

Message to the Georgia Workshop in Early American History and Culture

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April 23, 2007

Dear Workshop,

First, allow me to apologize for the length of the chapter I am asking you to read. It is the longest chapter in my forthcoming book—*Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future After Slavery* (NYU Press, 2008)—and the chapter with the most parts to it. This also makes it the chapter most in need of many pairs of eyes. I am grateful for the opportunity to present it to the workshop, particularly at this juncture in the writing process, as I am now in the last stage of revisions.

The manuscript as a whole concerns the multiple, often competing visions of freedom after emancipation in the U.S. South. I use the black child as a lens through which to view these visions of the future, endeavoring to explain what certain groups believed slave emancipation would or should bring. Free people of color, white northern audiences, freedpeople, former slaveholders, white northern military officials and reformers, politicians north and south—all of these groups brought to slave emancipation radically different ideas about black freedom.

In chapter 1, under the increasing racial repressions in the decade before the Civil War, for instance, free people of color in Louisiana encouraged their children to look outside of the United States for countries that might offer them freedom and equality. In chapter 2, before and during the war, northern abolitionists enlisted white-looking slave children from Virginia and Louisiana (two of whom are pictured in the present chapter) to argue for the urgency of slavery's defeat. In the view of white northern missionaries in the wartime and postbellum South (the views that I have tried to render with the enclosed chapter, chapter 3) black children represented fertile fields for the cultivation of a "civilized" black working class. Here I also endeavor to put the "civilization" of the freedchild within the context of the larger, global effort to promote civilization among "uncivilized" groups. Freedpeople and planters, on the other hand (the focus of the 4th chapter) both saw black children as instrumental to black self-sufficiency. Disputes over apprenticeship placed the black child at the center of efforts to defend or deny the autonomy of former slaves. Finally, in the 5th chapter, as politicians and activists, black and white, legislated and agitated over public education, the black child became representative of the uncertain future of race relations in the South and the nation.

I would welcome your thoughts and ideas on how best to make the case for the reformers' view of the black child after emancipation. For instance, are there examples that seem unnecessary, or some that need further explanation? Are all of the images sufficiently explored, or should alternative readings be considered? Do you have further thoughts on the "before and after" construction itself and why it was useful to reformers? These are just a few ideas for discussion. I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

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III

Civilizing Missions

”As We Found Them” and “As They are Now”

The photographic portrait of a woman named Harriet Murray with two of her students, taken in South Carolina in 1866, was an argument pressed with light and shadow, a tableau to enact the good that would come from emancipation in the South: two former slave girls gathered round a book held by a white woman.¹ [Figure 1] The performance may not have been perfect. Puss, the larger of the two girls, stood stock-still, and stared artlessly into the camera, and Elsie, while playing her part more faithfully, appears locked in Miss Murray’s embrace, as if she might seize an opportunity to escape.² Indeed, this was a very different image from the antislavery portraits of two other former slave girls, Fanny Lawrence and Rosa Downs. [Figures 2 and 3] White-looking girls who had been slaves in Louisiana, Fanny and Rosa took up the role of the Victorian middle-class white child, adopting the off-camera gaze or sentimental pose they had been given by the photographer. Instead of the sentimental poses and velvet-trimmed frocks in

¹ As one writer observed about this particular photograph, Murray’s arm around the smallest child, Elsie, “compels her attention as much as it embraces.” Karen Sánchez-Eppler *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 7. One can find similar images of white women and black slaves in antislavery literature. See, for example, the frontpiece to an almanac printed in London in 1853 in honor of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, of Liberty reading from the Bible to a group of black children with chains around their feet. Reprinted in Clare Midley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), 147.

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which Rosa and Fanny had appeared, however, Elsie and Puss stood plainly before the viewer in boots without laces and hand-me-down dresses. The backdrop—the “setting” provided for Elsie and Puss —was not a Victorian parlor, but a cultivated field. And unlike the photographs of Rosa and Fanny, this picture did not ask white northern middle-class viewers to imagine Elsie and Puss as their own. These freedgirls were not destined for the parlors of the white northern middle class, except perhaps, by some people’s endeavors, as maids.

The disparities between Rosa’s portrait and the photograph of Elsie and Puss reflect, in part, the passage of time—from the height of the Civil War to the years immediately following slavery’s defeat. Onto the bodies of white-looking slave girls, abolitionists had hoped that white northerners could project their hatred and fear of slavery, even their fascination with it. After emancipation, though, missionaries sought to quiet anxieties about the responses of millions of black freedpeople to freedom (that they would migrate to the North, or kill their former masters, or refuse to work, letting cotton and sugarcane rot in the fields³) with images of black freedgirls in a rural landscape under the civilizing influence of a white female teacher. Although the picture of a white-looking slave girl may have fueled northern indignation towards the South during the war, Rosa’s image would not have been a welcome one once slavery (and the caption “slave child”) no longer kept her from “passing” as the “white” child she appeared to be. Rather, what most white northerners wanted to imagine about the South

³ The Freedmen’s Bureau tried to counter these and other rumors (i.e. “[the freedpeople] are dying off,” “they are killing their children”) with published reports from military officials in the field. *Letters from the South, relating to the condition of freedmen, addressed to Major General O.O. Howard, commissioner Bureau R., F., and A.L. by J.W. Alford, gen. sup’t education, Bureau R., F., & A.L.* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1870) Library of Congress, “From Slavery to Freedom: The African American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909.”

after emancipation was just what they saw in the picture of Elsie and Puss with their teacher: dutiful black children (so “black” that they could not pass for “white”) ready to receive the order and discipline of a victorious northern white “civilization.”

Like Rosa’s portrait, the portrait of Harriet Murray with Elsie and Puss was staged with care—the white woman in broad skirts with her young black charges, the painted backdrop and the open book. And as with Rosa’s portrait, in the staging of the photograph lay the grammar of its argument—the choice, for instance, to stress the freed girls’ need for “civilization” (Murray’s arm training Elsie towards the book) rather than their innocence or vulnerability (Rosa Down’s doleful gaze). And while both pictures pled the necessity of emancipation, they posed separate questions about the future.

Rosa’s fair skin may have broached emancipation’s consequences, but the most immediate message her face conveyed was “what if slavery continues?” The portrait of Elsie and Puss, though, raised and answered a new question, a question about slavery’s aftermath. In the words of New England antislavery reformer Samuel Gridley Howe in 1864, “what shall be done with the negroes?”⁴

Harriet Murray was one of a small but determined group of northerners seeking to answer to Howe’s question. She was among those working for a collection of freedmen’s aid societies at Port Royal and the Sea Islands of South Carolina after the region’s occupation by Union troops in 1862.⁵ The coast of South Carolina, like the southern part

⁴ S.G. Howe, *Report to the Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 1864, The Refugees from Slavery in Canada West* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1864), iii. *The New York Times*, for instance, often ran columns addressing this theme, such as, “The Freedmen of the South—What Shall be Done with Them?” *NYT* March 6, 1862, p. 3, and “The Future of the Southern Negro” *NYT* March 23, 1862, p. 4.

⁵ Murray had been in South Carolina since at least 1864. Rupert Sargent Holland, ed. *Letters and Diary of Laura Towne Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina 1862-1884* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1912]), 136. The first boatload of plantation superintendents and teachers to reach Port Royal numbered just forty-one men and twelve women, many of whom lasted but briefly in the heat and mosquitoes before returning home. The freedpopulation in the region, on the other hand, numbered some

of Louisiana, fell under Union control early in the war. The “Port Royal Experiment,” endorsed by President Lincoln and funded and arranged through freedmen’s aid societies from New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, was to be a model post-slavery plantation society dedicated to a peaceful, orderly, and prosperous transition from slavery to freedom. The Port Royal Relief Committee declared in 1862 that they would teach freedpeople “the rudimentary arts of civilized life.”⁶ Those assigned to posts as plantation superintendents would organize and oversee the labor of former slaves while teachers addressed the educational needs of the islands’ freedpeople. After a year’s effort, nearly two thousand students, most between eight and twelve years old, were under instruction on Sea Island, the largest of the South Carolina islands.⁷ Much was at stake, however, since the supporters of the “Port Royal Experiment” were determined that theirs be the example for the nation. As one Port Royal advocate wrote in 1862, “the success of a productive colony there would serve as a womb for the emancipation at large.”⁸

While education was central to the campaign at Port Royal (as it was the governing theme in the portrait of Harriet Murray, Elsie, and Puss) it was education in the

8,000. Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 4-5; Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville, eds. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867 Series I, Vol. III, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 89.

⁶ *Circular of the Port Royal Relief Committee, Signed March 17, 1862* (Philadelphia: Port Royal Relief Committee, 1862). Cited in Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, p. 4.

⁷ Charles Nordhoff, *The Freedmen of South Carolina: Some Account of Their Appearance, Character, Condition, and Peculiar Customs* (New York: Charles T. Evans, 1863), 4; Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, 7. James M. MacPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 164. On the transition from slavery to freedom in the South Carolina lowcountry, see Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸ Adam Gurowski, *Diary, vol. I: March 4, 1861 to November 12, 1862* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1862), 47; quoted in Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1964), 31.

service of creating a “civilized” black working class in the South. With the help of Miss Murray, the portrait of Elsie and Puss suggested, the girls would learn their letters. Yet Murray’s presence—her motherly embrace, her finger directing Elsie to the book—said something, too, about the civilizing northern presence in the post-slavery South. Murray played the part of the white, middle-class female who often mediated, indeed domesticated, the boundaries between “civilization” and the “uncivilized” in the nineteenth century, whether through missionary work, colonization, or in allegorical illustrations and advertisements.⁹ Her presence suggested to northern viewers that while freedchildren learned to read and write, they would also learn the value of discipline and industry—the very fundamentals of Anglo-Saxon civilization. (Former slaves like Elsie and Puss, of course, already knew something about hard work.¹⁰)

Northern benevolent and missionary societies in the South during and just after the Civil War had begun to answer Samuel Howe’s question with a parable. It was a story of discovery, transformation, and civilization told in print and in photographs, a story that began with ragged slaves and ended with neat, disciplined freedchildren. The ragged child was a figure already present in antebellum urban reform efforts in the United States and Britain. But the ragged slave child, redeemed, reflected a new concern with the civilization of non-white peoples that would only grow throughout the nineteenth century, as Europe (particularly in Africa) and the United States (in the western territories, Latin American, and the Pacific) pressed to expand their empires. Told in the

⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 24, 44-45; Sanchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty*, intro and chap. 1.

