamed girl in the other, could easily be the pictures of someone’s white child if the images were not captioned. The girls again appear in fine dresses, shoes, capes, and hats. Both the front facing picture and the profile picture reveal no trace of the children’s African bloodline. These images could be those of any Northern white child and yet they were marked as slaves. Images of Rebecca and Rosa were immensely popular and abolitionists seized the opportunity to show audiences the products of adulterous liaisons between slave masters and their concubines. Abolitionists garnered support for their cause and displayed the evils of slavery through the innocence of children and childhood.

From the etchings and engravings found in slave narratives to the CDVs and photographs distributed throughout the North abolitionists presented their audiences with images of light-skinned slaves. In the eyes of antislavery activists these images proved slavery was an abomination. “White slaves” demonstrated to Northern audiences the evilness and sinfulness of the South’s peculiar institution. By all appearances, the persons in these images were white. They looked white and they dressed like a typical white person. The young children, and the girls in particular, captivated and confused Northern audience who found it difficult to believe the light-skinned children were a byproduct of slavery and slaves themselves. Slavery became a threat to their own personal freedom and that of their families. Images of whiteness used by

³⁰ Mattison, *Louisa Picquet*, 5.

antislavery activists demonstrated how tenuous racial identity was and also how difficult determining the race of another became.

Conclusion/Epilogue

This study has examined the abolitionist newspapers, slave narratives and testimonials, and imagery to demonstrate whiteness as a strategy in the abolition movement from 1835 – 1865. Abolitionists used “white slaves” and their stories to show Northern audiences slavery was an abomination. Light-skinned slaves were concrete proof of the licentious sins of Southern men. These slaves and former slaves were the offspring of interracial liaisons between slave and master, or another white occupying a position of power, and with the slave not having the right or freedom to object this encounter was rape. The inability for one party to object precludes any notion that these liaisons were mutually consensual. The subject of sex was taboo for the time and interracial sex was unmentionable, yet abolitionists breeched the subject by presenting audiences with everlasting images of “white slaves.” The stories of these men, women, and children captivated Northern audiences as they read or witnessed their testimonies and as they saw these former slaves either in person or in images. Looking at an individual who appeared to be white as they were confused many white Northerners. Some no doubt questioned the authenticity of the stories these former slaves and their sponsors presented. This doubt and confusion led many to fear for their own liberties and freedoms, for how could someone as white as themselves ever be thrust into slavery to suffer at the hands of a slave master or overseer? This doubt and questioning also complicated Northerners view of race and who was considered black or white. There was little doubt that these “white slaves” were considered black by Northern audiences, since slavery was associated with blackness, but nonetheless light-skinned slave made classifying people by the color of their skin much more difficult.

When combined, the evidence presented in these chapters creates a compelling argument that whiteness and light-skinned slaves were used strategically by abolitionists in the fight

against slavery. Any tint of whiteness or any sign of “European ancestry” in a slave showed a white had sinned and raped a slave woman. This in and of itself was enough to prove slavery should no longer exist, but when combined with the fear white Northerners felt for their own safety and freedom it was truly an impactful strategy. They also faced a new dilemma of trying to define what it meant to be white. Light-skinned slaves blurred the line between the racial divide and complicated Northerners views on race. The distinctions of white and black are easily seen until someone who appears white turns out to have been a slave and was therefore considered black. Race was not always determined by physical features either. As Ariela Gross points out in her examination of race in the American Justice system, race could also be determined by social factors including where a person went to church, who they were friends with and accepted by, the social functions they attended, and several other factors.¹ Skin tone was just part of the equation – one abolitionists seized upon to prove the ongoing generational rape of slave women by white Southerners.

Light-skinned slaves made Northerners wrestle with their ideas of race and racial classifications whether they wanted to or not. Northern audiences who saw, read, and heard the descriptions, images, and stories of the “white slaves” in this study had to adapt their neat racial classifications of black and white. This also muddled the notion that whiteness equaled freedom and blackness equaled slavery. When confronted with an individual who appeared white, passed as white, and could not be easily classified as white Northerners had to determine where these individuals fit into the racial hierarchy of the time. This was not always a simple or neat process and the struggles Northerners had with defining race had lasting ramifications for after the Civil

¹ Ariela Julie Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

War. Determinations made inside courtrooms and in society in general led to the creation of laws designed to separate, and keep separate, blacks and whites.² Jim Crow legislation came about in many Southern states after the Reconstruction efforts of the North either failed or simply ended. Laws passed to separate whites and blacks may have seemingly happened overnight but racial determination decisions made in courtrooms and society over generations effected this legislation. While I do not believe this was ever the intent of abolitionists, as their goal was the end of slavery, “white slaves” complicated views of race in the North and this had lasting ramifications for racial determination and racial identity as America moved forward after the Civil War. By and large white abolitionists were not interested in racial equality and certainly most would not have considered the “white slaves” they used to fight slavery as being white. These slaves did challenge any neat conceptions of racial classifications Americans in the North and South held at the time. When faced with a “white slave” they had to decide if the individual was white or black, and these decisions had lasting effects on the racial divide in America. These laws were originally designed to maintain a societal order based on race, depriving one group of rights and privileges – blacks – while reinforcing the position of power for others – whites. Even though many of these laws no longer apply they created a racial divide in America that has proven difficult to overcome.

Abolitionists used “white slaves” as a tool to help end slavery. These light-skinned slaves, who were often female, proved the ongoing generational rape present on Southern plantations. Using slaves and former slaves who looked like their Northern audiences was an effective strategy. This was a deliberate attempt to garner support for their cause by creating an emotional attachment to their audience. White Northerners could empathize with a “white slave”

² Ibid.

who looked similar to them and their loved ones. Abolitionists presented Northern audiences with a young light-skinned girl who could be their daughter, sister, cousin, etc. and in doing so demonstrated the evils of the South's "peculiar institution." This was an effective way to prove slavery was an abomination. Abolitionists' goal was to end slavery and "white slaves" were one of the tools that allowed them to accomplish their goal.