¹⁰ Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) chap. 2; Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), chap. 5; Gwyn Campbell, “Children and Slavery in the New World: A Review,” *Slavery and Abolition* v. 27 n. 2 (August 2006): 264-266.

form of “before and after” narratives—the ragged slave child alongside the tidy freedchild—these appeals were akin to those of nineteenth-century advertisers and even medical doctors. Such stories evoked both present and future in the newly free South—readers and viewers could see for themselves, ostensibly, both what *was* happening and what *would* happen. As an early illustration of civilization as a spectacle to be consumed, this narrative allowed viewers and readers to witness the event of the ragged child’s reform. To a large extent, then, the selling of emancipation as a civilizing mission, to a wary northern public—the proffered answer to Howe’s question—took the form of an educable, employable black freedchild. With freedchildren, missionary and benevolent societies executed a process, on paper, through lens and light and shadow, through which a former slave population became scrubbed of history, relatives, and the indelible marks of slavery. Here, they said, was a generation capable of rescue, receptive to reform. Here was the tidy, disciplined future of freed black labor in the South.

Renderings of the freedchild’s rapid advance under the supervision of white northern reformers would prove faint match for the social realities of the postbellum South: the opposing demands of freedpeople and former slaveholders, the violence, the politics, and the poverty. The images created in the name of aid and benevolence were, in the end, both grand, even global visions of civilization’s triumph and cardboard fantasies acted out in front of a painted landscape in a photographer’s studio. Still, these appeals drew upon shared ideals—a familiar system of symbols and arguments—in order to persuade their audience. And in that sense, perhaps they were successful. These clever acts of persuasion aimed at the northern public, may have convinced some reticent

souls that black children deserved the aid of the North, and that emancipation would benefit the nation as a whole.¹¹

In some cases, such arguments may have been too convincing. The marketing of the black child as the future of free black labor went beyond metaphor when zealous northern reformers in the South tried to “place out” individual freedchildren and their services to the homes of northern employers. Placing out poor orphans to work in households was an accepted alternative to institutions in the North by the 1860s. But most freedpeople did not see the advantage of sending away their children, or nieces and nephews, or grandchildren, to help in someone else’s household. Indeed, the irony of sending former slave children hundreds of miles away to fill the needs of northern employers for dishwashers and house servants—in the aftermath of a system of slavery that had divided black families for generations and a sectional conflict that had ended the interstate trade in human beings—seems to have escaped their sponsors almost entirely.

To recognize the portrait of Elsie and Puss as a response to Howe’s question about the fate of “the negroes” we must recall, first, the urgency with which abolitionists had tried to predict what would happen after emancipation. Abolitionists hoped to persuade Congress and the public that emancipation would not tip off a bloody, ex-slave rebellion by promoting the idea that enslaved people were, by nature, peaceful and industrious. Many prominent abolitionists, such as Senator Charles Sumner of

¹¹ As one of the most thoughtful students of abolitionism, Ronald Walters, once suggested, “for reform to have a constituency, it must be intelligible, and it can only be if it draws upon conventional symbols and articulates acceptable themes. Anything else would be gibberish.” In turn, Walters argued the usefulness of abolitionist propaganda for the cultural historian: “the power of antislavery propaganda was in its ability to *explain* (sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly) and explanation is impossible unless reformer and audience operate with a shared structure of assumptions.” Ronald G. Walters, “The Boundaries of Abolitionism,” in Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds. *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 21-22.

Massachusetts, romanticized the “African” race, insisting that “this whole objection [to immediate emancipation] proceeds on a mistaken idea of the African slave...The African is not cruel, vindictive, or harsh, but gentle, forgiving, and kind.”¹² Others sought to offer *proof* of the industriousness of former slaves by turning to earlier emancipations in the West Indies in order to assuage concerns about black freedom in the South. Perhaps the most well known treatise in this vein was a pamphlet by Lydia Maria Child entitled *The Right Way the Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies and Elsewhere* (1860). Child gathered testimonies from officials and observers in Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica and smaller islands in the British West Indies to argue for immediate emancipation (rather than the gradual emancipation that some proposed) for slaves in the United States.¹³

The picture Child rendered of the British West Indies after slavery, in turn, was one of rapid improvement meant to foreshadow conditions in the South after full-scale emancipation, and the responses of freedpeople in the United States to freedom. For instance, she quoted a Moravian missionary’s account of former slaves’ response on the day of emancipation: “Planters and missionaries, in every part of the island, told us there was not a single dance, by night or day; not every so much as a fiddle played. There

¹² Sumner quoted in George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press), 109. For more examples of this “romantic racialism” see chap. 4 in Frederickson *The Black Image*.

¹³ Child, *The Right Way, The Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies, and Elsewhere* (New York, 1860), chap. 5. Specifically, Child dismissed the idea of a gradual emancipation accomplished through a system of apprenticeship. Apprenticeship, in its Caribbean incarnation, was a system intended to smooth the transition to free labor, in effect “training” former slaves for freedom. It required them to pay for their freedom with continued labor on the plantation. This system had been tried in Jamaica and would surface later in Cuba [ck this], but it was viewed by many abolitionists as a failure because it kept former slaves in an ameliorated state of bondage, still subject to abuse by overseers and planters and unable to “advance” as rapidly as former slaves under immediate emancipation. Child’s promotion of immediate emancipation highlighted the activities of fully freed populations in the Caribbean. See Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

were no drunken carousals, no riotous assemblies. The emancipated were as far from dissipation and debauchery as they were from violence and carnage. Gratitude was the absorbing emotion. From the hill-tops and the valleys, the cry of a disenthralled people went upward, like the sound of many waters: ‘Glory to God! Glory to God!’¹⁴ The end of slavery in the American South, Child suggested, could be just as peaceful. Instead of retaliating against their former masters with violence, they would praise God for their release.

Armed with examples from the West Indies, Child also predicted the compliance of freedpeople to northern ideals of order and “safety” and the least amount of disruption to the plantation system of production. Freedpeople would remain on the plantation and happily work for a wage. Drawing from the account of an estate manager in Antigua, Child reported that “the love of home was such a passion with negroes, that nothing but bad treatment could force them way.”¹⁵ A visitor to Dominica encountered freedpeople “working cheerfully, and cheaply to their employers, as compared with slavery.” Having visited all of the islands in the British West Indies in 1840, the same man noted: “the change for the better, in the dress, demeanor, and welfare of the people, is prodigious.” And according to an observer on Montserrat, “schools were springing up in all parts of the island. Marriages were occurring every week. The planters now encouraged missionaries to labor among their people, and were ready to give land for chapels, which

¹⁴ Child, *The Right Way, the Safe Way*, 13-14. Library of Congress, “From Slavery to Freedom: The African American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909.” On master-slave relations in Antigua before emancipation see David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ Child, *The Right Way, the Safe Way*, 19. Throughout the Caribbean, freedpeople often resisted the plantation mode of production after emancipation and sought to establish their own “peasant communities,” rather than to work for their former owners. Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), chaps. 5-9 and Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, chap. 5.

were fast multiplying.”¹⁶ In Jamaica, once full emancipation had replaced a system of apprenticeship, all the signs of “civilization” appeared. The “thatched hovels, with mud walls, thrown together without any order or arrangement” vanished from the landscape. Instead, freedpeople living in white washed houses “now have looking-glasses, chairs, and side-boards decorated with pretty articles of glass and crockery. Each dwelling has its little plot of vegetables, generally neatly kept, and many of them have flower-gardens in front, glowing with all the bright hues of the tropics.”¹⁷ Emancipation in the British colonies, then, swiftly brought to the plantation regions that had once been a miserable haven for slavery, all the necessities of “civilization”: domesticity, orderly Christianity, and conspicuous consumption. Child predicted this same constellation of behavior, in short order, for freedpeople in the South.

Early witnesses to the Port Royal experiment had similar aspirations. In 1863, journalist Charles Nordhoff published the story of his visit to Port Royal, *The Freedmen of South-Carolina: Some Account of their Appearance, Character, Condition, and Peculiar Customs*. Nordhoff was particularly interested in the opportunity for creating consumer desires among former slaves. He predicted that the former slave men enlisted in the Union army “will bring back with them improved ideas and new wants, and will work a change both in dress and furniture.” Nordhoff’s hope was that such new habits of taste would soon be readily apparent in the simple cottages of freedpeople. “I noticed that on some walls were hung pictures from the illustrated journals; and I have no doubt cheap colored prints would find a ready sale.” Behind the Union troops, another kind of army would advance the cause of progress in the South: “The day which sees the

¹⁶ Child, *The Right Way, the Safe Way*, 36.

¹⁷ Child, *The Right Way, the Safe Way*, 80.

introduction on these islands of the itinerant Yankee peddler will be an important one. If he is only moderately honest, and quick-witted, he will be a valuable helper in advancing civilization here.”¹⁸ Edward Philbrick, who had worked as a plantation superintendent near Port Royal, with the ambition to prove that free labor was more profitable than slave, had just that idea. He opened a store there and reported that freedpeople quickly bought up his dry goods, hardware, and other provisions. “It may readily be seen that a considerable demand may arise for the articles above-named and others of kindred nature, when a population of some millions shall be in a position to apply their earnings to the supply of their rapidly increasing wants. Should not the manufacturing interests of the North be awake to this?”¹⁹

Talk of freedpeople’s “increasing wants,” of printed pictures tacked to bare walls, was of a piece with the educational efforts of northern benevolent societies in the South. Together they told a story of advancing civilization and expanding markets.²⁰ Edward Pierce, one of the leaders of the Port Royal experiment, engaged schoolchildren there in a “dialogue” in 1863 that reflected this relationship between education, self-reliance, a Protestant work ethic (directed at the crop that most concerned northern markets after the Civil War, cotton), and consumerism.

¹⁸ Charles Nordhoff, *The Freedmen of South Carolina: Some Account of Their Appearance, Character, Condition, and Peculiar Customs* (New York: Charles T. Evans, 1863), 18.

¹⁹ Edward Philbrick, Letter to the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 20 July 1863. Quoted in Elizabeth Ware Pearson, ed. *Letters from Port Royal 1862-1868* (New York: Arno Press, 1969 [Originally published as *Letters from Port Royal Written at the Time of the Civil War* (Boston: W.B. Clarke Company, 1906)], 220. Thomas C. Holt, “‘An Empire of the Mind’: The language of liberalism, encouraging “industry” and “thrift,” Thomas Holt has noted, was common to both British and U.S. emancipation. Thomas C. Holt, “‘An Empire over the Mind’: Emancipation, Race, and Ideology in the British West Indies and the American South,” in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 283-313.

²⁰ Similar arguments would surface again concerning Native Americans in the 1880s. See David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 23.

“Children, what are you going to do when you grow up?”
 “Going to work, Sir.”
 “On what?”
 “Cotton and corn, Sir.”
 “What are you going to do with the corn?”
 “What are you going to do with the cotton?”
 “Sell it.”
 “What are you going to do with the money you get for it?”
 One boy answered in advance of the rest,—
 “Put it in my pocket, Sir.”
 “That won’t do. What’s better than that?”
 “Buy clothes, Sir.”
 “What else will you buy?”
 “Shoes, Sir.”....²¹

The children also promised to send *their* children to church and school, when the time came, and promised to pay for the parson and the teacher themselves, rather than relying on the government. In conclusion, Pierce wrote: “One who listens to such answers can hardly think that there is any natural incapacity in these children to acquire with maturity of years the ideas and habits of good citizens.”²² These “ideas” and “habits” would become a point of dispute between freed laborers and plantation owners in postbellum South Carolina, as elsewhere in the South after slavery. Nonetheless, Pierce and other reformers clearly had high hopes for the creation of a freed black working class that participated (and enriched) the nation’s markets.²³

Yet as Child’s treatise suggests, the ambitions of those concerned with the fate of freedpeople were in many ways larger than the national crisis they struggled to address. Abolitionists, reformers, and missionaries alike viewed their work as part of the transatlantic movement bringing “civilization” to the “uncivilized” peoples of the world.

²¹ Edward L. Pierce, “The Freedmen at Port Royal,” *The Atlantic Monthly* v. 12 (September 1863), 306-307.

²² Pierce, “The Freedmen at Port Royal,” 307.

²³ On postbellum labor struggles in South Carolina see Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

For missionaries, in particular, the inclusion of the black population of the South in this larger civilizing movement had begun before the Civil War. Writing in 1858, in the “Children’s Corner” of the *American Missionary* magazine, (the official organ of the American Missionary Association) the editors told young readers of the shared desires of children abroad and at home to become Christian: “Ten thousand little children, from the shores of Africa, India, and China, are turning to you, and stretching out their little hands, earnestly pleading for the Gospel.” And there were children, in the United States, with the same desires. “From the poor slave in our own land, groaning under the lash of a cruel master comes the same earnest plea, ‘Oh! Send us the Gospel.’”²⁴ The *American Missionary* often ran stories about the daily lives of African children at their mission in West Africa alongside reports from missionary teachers teaching freedpeople in the South.²⁵

This global view of reform, in turn, shaped abolitionists’ and missionaries’ consideration of black freedom and black people’s prospects for civilization. Two months after the start of the Civil War, the *American Missionary* ran an excerpt from the writings of the Rev. J. Leighton Wilson, a missionary working in Africa, under the heading “Capacity of the Negro for Improvement”—a pointed lesson for readers concerned with the prospect of a newly freed “Negro” population in the United States. The Rev. Wilson explained: “Looking at the African race, as we have done in their native country, we have seen no obstacle to their elevation which would not apply equally to all other uncultivated races of men.” Wilson compared Africans with South

²⁴ “Children’s Department,” *American Missionary* v. 2 (November 1858): 285.

²⁵ See, for instance, “Children’s Department,” Letter from Mount Tappan, April 23, 1862. *American Missionary* v. 6 (August 1862): 188-189; “Letter from Mr. Fee” and “Children’s Department,” *American Missionary* v. 3 (November 1859): 260-263.

Sea Islanders, “the Indian tribes of our own country” and “even with the great masses of ignorant poor who throng all the great cities of the civilized world.” In sum, they (Africans, Negroes) “do not appear to any disadvantage whatever.”²⁶ The soon-to-be emancipated slave population of the South, as the headline suggests, would be included in the worldwide civilizing campaign. As Edward Pierce, former Union officer and chief promoter of the experiment at Port Royal, advised a leading pastor in Boston the next year: “You must see that the heathen to whom we owe a special duty...are nearer to us than the Ganges.”²⁷

The particular aims and expectations of those bringing “civilization” to freedpeople in the South had their roots in the early nineteenth century, when a notion of “civilization” developed, according to anthropologist George Stocking, “in the shadow of other broad forces of historical change,” namely the Industrial Revolution, evangelical Christian revivalism, and radical protest in France. All of these developments contributed to a proactive nineteenth-century version of “civilization” that encompassed not just evangelical Christianity and the celebration of European (and Anglo-American) superiority, but also the desire to promote human progress generally, by working directly with the “uncivilized” peoples of the world.²⁸ When a collection of leading abolitionists and missionaries founded the National Freedmen’s Relief Association in New York in

²⁶ “Capacity of the Negro for Improvement,” *American Missionary* v. VI, June 1861, p. 129.

²⁷ Letter published in the *Boston Transcript*, Jan 27, 1862. Quoted in McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 160.

²⁸ George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 10-11. See also David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 12-13. From here, I will use the terms “civilization,” “uncivilized,” and “civilizing,” without quotation marks, as nineteenth-century reformers would have understood them.

1862 to immediately address the situation at Port Royal, they did so in the name of “civilization and Christianity.”²⁹

Women played a particularly important role in the spread of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Female missionaries and teachers, in particular, often served as intermediaries in the civilizing process.³⁰ From the earliest phase of European exploration, female figures served in symbolic ways to mark the “threshold” between European civilization and the New World.³¹ But by the first half of the nineteenth century, in the context of massive evangelical revivals that attracted a largely female following, women had begun to engage directly in civilizing activities, from carefully plotted “rescues” in efforts to end prostitution in the streets of New York to attending abolitionist meetings and supporting a flourishing industry in antislavery literature. As missionary efforts gathered speed in the second half of the nineteenth century, British and American women traveled widely in support of their cause, from Africa and India to the Pacific Islands and the American West.³² At the close of the Civil War, the work of northern evangelical women in the South became a further extension of this work. Yet by the 1860s, ideas about the civilizing effects of an idealized middle-class domesticity

²⁹ *National Freedmen’s Relief Association Organized in the City of New York on 22nd February 1862* (New York: National Freedmen’s Relief Association, 1862); Quoted in Morris, *Reading, ‘Riting, and Reconstruction*, 4.

³⁰ Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in 19th-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 95-97; Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West 1874-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) *passim*.

³¹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 24.

³² Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 197 and chaps. 9-10; Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Mary Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: “Civilizing” the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, Rev. Sub. Ed., 1998); Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: the Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990);

had become as important to reform efforts as the spread of Protestantism. This is evident in Lydia Maria Child's treatise, as well as the writings of other Protestant reformers. Even missionary Austa French, who traveled early to Port Royal, explained her calling there, in one passage of her memoir, not in terms of Christianity, but in terms of domestic order: "Still some would have us sit in northern parlors, with hands folded, to entertain some caller, or even slaveholder," while freedwomen continued to raise children in squalid cabins, without the fundamentals of "domestic knowledge."³³

The experiment at Port Royal, which drew both Austa French and Harriet Murray out of their parlors, was the first of many such efforts in the South during and after the Civil War. Northern benevolent societies had begun sending teachers south as early as 1861, to Fortress Monroe in Virginia and 1862 to the island of Port Royal on the South Carolina coast.³⁴ Some of them represented missionary societies, the largest of them being the American Missionary Association (AMA), an organization that prior to the Civil War had been working among freed populations in Jamaica, Canada, the northern United States, as well as with the native inhabitants of West Africa.³⁵ Other northerners, most though not all of whom came from an evangelical, abolitionist tradition, represented organizations formed expressly for the purpose of freedpeople's aid: among them the National Freedmen's Relief Association, the Boston Educational Commission, the American Freedmen's Aid Commission, and the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association, the latter formed with the help of the Quakers. Other Quaker societies also

³³ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 48.

³⁴ Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), chap. 1.

³⁵ Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 20. Also on the AMA see Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Clifton Herman Johnson, "The American Missionary Association, 1841-1861: A Study of Christian Abolitionism," Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina, 1958.

developed, including the Friends Association of Philadelphia and its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freedmen. The Friends also took in orphaned freedchildren at their Home for Colored Orphans in Philadelphia.³⁶

Despite the many regional and denominational affiliations of reformers and missionaries, the group as a whole was mostly white and middle-class. Some African-American missionaries arrived from the northern states, but the majority of those sent from groups like the AMA were white. At the peak of this activity, there were some 3500 teachers and missionaries educating freedpeople in the former Confederacy. While a handful of these teachers were white southerners and one-third of them, by 1867, were African American, the majority of teachers in freedpeople's schools were single, white, northern women: the "Yankee schoolmarm" so derided by hostile southern sympathizers (some historians among them) well into the twentieth century.³⁷ By contrast, black scholar and activist W.E.B. DuBois, writing in 1903, celebrated northern teachers as heroes, whom came to teach the black *and* white of the South: "Behind the mists of ruin and rapine waved the calico dresses of women who dared, and after the hoarse mouthings of the field guns rang the rhythm of the alphabet."³⁸ Northern women's activism on

³⁶ Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, 2-5, 12-14; *The Thirtieth Annual Report of the Association for the Care of Colored Orphans* (Philadelphia: William K. Bellows, 1866), 5-7.

³⁷ According to Clara DeBoer, 467 black "workers" worked for the AMA, 174 of them women. But not all black male workers were teachers. See Clara DeBoer, "The Role of Afro-Americans in the Work of the American Missionary Association," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1973), 492, and Judith Weisenfeld, "'Who is Sufficient for These Things?' Sara G. Stanley and the American Missionary Association, 1864-1868," *Church History* v. 60 no. 4 (December 1991), 493-507. On northern missionaries in the South see Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1941); Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1964); Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Margaret Washington Creel, *'A Peculiar People': Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).

³⁸ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Bantam Books, 1989[1903]),19.

behalf of freedpeople, in fact, extended well beyond the schoolroom—they engaged in debates on labor reform, bought and sold land for cultivation by freedpeople, and lobbied the federal government.³⁹ But in the marketing of the freedchild as the future of the black population in the South, the figure that most often appeared was the white, female teacher.

Benevolent societies sponsoring teachers and schools were warmly received by the freed population in the South. Most southern states before the war prohibited the education of blacks, and in 1860, over 90 percent of the South's adult black population was illiterate.⁴⁰ In turn, northern visitors throughout the South after the Civil War were impressed by freedpeople's desire for education. One northern teacher, for instance, testified to the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission that: "without exception I never saw such greedy people for study. Then there is the great ambition to be able to read the Bible for themselves. I have not seen an indifferent child or an indolent one—dull ones, I have seen or course; they are all zealous." Another observer described seeing laundresses in Atlanta working at their washing while studying schoolbooks they had hung from the backyard fence. Some freedpeople, in fact, insisted that schooling for their children be provided as part of labor contracts.⁴¹ When queried about their demand for

³⁹ See Carol Faulkner's long overdue reexamination of women's work in this regard. Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 2 and *passim*.

⁴⁰ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 97.

⁴¹ Testimony of Miss Lucy Chase to the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, Portsmouth, Virginia, 10 May 1863. Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville, eds. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867 Series I, Vol. III, The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 151; Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War* (New York, Arno Press, 1969[1866]) p. 338. Cited in Tera Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 42; William Shields to William N. Mercer, September 21, November 28, December 1, 12, 1866, William N. Mercer Papers, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, cited in Foner, *Reconstruction*, 140. See also, James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks*

schooling for their children, freedpeople explained it in practical terms. When testifying before the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission in South Carolina in 1863, for instance, freedman Harry McMillan was asked: "Did your masters ever see you learning to read?" to which he responded: "No, sir; you could not let your masters see you read; but now the colored people are fond of sending their children to school." When asked why this was, McMillan replied: "Because the children in after years will be able to tell us ignorant ones how to do for ourselves." McMillan even had a vision for a time when freedpeople would govern themselves entirely, without the help of whites. "Probably with the children that are coming up now white men will not be needed," he said. Learning to read and write, and training to be doctors, ministers, and lawyers, the young people would free their race from dependence on whites. "After five years," McMillan said, "they will take care of themselves; this [older] generation cannot do it."⁴²

Government-sponsored schools for freedpeople after the war typically were staffed by teachers from benevolent societies and governed by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, or "Freedmen's Bureau," a federal agency established in 1865, which was also charged with the management of abandoned lands, the facilitation of labor contracts, and overall supervision of the transition from slavery to free labor in the South.⁴³ The societies' numbers and resources, however, would never be

in the South, 1860-1935 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) and Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.)

⁴² Testimony of Harry McMillan (colored), to the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission, June 1863, Beaufort, S.C., in Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Julie Saville, eds. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867* Series I, Vol. III, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 250-252.

⁴³ Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), xi and 43; On the Freedmen's Bureau see Foner,

sufficient to meet the demands of the nearly four million freedpeople—adults and children—they hoped to educate. They could not even reach all of the nearly two-and-a-quarter million freedchildren in the South after emancipation.⁴⁴ In the state of Georgia, for instance, only five percent of freedpeople attended school in any one year.⁴⁵ In 1870, the superintendent of education for the Freedmen’s Bureau bemoaned the inability to provide instruction for most freedpeople. “The mass of these freedmen are, after all, still ignorant. Nearly a million and a half of their children have never as yet been under any instruction.”⁴⁶ Without sufficient government and charitable support, most often, freedpeople had to rely on their own meager resources to fund schools and teachers.⁴⁷

But in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, benevolent societies and representatives of the Freedmen’s Bureau had great expectations for their campaign to educate former slaves. Education for freedpeople, like education for northern children, was fundamentally about the instruction of discipline and industry. Indeed, the education of the freed population was a necessity akin to the education of all working classes. As an editor of the *American Missionary* wrote, “it is the duty of every government to provide against crime, pauperism, and wretchedness, by providing against ignorance.”⁴⁸

The textbooks for freedpeople’s schools, given the financial straits of benevolent

Reconstruction, 142-170 and Paul A. Cimbala, and Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, eds., *The Freedmen’s Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999).

⁴⁴ According to the census of 1860, there were 2,213,209 enslaved people under the age of twenty. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial times to 1970*, Bicentennial ed., Part I (Washington: U.S. Dept of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975), 18.

<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/CT1970p2-01.pdf>.

⁴⁵ “A New Sanitary Commission,” *Harper’s Weekly*, v. 10 (1866): 659; Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 3, 229.

⁴⁶ John Watson Alvord, *Tenth Semi-Annual Report on Schools for Freedmen*, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, (Washington: 1870), 3. Robert C. Morris, *Reading, ‘Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), chap. 7.

⁴⁷ See Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ *American Missionary* 9 (August 1865): 180.

societies, were more often than not used textbooks from northern schools. While Lydia Maria Child's *Freedman's Book* (1865) instructed freedpeople about such important figures as Toussaint L'Overture, Phyllis Wheatley, and William Lloyd Garrison, its primary message was still one of self-reliance, uplift, and hard work—betraying the idea that reformers feared freedpeople, without civilizing instruction, would not work for themselves.⁴⁹ As the western secretary of the AMA declared in 1866—the year Elsie and Puss stood in the portrait studio—the teachers and missionaries descending on the South the greatest “Army of Civilization” the nation had ever mustered.⁵⁰ The portrait of Harriet Murray, Elsie, and Puss, as a piece of propaganda, was at once a reenactment of the “army’s” success and a projection of the future for freedpeople in the South, carefully arranged around a theme that nineteenth-century viewers readily understood: the ragged child, redeemed.

The first organized efforts directed at the nineteenth century’s growing numbers of so-called “ragged children” began with the Ragged School movement in 1840s London, born of concern for the working-class children who filled the industrial city’s streets. Founded largely by evangelical groups, Ragged Schools recruited street children, often giving them food and shelter, and providing free instruction. By the 1850s, however, other reformers in the U.S. and Britain, less focused on religious conversion and more concerned with rescue and reform, began to introduce their own strategies to address the problem of the ragged child. Guided by their conviction that “goodness could

⁴⁹ Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, 186; Lydia Maria Child, *The Freedmen's Book* (New York: Arno Press, 1968 [1865]).

⁵⁰ Jacob R. Shipherd to Lyman Abbott, 24 February 1866, Jacob R. Shipherd Letterbook, 13 February 1866-14 June 1866, Cornell University Library. Quoted in Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 53.

be concealed beneath rags,” these new efforts sentimentalized the street child. At mid-century, reformers had yet to fully engage the system of industrialism that encouraged child labor and instead placed emphasis on the inadequacies of the working-class family to raise poor children.⁵¹ Such children, they argued, needed to be rescued by society and educated in the ways of civilization and honest labor.

Ragged children, as reformers rendered them, were either without parents or living with parents whose alcoholism and “slovenly” habits forfeited their ability to care for their children. In the United States, for instance, although many of the children who became the focus of reform efforts were not orphans, their families sent them to missionary institutions because they could not care for them themselves.⁵² It was in the interest of such “street orphans” that Charles Loring Brace founded the Children’s Aid Society in 1853 in New York City. The CAS sent “home visitors” into the dwellings of poor families to monitor the conditions of the “tenement classes,” a group that in the view of reformers had, by the 1850s, become a dire threat to the social order. The growth of street trade in cities like New York drew children into public commerce in ever larger numbers, assisting peddlers, selling newspapers, and running errands. Brace published accounts of the CAS’s investigations, describing the “wild ragged little girls who were flitting about” in the streets, “seeking chances of stealing” and running afoul of police, unsupervised by their parents.⁵³

In fact, nineteenth-century missionaries and reformers working in Europe, Africa, and the United States generally viewed parents and other relatives as a hindrance to the

⁵¹ Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, 134-142.

⁵² Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 157-158.

⁵³ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 194-197; 204-5.

civilizing of ragged children. In his first *Plea for Ragged Schools*, Scottish missionary Thomas Guthrie wrote that “Parents are begetting and breeding up children in their own image; while ignorance, and vice, and crime are shooting ahead even of the increase in population.”⁵⁴ While Guthrie did not propose to remove children from their homes, his plan for schooling would keep them well away from their parents, in school from dawn until after supper. In Africa, too, missionaries took up the strategy of rescue, and strove to remove children from the immediate influence of their “heathen” parents. The readers of the “Children’s Corner” of the *American Missionary* in 1862 learned that African “mission children” were “boys and girls whom the missionaries have taken—with the consent of their fathers and mothers—to live with them in the mission till they grow to maturity,” and learning to sew and “work on the farm.” They believed that by removing the children from the influences of their parents and relatives, they could create a more “industrious” African population.⁵⁵ African children who learned “American ways” would be useful in teaching civilization to their people. But this task was made difficult because “temptations are all about them. Their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and all their relatives and friends, except those in the mission, do differently from what missionaries require them to do. They cook, eat, dress, and work in a different way from what the children are taught to do.... We teach them to be industrious, but as their country people spend much time in idleness, is it strange that labor at times seems a burden and occasions discontent.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Thomas Guthrie, *Seed-time and Harvest of Ragged Schools; or, A third plea with new editions of the first & second pleas*. (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1860) PAGE.

⁵⁵ “Children’s Department,” Letter from Mount Tappan, April 23, 1862. *American Missionary* v. 6 (August 1862): 188-189.

⁵⁶ “Children’s Department,” Letter from Mount Tappan, April 23, 1862. *American Missionary* v. 6 (August 1862): 188-189.

In the United States, there were two significant efforts in the mid and late nineteenth century to remove large numbers of children from their families. The first came from the Children's Aid Society, which began "placing out" poor and orphaned children in the 1850s to homes in the country. In its literature, the CAS declared that the charge of its agents was "to get these children of unhappy fortune utterly out of their surroundings, and to send them away to kind Christian *homes in the country*. No influence, we believe is like the influence of *Home*."⁵⁷ Soon the CAS was sponsoring "orphan trains," aimed at improving the lot of thousands poor urban children (many of whom were not orphans but simply poor boys seeking a better future) by sending them to the Midwest and West to live with farm families.⁵⁸ The second was directed at Native American children after the Civil War. In the interest of assimilation, thousands of Indian children boarded trains in the opposite direction, headed east to learn their letters and become schooled in the ways of "civilized" society. One agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, writing in 1878, saw such boarding schools as the only means of assimilation: "It must be manifest to all practical minds that to place these wild children under the teacher's care but four or five hours a day, and permit them to spend the other nineteen in the filth and degradation of the village, makes the attempt to educate and civilize them a mere farce."⁵⁹ Also by the 1870s and into the twentieth century, many reformers advocated the sending of older African American and Native American children

⁵⁷ Children's Aid Society, *Third Annual Report* (1856), p. 8. Quoted in Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 211.

⁵⁸ Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Belkap Press, 2004), 164-167; Clay Gish, "Rescuing the 'Waifs and Strays' of the City: The Western Emigration Program of the Children's Aid Society," *Journal of Social History* 33.1 (1999): 121-141; Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵⁹ Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1878, p. 649. Quoted in David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995). 29.

to industrial schools in the Virginia and the Northeast, both to teach them skills and to remove them from the influences of family and the small town South.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that there were large numbers of children orphaned or separated from their parents by the slave trade (under slavery) and then by the chaos of the Civil War, an organized system of removal never developed for the freedchildren of the South.⁶¹ Before the Civil War, antislavery activists had centered their appeals on the cruel separation of families encouraged by the slave system, decrying the brutality of slaveholders who placed profit over the bonds of family. It would have been difficult for them, in turn, to endorse family separation after emancipation. It seems that most freedchildren who were orphaned were absorbed into their extended families and the fictive kin groups that had been formed under slavery as a means to combat the emotional and material effects of family separation by the slave trade.⁶²

Still, the desire to remove freedchildren from the influences of their families did surface from time to time, in the correspondence of teachers and reformers in the South. A teacher for the AMA suggested that a Normal school be established “where boys and girls can be sent from their home for a year or two then return to set a proper example among their own people...It is very little use of teachers doing a faithful part for pupils to be laid aside as soon as the children return home which is frequent.”⁶³ (Such schools

⁶⁰ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Indian Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrenceville: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

⁶¹ Due to the efforts of benevolent societies responding to the large numbers of orphaned children, white and black, during the Civil War, the 1860s did see the establishment of the same number of orphanages as in the previous two decades combined. James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 211.

⁶² See Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 148.

⁶³ Elvira C. Williams to Mr. G. Whiting, Parish of Orleans, R.B. five miles below Algiers, July 24, 1867. AMA microfilm, Louisiana, Reel 1 [45716.]

would come to fruition by the early 1870s, for older students.)⁶⁴ Elizabeth Botume, reflecting on the question “how far can the negroes go in education?” resolved that the family life of her students was a hindrance to them.

The children learn readily and memorize quickly. Then the lack of habits of application bars the way. What is learned in school is repeated at home, and so the whole is leavened. In this way the family is instructed and advanced, while the progress of the child is retarded. He hears only the plantation dialect, and becomes familiar with the plantation superstitions.⁶⁵

After the war, however, white northern abolitionists took on what they considered to be a new enemy. Antislavery campaigns had decried the brutality of slaveholders and antislavery activists had employed the language of sentimental fiction to voice their outrage against the system that tore babies away from their mothers.⁶⁶ But that campaign had been waged from a distance. Once white northern abolitionists reached the South, their work was no longer antislavery, but rather, civilizing.

After the agony of lost children and parents to the slave trade, however, freedpeople fought any attempts to deprive them of their children and their children’s labor, often to the chagrin of northern reformers and officials.⁶⁷ Indeed, the overarching reason that freedchildren remained in the South, in cities and on plantations, was that they were extremely valuable as workers—whether as a critical part of the family economy or as cheap labor for former slaveholders and other employers. Clearly, an organized effort to place freedchildren somewhere outside of the South would have met resistance from all sides. Still, freedchildren proved central to reformers’ campaigns to “rescue” the

⁶⁴ Morris, *Reading, Riting, and Reconstruction*, 159-164; See also Anderson, *Schooling of Blacks in the South*, passim, and James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). esp. chap. 6.

⁶⁵ Botume, *First Days Amongst the Contrabands*, 283.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth B. Clark, “‘Sacred Rights of the Weak’: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America,” *Journal of American History* (September 1995): 463-493.

⁶⁷ See the end of this chapter and Chapter 4.

freed population from an uncivilized existence and secure the future of black labor in the South.

Common to all efforts to rescue the ragged child in the nineteenth century were the stories of discovery told by reformers, stories that drew upon the writings of missionaries to Africa as well as upon popular sentimental novels of the period.⁶⁸ The discovery stories about street children and freedchildren were akin to what Mary Louise Pratt terms narratives of “anti-conquest,” that is, stories of chance discovery told by missionaries or other representatives of an imperial or civilizing power, that allowed them to employ “strategies of innocence.”⁶⁹ Such discovery narratives surfaced in the accounts of reformers such as Henry Mayhew, Charles Loring Brace, and Lydia Maria Child, when they made their forays into the streets and tenements of New York and London (in the case of Mayhew). It was in the streets, for instance, that Child encountered, “a ragged little urchin” whose “sweet voice of childhood was prematurely cracked into shrillness” from selling newspapers. Such children lived in tenement houses, according to reformers, that contained “dark narrow stairways, decayed with age, reeking with filth, overrun, with vermin.”⁷⁰ Similar passages appear in the fiction of Charles Dickens and his contemporaries. The ragged little crossing sweeper, Jo, in Dickens *Bleak House* (1853), for instance, who had “no father, no mother, no friends” and knew nothing of a “home,” lived “in a ruinous place...a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people.” Dickens takes his reader down that street:

⁶⁸ Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, chap. 3; Stansell, *City of Women*, 196, 201

⁶⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.

⁷⁰ Lydia Maria Child, “Letter XIV,” 17 February 1842, in *Letters from New York* (New York: Charles S. Francis and Co., 1843), 83; New York Assembly, *Report...into the Condition of Tenement Houses*, p. 14. Quoted in Stansell, *City of Women*, 201. See also Karen Sanchez-Eppler, “Playing at Class,” *ELH* 67 (2000), 822. On Henry Mayhew’s oft-cited encounter with a young watercress seller, see Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography, and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992), chap. 13. See also Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, chap. 3; Stansell, *City of Women*, 196, 201.

Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so, these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in....⁷¹

In addition to describing Jo's surroundings, Dickens also mused about the story he was spinning, a story that would bring together a child like Jo and the wealthy Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester: "What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!"⁷² Although the author himself joined the life of the street urchin and the lady together, his narrator declared it a "curious" accident.

Using similar stories of discovery in their own writings, reformers could direct benevolence towards ragged children while at the same time asserting control over them, and thus altering their future.⁷³ Accounts of freedchildren must be seen in this light, as well. They were part of this genre of discovery writing and benevolence, a genre that encompassed both street children and former slave children. Just after her trip to Port Royal in 1862, for instance, Austa French told the story of a freedwoman to whom French and a group of women paid a visit. She introduced the story (told at the start of a chapter entitled "Cruelty Reigns") by explaining, in sympathetic terms, the heartless condition of freedwomen: "no time, strength, patience, or heart, for sympathy have the poor 'field hand' women. They all have little feeling at the death of [a child] because all

⁷¹ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Modern Library, 2002 [1853]), 147, 217.

⁷² Dickens, *Bleak House*, 217.

⁷³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

want to die who would, by grace, have the tenderness to feel.”⁷⁴ In telling the story of the freedwoman, French began with the notion that slavery had stripped its victims of all capacity for feeling. Only the intervention of French and her female companions would set the household aright, and would chance to save the life of the ragged child on the floor. The boy was “lying upon a few rags on the hearth, too weak to cry, is a child of six years, in a dying state, from consumption or neglect.”

One of our ladies, on a second visit said to the woman:

“You said that was your child. Is it?”

“No, ma’am; my sister’s.”

“There, I thought you told me wrong. You must take it up and bathe it, using some of this nice healing soap. We have brought all clean clothes and a bed” (a large clothes-basket filled with nice straw, and covered with soft cloths).

“Can’t wash him; mus’ go fo’ rations.”

“You must wash him; he is suffering so.”

“I’ll do it when I come home.”

You must do it now; we cannot leave until you do.”

“I won’t let my baby cry, and hold that big nigger.”

“Only think how you speak, and he cannot live two days. How will you feel when you see him dead?”

“I feel glad, Missus, glad! Heavenly Father take five my children, I glad! I praise him! If he take dis too, and my own one child, all I got, I praise him—tears running down her poor face—‘cause so much trouble.”⁷⁵

When the freedwoman explained that the boy’s head was suffering from “maggits,” French wrote, “our sister, with uplifted hands, ran out and home to get remedies,” while French and the others remained, “enforcing and superintending the washing.” After cleaning the child, French and her colleagues expressed empathy for the woman, not blaming her but pitying her for being “so destitute of domestic knowledge”: “We do not have to work in the field as you always have to do. Still, you want to learn to do things right, don’t you?” French admitted, however, that “her rags were all as clean as

⁷⁴ Mrs. A.M. French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; Or, The Port Royal Mission* (New York: Winchell M. French, 1862; reprinted by Negro Universities Press, 1969.) 46.

⁷⁵ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 46-47.

possible without soap, as so many of them had none to wash with...”⁷⁶ The child, despite the intervention of French and her “sisters,” died two days later. As for the freedwoman, French explained that she would be, “attended to.”⁷⁷

Like Dickens, French exposed the living conditions of poor children, and their alleged abandonment or neglect by parents or guardians, to point out the distance between the ragged child and civilization, a distance that reformers hoped to bridge. In other representations of ragged children in the nineteenth century, how, reformers used racial categories as a means to highlight the difference between civilization and savagery in which the ragged child lived. Thomas Guthrie, in his first *Plea for Ragged Schools* (1849), referred to street children as “Arabs of the city.” Reformer Thomas Beggs, in *An Inquiry into the Extent and Causes of Juvenile Depravity* (1849) reported that the “predatory hordes of the street” in London might “almost to belong to a separate race.” British children new to the Ragged Schools “behaved more like savages than civilized human beings.” Charles Loring Brace seems to have adopted the term “street Arab,” but also compared poor boys to Native Americans, in that they bore “the same relation which Indians bear to the civilized Western settlers” who existed as “a happy race of little heathens and barbarians.”⁷⁸ Not incidentally, perhaps, many of these children described

⁷⁶ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 48.

⁷⁷ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 48. Peggy Pascoe has studied similar episodes in terms of women’s moral authority and intercultural interaction between Protestant mission women and the women they aimed to help. See Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.)

⁷⁸ Guthrie, *Seed-time and Harvest of Ragged Schools*, PAGE. Thomas Beggs, *An Inquiry into the Extent and Causes of Juvenile Depravity* (London: Publisher, 1849), 49, quoted in Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, p. 108. Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York* (Montclair, NJ: P. Smith, 1967[1880]), 97. On Brace’s adoption of the term “street Arab,” see also Karen Sanchez-Eppler, “Playing with Class,” fn. 5.

as “barbarians” were the offspring of Irish immigrants, nearly two million of whom arrived in the 1850s, and settled in eastern cities like New York and Boston.⁷⁹

In relating the child to the savage, missionaries working in the 1840s and 1850s were ahead of social science. It was not until the 1860s and 1870s that social scientists proposed the theory of *recapitulation*—that is, that both children and colonized people were at the beginning stages of human development. Whereas the “savage” represented an early stage in mankind’s evolution, so the theory went, the child’s growth *recapitulated* the developmental stages of the human race, from savagery to civilization.⁸⁰ Recapitulation eventually collapsed under the weight of science, but while in vogue served to reinforce the work of missionaries and other reformers promoting the development and dispersal of Victorian civilization among the nineteenth century’s poor children.

Unlike London’s young “street Arabs,” African American children were seldom linked to “savage” parts other than sub-Saharan Africa.⁸¹ Africa was a continent in which the American Missionary Association had made inroads before the Civil War.⁸² The antebellum missionary work underway in West Africa seems to have inspired missionaries hoping to start their own schools among African Americans in the United States. Africa was quickly becoming, by the 1860s, a source of fascination with

⁷⁹ Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Perennial, 1990), 140-141.

⁸⁰ George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 79; Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, 100; 123-132. Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontology* Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), chap. 3. On other theories of racial development see Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), chap. 4.

⁸¹ “Desert savages” comes from Thomas Guthrie’s *Seed-time and Harvest for Ragged Schools*, 13; “wild colts of the Pampas” and “Arabs of the metropolis,” from an 1846 article by Lord Ashley, President of the Ragged School Union. Both quoted in Cunningham, *Children of the Poor*, 104.

⁸² Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), viii.

American readers, a fascination that would continue to grow with the publication of European and American explorers' accounts.⁸³ Enthusiasm for an imagined Africa is evident in the reports and letters of aspiring missionaries in the United States. A teacher writing to the American Missionary Association in 1864, petitioning for a teaching position in the South, clearly hoped to impress the reader of his petition by proving his sense for missionary duty. He explained that he had stumbled upon "a collection of negro huts, occupied by free blacks" while living in the free state of Ohio. When he saw the children, he knew then "that I found this, my first *missionary* field. I had longed for it a great while, and when I saw it, I *knew* it. The woods were swarming with little woolly-headed, half-dressed children, and my heart warmed to them in a minute." He then turned and spoke to the mother of some of the children, making no observations about her whatsoever. Instead, he focused on the children as if they (unlike the mother) were not African Americans living in Ohio, but little Africans: "I said to the mother of six of the young savages, for really small Hottentots would not have looked any more like real live heathen to me than they did: 'Don't your children go to Sunday-school?'"⁸⁴ When he discovered that white children harassed the black children and kept them from attending school, he resolved to start his own class. "I went there next Sunday and sat down under a tree, with a great log in front of me, whereon sat thirty-four half-naked children, their little black legs hanging down, too short to touch the ground, and had a Sunday school." An observer in Illinois described a similar scene. He watched a young man "teaching a group of little darkies" under a "magnificent oak" noting that "twenty or thirty negro

⁸³ Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, 116-117.

⁸⁴ "Letter from an Applicant," *American Missionary*, June 1864, p. 149.

children were sitting around him in a circle on the ground, as the heathens do in the missionary picture books.”⁸⁵

Those who recorded or recounted their first visit to the South during the Civil War described their missionary endeavors in similar fashion. The freedchild often inspired in missionary teachers an enthusiasm that grown freedpeople did not. If they were little savages, they were savages who could be civilized. In a letter that appeared in the *American Missionary* in 1864, for instance, teacher Carolyn Jocelyn wrote: “I can never meet the peculiarly mournful gaze of the mute, overawed negro,” she wrote, “but a fountain of tears is stirred within me. There is, however, in Young Africa, a jubilant hopefulness which sweeps over all barriers, and will bear their possessors on to success and prosperity.”⁸⁶ Northern benevolent societies printed accounts like these because they served as dramatic tales of discovery. In the writings and photographs published by northern benevolent societies, in turn, the black freed child represents both the beginning and the end of Pratt’s “anti-conquest”: the discovery of former slaves in “ragged” or “degraded” form and their transformation into tidy, disciplined freedpeople. Freedchildren were instrumental to the white northern “anti-conquest” of the South because they—like Africa itself—were to the eyes of white northern reformers, new territory for the spread of “civilization” and discipline, each child an untouched, if untamed, field ready for cultivation.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ “Picturesque Scene,” from the *Springfield Republican*, reprinted in the *National Antislavery Standard*, June 27, 1863.

⁸⁶ Letter from Miss Caroline E. Jocelyn, Stoney Plantation, Hilton Head, S.C. July 20, 1864, *American Missionary* 8 (October 1864) p. 238.

⁸⁷ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201.

The portrait of Harriet Murray, Elsie and Puss, therefore, was more than just an image of a white female teacher with her black charges. In the figures of freedchildren, white northerners read stories of both geography and phylogeny, that is, of national progress and racial progress. Seen under the instruction of their white female teacher, Elsie and Puss embodied the transformation of the South under the direction of the North, a region to be cultivated by “disciplined” free laborers. At the same time, given their capacity to develop, freedchildren like Elsie and Puss also represented for white northern audiences the black race’s historical coming-of-age. In the narratives of missionaries and officials, freedchildren illustrated the race’s swift passage from slavery to freedom, from “savagery” to “civilization,” under the influence of northern reformers.

New arrivals to the South often began with descriptions of the landscape and its freed inhabitants, as if both were completely foreign.⁸⁸ Writing in 1893, Elizabeth Botume, a northern teacher and missionary to freedpeople in South Carolina, introduced her memoir with a passage about the “discovery” of freedpeople in the Low Country at the start of the war.

People at the North knew but little of slavery as it existed in the United States seventy-five or even fifty years ago. It was *terra incognita* to them. When brought face to face with the slaves, as they were during the war, it was like the discovery of a new race... What was known of the slaves themselves? Had they any individuality? Were they, as we were often

⁸⁸Their professed inexperience with slaves and former slaves, historians have discovered, may have had its roots in the North’s own experience with slavery and emancipation. From the collective denial of the history of slavery in the North and a blindness to the population of freed people of color in the northern states, arose the fantastic notion of a “whites-only New England.” This way of thinking of the North as a land of white people “untainted” by the evils of slavery was shared by both intellectuals and the northern white populace at large and served to paint New England and the rest of the North as a region distinct—both morally and racially—from the slaveowning South. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), chapter 6 and p. 218. On antebellum “nationalist regionalisms” see David Waldstreicher “The Making of American Nationalism: Celebrations and Political Culture, 1776-1820,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1995.

told, only animals with certain brute force, but no capacity for self-government? Or were they reasoning beings?⁸⁹

Though she had been warned that slaves on rice plantations were “the most degraded of the race” and perhaps “the connecting link” between humans and “the brute creation,” Botume insisted that they were the people with whom she wanted to work. She had hoped to labor in what she considered uncharted territory, her enthusiasm for “*terra incognita*” being the principle motivation. Botume was not the only northerner to make this observation about the enslaved population of coastal South Carolina. The notion that they were the most “degraded” of all enslaved populations had much to do with the fact that they were also among the most African. The black population there, isolated from other enslaved populations, spoke Gullah, a pigeon language combining African and English forms.⁹⁰ Still, although Botume wrote this in 1893, when U.S. imperialism was reaching new heights, it is still striking that her words were not unlike those that appeared in accounts from the 1860s. Sounding like the missionary who found his calling among the “Hottentots” of Ohio, Botume declared: “As this was purely missionary work, these were the people I wished to come in contact with.”⁹¹

Edward Philbrick and Austa French, both writing from Port Royal, seemed captivated by the wildness of their surroundings. Both writers used the landscape and its black inhabitants to argue that its white inhabitants, by their decadence and cruelty, must forfeit it to more competent managers.⁹² French, the wife of the Reverend Mansfield

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Hyde Botume, *First Days Amongst the Contrabands* (New York: Arno Press, 1968 [1893]), 4. Italics in original.

⁹⁰ See Margaret Washington Creel, “*A Peculiar People*”: *Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: NYU Press, 1989).

⁹¹ Botume, *First Days Amongst the Contrabands*, 35.

⁹² On the travel narratives of British missionaries and abolitionists in pre- and post-emancipation Jamaica, see Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-*

French, a leader of the Port Royal experiment, explained that in South Carolina, “vegetation, too, is singular. Even that seems to partake of the spirit of slavery. Trees luxuriant, but misshapen, gnarly, ill-tempered...Every splendid thing seems to overtop something which dwindles under its influence.”⁹³ Philbrick, who would become a plantation superintendent, wrote upon his arrival in 1862: “Dilapidated fences, tumble-down buildings, untrimmed trees with lots of dead branches, weedy walks and gardens and a general appearance of *unthrift* attendant upon the best of slaveholding towns, was aggravated here by the desolated houses, surrounded by heaps of broken furniture and broken wine and beet bottles which the army had left about after their pillage.” Freedchildren, in Philbrick’s description, were a natural part of this careless, untended place. As he made his way through the town of Beaufort, “Quantities of negro children lay basking in the morning sun, grinning at us as we passed.”⁹⁴

Like the southern landscape and its inhabitants, northern observers presented the freed child as mostly untouched and unsocialized, except by the inhuman cruelties of slavery. With an image that appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1862, entitled “Feeding the Negro Children Under the Charge of Military Authorities at Hilton Head, South Carolina,” **[Figure 4]** the editors suggested that freedchildren remained in a savage state, one that could only be remedied by northern instruction: “Our picture shows the feeding of these negro pickaninnies. Poor little creatures! they are realizing for the first time that

1867(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), esp. chap. 3. British journalists and urban reformers use similar tactics in the 1880s, comparing London’s slums to the darkest reaches of Africa. See Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 120-121.

⁹³ Mrs. A.M. French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; Or, The Port Royal Mission* (New York: Winchell M. French, 1862; reprinted by Negro Universities Press, 1969.) 41-42.

⁹⁴ Edward Philbrick to Mrs. Philbrick, 9 March 1862. Printed in Pearson, ed. *Letters from Port Royal 1862-1868*, 7.

they are human beings, and not of the same class in animated nature as dogs and hogs.”⁹⁵ But the picture itself shows the children sitting on the ground in a yard—“under the charge of military authorities”—eating with chickens, ducks, and dogs. There is even a dog sitting upright, begging, alongside children who are about to be fed. Plenty of former slaves angrily recalled having to eat out of one large pan placed in the yard as children.⁹⁶ Still, this image implied that freedboys and girls were not much more advanced than the barnyard animals around them and urgently needed the enlightenment that only northern civilization would bring. In contrast to the children, the adults in the picture standing or sit to the side of the image, making the children appear completely unsocialized by their elders, unaware (unlike the adults around them) that they were not, in fact, in the same class as the chickens.⁹⁷ Further still, readers had a standing perspective on the child figures seated on the ground, thus allowing them to look down upon the children feeding with animals. The children appeared in a helpless state of “savagery” and in need of white northerners’ help.⁹⁸

As we saw in the last chapter, the National Freedmen’s Relief Association’s presentation of girls like Rosa and Rebecca, and Henry Ward Beecher’s appeals from the pulpit of Plymouth Church were rescue stories. The white-looking girls (and others like

⁹⁵ *Harper’s Weekly*, June 14, 1862, pp. 372-373.

⁹⁶ Ex-slave Calvin Kennard recalled being fed this way as a child: “We negro, kids which they call us, dey would have the negro wench, as dey called deir cook, to put us chillun’s food in a large pan, gib us all a spoon to eat wid an’ all us negro kids would git ‘round dat pan like a lot of pigs an’ dat slop it good to me.” George Rawick, ed. *American Slave*, Supp., ser. 2 v. 6 (Texas) pt. 5, pp. 2178-2179. See also Laura Smalley’s account; she recalled eating with other children, using a wooden spoon, out of a large tray “made just like a hog trough.” Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven Miller, eds., *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Freedom* (New York: The New Press, 1998.), 135. See also the account Mae D. Moore, quoted in John B. Cade, “Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves,” *Journal of Negro History* 20 no. 3. (1935): 300.

⁹⁷ On the difficulties of missionaries’ “early publicity” in the South see Willie Lee Rose, “Iconoclasm Has Had Its Day’: Abolitionists and Freedmen in South Carolina,” in Martin Duberman, ed. *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 201.

⁹⁸ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, chap. 5.

them) needed the help of the northern public to spare them a future of slavery and sin. Fanny Lawrence, too, was discovered “sore and tattered and unclean” by a Catherine Lawrence when Lawrence was working as a nurse in Virginia. Lawrence even staged a “ragged” carte-de-visite of Fanny as part of her series of photographs to raise money to support Fanny and herself. **[Figure 5]** Very different from the other portraits of Fanny, and the individual portraits of Rebecca and Rosa, this photograph was taken from a distance, with a faint landscape painted on canvas in the background. Fanny looks forlorn, standing with her head bowed and her feet bare.⁹⁹ Like the drawing of the freedchildren eating on the ground, this picture invited northern intervention, and like the illustration, put viewers in the position of the discoverer, as if they had just come upon her standing there, a slave child unprotected.

Reformers’ descriptions of freedchildren’s development had many precursors in fictional stories about ragged children in the nineteenth century. They could be found in the tales of street children in the popular fiction of Charles Dickens, tales of rescuing and reforming the youngest, most vulnerable members of society. The work of Dickens and his contemporaries often reflected the nineteenth-century fascination with growth and transformation, and with an individual’s evolution. (It has even been suggested that Charles Darwin’s discussions of transformation and metamorphosis owed much to the work of Dickens.¹⁰⁰) The most familiar ragged child, transformed into an upright, hard-working young man would be Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick*, first serialized in 1867. Dick first appears to the reader in a sorry state. His pants were tattered, his shirt “looked as if it had been worn a month, and Dick “had no particular dislike of dirt, and did not think it

⁹⁹ Thanks to Tony Seideman for sharing this image from his private collection with me.

¹⁰⁰ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) chap. 4.

necessary to remove several dark streaks on his face and hands.” Still, “in spite of his dirt and rags, there was something about Dick that was attractive. It was easy to see that if he had been clean and well dressed he would have been decidedly good-looking.”¹⁰¹ The rags and the dirt (by Alger’s design) were a way of measuring distance, marking Dick’s passage from street urchin to a well-dressed, hard-working young man. That “would have been decidedly good looking” if cleaned up, foreshadows his ultimate reform.

The literature of antislavery had its own familiar ragged child (one who preceded *Ragged Dick* by more than a decade) in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Topsy, in whom (like Dick) there was goodness beneath the rags. Topsy was introduced in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853) as the true test of northern civilization, which was, the reader learns, embodied by the Yankee spinster Ophelia. When Topsy first appeared in the story, she was intended as a model of the unschooled, devilish “pickaninny”:

Her woolly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning, over which was oddly drawn, like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity. She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging; and stood with her hands demurely folded before her. Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance—something, as Miss Ophelia afterwards said, “so heathenish,” as to inspire that good lady with utter dismay....¹⁰²

Miss Ophelia was a white northern woman recently arrived in Louisiana living in the household of her slave-owning cousin, Augustine St. Clare. Since Ophelia so often preached the importance of education among the “heathen,” St. Clare presented her with

¹⁰¹ Horatio Alger, Jr., *Ragged Dick, or, Street life in New York with the Boot-blacks*, introduction by David K. Shipler, (New York: Modern Library, 2005) p. 4. On Alger’s story and its ambivalent relation to capitalism see Aaron Shaheen, “Endless Frontiers and Emancipation from History: Horatio Alger’s Reconstruction of Place and Time in *Ragged Dick*,” *Children’s Literature* 33 (2005): 20-40. See also Sanchez-Eppler, “Playing at Class,” 825-826.

¹⁰² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or, Life Among the Lowly*, Ann Douglas, ed. (New York: Penguin, 1981 [1852]), 351-352.

Topsy, whom he declared to be “a fresh-caught specimen” on which to test her ideals. Though at first opposed to the idea, Ophelia decided that it might, indeed, “be a real missionary work” and so “applied her mind to her heathen with the best diligence she could command.” Topsy was scrubbed down and “shorn of all the little braided tails wherein her heart had delighted, arrayed in a clean gown, with well-starched apron,” thus making the child, in the eyes of Ophelia, at least a bit “more Christian-like.”¹⁰³

Though Topsy was shorn of her braids, she was never transformed into a pliant, angelic child despite Ophelia’s efforts. She stole gloves and bits of ribbon, and took revenge on any of the other slaves in the household who crossed her. Only Eva, St. Clare’s saintly white daughter, could discipline Topsy and inspire kindness in her. As Eva began to die, Topsy finally manifested signs of “goodness.” But Topsy remained, in popular culture, the picture of devilishness. Her signature phrase, well into the early twentieth century was “I’se so wicked.”¹⁰⁴ Ironically, Topsy’s intransigence made her all the more useful to northerners describing their first encounters with freedchildren in the South. She remained, in popular memory, the uncivilized child born of slavery, with no mother or father to care for her, and only “speculators” to raise her. As such, she was the perfect symbol for northern civilizing efforts. Northerners could use Topsy, incorrigible as ever, both to justify their presence in the South and to explain away freedchildren’s resistance to their efforts to civilize them.

¹⁰³ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 353-358.

¹⁰⁴ Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 414-415. See Harry Birdoff, *The World’s Greatest Hit: Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1947) 219-224; Jim O’Loughlin, “Grow’d Again: Articulation and the History of Topsy,” <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/interpret/exhibits/oloughlin>.

The frequent comparison of freedgirls to Topsy was testament to the extent to which Stowe's popular characters shaped northerners' experience of the South.¹⁰⁵ One observer at a southern hospital (possibly in Mississippi) in 1863, for instance, wrote of her encounters with slave children there: "People have often laughingly wondered if 'Topsy' was not a creature of Mrs. Stowe's prolific fancy. Could they have enjoyed a brief season in Corinth, I think they would scarcely have questioned the truthfulness of the character. Topsies might be found here by the hundred."¹⁰⁶ A teacher working for the American Missionary Association in Savannah confessed in a letter to her sister in the North: "I could tell you many amusing incidents of school life: we have so many *Topsys*."¹⁰⁷ And after relaying in her letter that she planned to take in Puss (the child in the photograph with Harriet Murray) to "bring up," Laura Towne described the child as "about the worst little monkey that ever was. Topsy has nothing to her."¹⁰⁸

The teacher who insisted that *Topsys* could be found "by the hundred," said that she even "had one" in her room. She described Nell, the child in question, as "a bright,

¹⁰⁵ Stowe's novel was a touchstone for many Americans in the nineteenth century. As one literary scholar has noted, "Americans could live in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because it became a way of structuring experience." Jim O'Loughlin, "Articulating Uncle Tom's Cabin," *New Literary History* 31 (Summer 2000): 573. By the 1860s, Topsy had taken on a life of her own on the "legitimate" stage and on the minstrel circuit. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not only a national, but also an international sensation. The white actresses who played the part of Topsy competed with one another for the most accurate portrayal. One critic, who had once played Eva herself, compared the performances of two actresses in the role of Topsy: "True, both are great. Mrs. Howard is more like a minstrel wench, thoroughly Northern. Mrs. Chapman is the *bona fide* little nigger, and I fancy, has seen a great deal of plantation life." When "Mrs. Howard" took her performance of Topsy's abroad, however, a London critic declared that Howard had achieved, "not merely the droll, half idiot, wholly ignorant Topsy of the English stage, but the shrewd, cunning, naturally wicked, almost impish Topsy of reality—the child for whom nobody cared, that in a figurative sense may be said with perfect truth 'never to have been born,' that 'never no fader, nor moder, nor broder, nor sister, nor aunt—no, none one em—that never had nothin' nor nobody.'" Harry Birdoff, *The World's Greatest Hit: Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1947), 197, 162-163. Jim O'Laughlin argues that Stowe drew upon minstrel stereotypes in her creation of Topsy, which in turn made Topsy a natural for the minstrel stage. O'Laughlin, "Articulating *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," 581.

¹⁰⁶ From the *Evening Post*, quoted in the *National Antislavery Standard*, November 28, 1863.

¹⁰⁷ Letter "From a Teacher [in Georgia] to her sister at the North," *American Missionary* June 1865, p. 123. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁸ Towne, *The Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 219.

quiet little creature with a tiny round face as black as the ace of spades.” The woman “dressed her up and kept her about” to do errands for her, but she served as entertainment as well. “She would dance, sing and act quite as comically as Topsy ever did.” Nell ran into trouble, however, with one of the hospital clerks who declared her “a perfect little imp!” It seems the clerk and his friends enjoyed teasing Nell (in coercive ways, it seems, given his admission that they “often got her into the store downstairs to hear her make droll remarks.”) The clerk explained that he had “got in the habit of tapping her upon the head, pretending to be vexed, just to see her roll up her eyes at me in her comically-deprecating way.” “Her wool is pretty thick,” he said “and I guess I tapped her pretty hard sometimes, relying on its softness to protect her.” Tired of such abuse, Nell got the better of him by sticking pins beneath her kerchief with the points up and the clerk got a dozen of them through his hand, soon covered in blood. When the woman (who found it all very funny) questioned Nell as to why she stowed the pins in her hair, the child replied, “why, miss, he was allus a spattin’ o’ me.”¹⁰⁹

Topsy’s influence, as trickster and minstrel, extended to other “first impressions” of freedchildren, even when Topsy herself was not directly invoked. Teacher Elizabeth Botume recalled that when she first approached her new schoolhouse in South Carolina, “the piazza was crowded with children, all screaming and chattering like a flock of jays and blackbirds in a quarrel. But as soon as they saw me they all gave a whoop and bound and disappeared.”¹¹⁰ And Laura Towne remarked upon the children she encountered when she first arrived in St. Helena, South Carolina. She noted that they were “all very

¹⁰⁹ “Incidents of Hospital Life,” from the *Evening Post*, reprinted in *National Antislavery Standard*, 28 November 1863.

¹¹⁰ Botume, *First Days Amongst the Contraband*, 41.

civil” despite their “mischief.” Yet despite their civility, they were still the stuff of minstrel shows: “The number of little darkies tumbling about at all hours is marvellous. They swarm on the front porch and in the front hall. If a carriage stops it is instantly surrounded by a dozen or more wooly heads.”¹¹¹ When a special correspondent for the *New York Times* visited Port Royal in 1862, he found “curly-headed picaninnies whose large rows of white, glistening teeth, were only exceeded in whiteness by their rolling eyes, swarmed on every doorstep, and could be seen piled tier above tier in every room...” The writer could not resist using Mrs. Stowe’s character for inspiration, too, when he saw “a swarm of happy Topseys [sic]” sitting together in church.¹¹²

Such descriptions also implied that freedchildren were unsocialized by adults. Indeed, Topsy’s devilishness, in large part, was attributed to her lack of a mother and father to raise and love her. She had “just grow’d” with other slave children under the supervision of an old woman and a slave trader. Topsy’s life story was part of Stowe’s many-sided attack on the system of chattel slavery that destroyed families and orphaned children. But it also made Topsy a useful character in the aftermath of slavery because it served to place Topsy in the company of the mid-nineteenth century’s ragged children.

Reformers soon recognized the utility of visual representations of the transformation of the ragged child. In doing so, they drew upon other examples of “before and after” imagery in the nineteenth century. In the 1860s and during the Civil War, medical doctors used before-and-after photos to document the effects of amputation

¹¹¹ Letter from Pope’s Plantation, St. Helena, S.C., April 21, 1862. Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 11.

¹¹² “The Negro in South Carolina, Social, religious, and military aspects of the Negro Question at Port Royal,” *New York Times*, 19 July 1862. p. 2.

as well as reconstructive surgeries to treat birth defects.¹¹³ Such photographs were useful both in the camera's ability to document medical conditions objectively, or scientifically, and to record and promote (among doctors and patients) the successful outcome of those operations. Also, the makers of patent medicines and even hospitals began to use before-and-after illustrated advertisements to argue that an elixir or a particular kind of treatment or surgery could change a person's life. The most elaborate, four-color before-and-after trade cards did not become widely available until the late 1870s. The National Surgical Institute of Philadelphia, for instance, produced a trade card (a popular medium using 3" x 5" colored illustrations) featuring one child on crutches, and another child a few paces ahead casting away her crutches and standing on her own.¹¹⁴ Soap advertisements in this period, too, conveyed the before-and-after scenario with one illustration—"black" adults or children with part of their face or arms scrubbed "white" with the advertiser's soap.¹¹⁵ Yet the mass marketing of radical transformation—the notion that ailments, household chores, frailties, and defects could be instantly alleviated or completely eradicated—was already well established by mid century. Like the written accounts of missionaries and fictional tales of rescued street urchins, advertising, too, played upon the theme of

¹¹³ J.H.T. Connor and Michael G. Rhode, "Shooting Soldiers: Civil War Medical Images, Memory, and Identity in America," *Invisible Culture* 5 (2003): http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_5/ConnorRhode/ConnorRhode.html; Blair Rogers, "Reed B. Bontecou, M.D.: His Role in Civil War Surgery and Medical Photography," *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery* (March/April 2000): 114-129; Blair O. Rogers, "The First Pre-and Post-Operative Photographs of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery: Contributions of Gurdon Buck, 1870-1877," *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery* v. 15 (1991): 19-33.

¹¹⁴ See Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Ben Crane, *The Before and After Trade Card* (Dexter, MI: The Ephemera Society of America, Inc., 1995).

¹¹⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 214 and chap. 5.

transformation. Another term for before-and-after advertisements printed on *cartes-de-visite*, in fact, was “metamorphic cards.”¹¹⁶

Reformers began to use the before-and-after photograph as a fundraising tool in the early 1860s. The creator of the most well-known series of photographs of ragged street children changed into tidy workers, was the British missionary Dr. Thomas Barnardo, a leader in the Ragged School movement in London. But Barnardo may have gotten the idea for his “contrast” photos from after meeting with a then relatively obscure missionary from Chicago, Dwight Morris, who had taken a set of “before” and “after” photographs of street children at his mission in 1862.¹¹⁷ Both men used these serial images to raise money and awareness for their work with poor children. What made them so effective, as propaganda, was their apparent realism, rendered through the use of photography. As documents, they were marked by a particular kind of doubleness: the reality of the children’s improved material condition and the rhetoric of progress inherent in the spectacle of transformation.¹¹⁸ Viewers could see the difference for themselves.

Yet the use of “contrast” photographs raised the issue of authenticity, or rather, duplicity. The propaganda methods of Thomas Barnardo were famously discredited in 1877, when Barnardo was accused in court of having staged his before-and-after photographs. The mothers of some of his subjects came forward to object to images of their children in tattered clothes (one mother insisted that she had sent her children to the mission in *decent* clothes) or the image of a girl selling newspapers, a job the girl had never done. Children testified that their clothes had been torn to shreds before Barnardo photographed them. The court arbitrators lamented that Barnardo had made “fictitious

¹¹⁶ See Lori McCulloch, *Paper Americana: A Collector’s Guide* (A.S Barnes & Co., 1987)

¹¹⁷ Gillian Wagner, *Barnardo* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 42-44.

¹¹⁸ Here I’m drawing on John Tagg’s discussion of realism. Tagg, *The Burdens of Representation*, 99.

representations of destitution” for the “purposes of obtaining money.” After the cases were resolved in 1877 with Barnardo still running his mission, if less triumphantly, he ceased taking propaganda photographs, only recording children for the purposes of identification in case they ran away.¹¹⁹

Barnardo’s defense, in the face of all the evidence against him, was that his “contrast” photos, if not literally true, contained a deeper truth about the conditions of ragged children, much like the truth conveyed in painting or literature. Barnardo was right, although perhaps in a way he did not intend. The “contrast” pictures of ragged children *were* in the tradition of popular fiction, particularly the work of writers like Dickens and Stowe. Scholars have also written about Barnardo’s images as reflective of evangelical, rather than literal truths—a truth not based on fact but on inner feeling, a faith in radical transformation of the individual.¹²⁰ Yet as we have seen, evangelicalism was intertwined with the sorts of images that Barnardo did not, and would not have, named—advertisements for magic elixirs, patent medicines, cosmetics, and cure-alls. Indeed, as Jackson Lears has noted about American advertising in this period, the preacher and the peddler were not so far apart. Those who sold snake oil and those who praised Jesus both conveyed messages of self-transformation and the possibility of a changed future.¹²¹

This very same message was also central to the efforts of antislavery reformers on behalf of former slaves. Perhaps the earliest example of before-and-after photography

¹¹⁹ Seth Koven, “Dr. Barnardo’s ‘Artistic Fictions’: Photography, Sexuality, and the Ragged Child in Victorian London,” *Radical History Review* 69 (Fall 1997): 25, 31; Wagner, *Barnardo*, 140-152.

¹²⁰ Koven, “Dr. Barnardo’s ‘Artistic Fictions,’” 13, 29.

¹²¹ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) Pp. 56-63; Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), chap. 1.

to promote slave emancipation in the South and raise money was a set of *cartes-de-visite* sponsored by the Society of Friends in 1864. [Figures 6,7] Emphasizing that the children photographed had been discovered *and* rescued, their portraits appeared over the titles “As We Found Them” and “As They Are Now.” A captain in the Sixth U.S. Colored Infantry named Riley rescued two children, a brother and sister eight and six years of age, in Virginia. He had been sent to rescue some Union families in Matthews County. On his return, he came upon the two children living with an elderly slaveholder named White and five other children “in a most destitute condition.” The slaveholder pled poverty and begged the soldiers not to take his chickens. The mother of the brother and sister, he claimed, was dead. White left the slaveholder with the warning to “take care of the little colored children, they will be free some day.” But he soon learned from a “contraband” that the mother of the boy and girl had been sold the day before and that White was cruel master. Riley returned, taking both the children and the man’s chickens, after admonishing him and quoting the Scripture. (No mention was made of the other five children living with White.) Riley found clothes and bedding for the brother and sister and took them to a Quaker woman, Eliza Yates, who sent them to the Friends Shelter for Colored Orphans in Philadelphia, an American counterpart to the Ragged Schools of London.¹²² At the time that their picture was made in Philadelphia, the Friends were still searching for the children’s mother.¹²³

¹²² The Quakers had been active in the education of blacks and Native Americans in the United States since the seventeenth century. The “Orphans Shelter” was established in Philadelphia by an association of women “Friends” in 1822 “for the purpose of relieving the necessities of the poorest of the poor; for where do we find, even in populous cities, a class of the human family more abject, or more deserving of the fostering hand of benevolence, than the parentless children of the African race of this country.” *Annual Report of the Association for the Care of Coloured Orphans for 1836* (Philadelphia, 1836), iii-iv. “Going to School,” *Harper’s Weekly* (10 June 1876): PAGE. During the Civil War, the Society of Friends established and funded orphanages and schools for freedchildren in Mississippi, South Carolina, North

In the first photograph, “As We Found Them,” the children stood in shredded clothes, the boy a bit slouched and leaning on the banister that served as the photographer’s prop. Their clothes were tattered, the boy’s shirt held round his neck by just a button at his collar. The girl wore a torn jumper hanging loosely. Both children had bare feet. In the second, “As They Are Now,” the children appeared neatly dressed. The boy wore a jacket, a hat (on the banister) and whole, clean trousers. His sister wore a starched polka-dot dress. They both wore shoes. The Union army had rescued these children but the intervention of the Society of Friends transformed them—with soap and starch and clean linen. This kind of before-and-after photograph of freedchildren seemed to document the total success that Miss Ophelia never enjoyed with Topsy, rendering a metamorphosis, a transition from past to present, slavery to freedom. With the two pictures side-by-side, the transformation seemed instantaneous, turning the ragged little slave, the savage, into a tidy, obedient child.¹²⁴ Here was proof—in flesh and blood, shadow and substance, “As We Found Them” and “As They Are Now”—of the potential of freedpeople to become civilized.

The text beneath the portrait of the brother and sister authenticated their past lives as slaves and endorsed the intervention of the Society of Friends, using the words of the children’s mother. The text beneath “As We Found Them,” states the name of their owner, “Thomas White of Mathew Co, Va.” and explains their rescue at the hands of Captain Riley and with the help of the Society of Friends. Beneath the title “As They Are Now”—the portrait of their children clean and well-clad—was printed an endorsement

Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C U.S. Office of Education, *History of Schools for the Colored Population* (New York: Arno Press, 1969 [1871]), 378.

¹²³ *The Thirtieth Annual Report of the Association for the Care of Colored Orphans* (Philadelphia: William K. Bellows, 1866), 5-7.

¹²⁴ Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 105; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 122.

from the children's mother, a woman who had been "beaten, branded, and sold at auction because she was kind to Union soldiers." As she was carried away, "bound down in a cart, she prayed 'O! God send the Yankees to take my children away.'" Not only were the children in need of help, but also their mother (according to this story) pled directly to northerners to take her children under their care. The pair of portraits, therefore, delivered to viewers the past, present, and future of the children rescued by the Society of Friends, a story made "real" through the photographic medium, allowing the eye to see the children's transformation, in elapsed time, from ragged to tidy.

But were the children rescued by Captain Riley and the Society of Friends really "As We Found Them"? Did someone take them straight from the slaveholder's yard to the photographer's studio? Their tattered clothes do look somewhat picturesque, as if they have been torn in even shreds, with the little girl wearing a ripped smock over a skirt and shirt. Did their value as subjects of propaganda really trump their need for proper clothing? Or is it more helpful to recognize that the Society of Friends used a bold argument of radical transformation—the spectacle of the ragged child redeemed—to convince northern viewers that the need for their help was urgent.

Perhaps we should take something, too, from Barnardo's argument about the constructed representation of a certain kind of "truth." Thousands of freedpeople, in 1864, were destitute and in need of clothes, food, and medicine. Freedwomen with children who followed federal troops in the South were particularly vulnerable to disease and displacement, since most had no official work with the Union army and were often considered a hindrance to operations. Teachers and missionaries in Virginia and South Carolina, in particular, where Union forces were established by 1863, reported on the

ragged and destitute conditions of freedpeople there. In cities like Washington, D.C., shantytowns and overcrowded tenements prompted the government and benevolent agencies to look for employment for freedwomen and children elsewhere, in more northern cities.¹²⁵ The war and that crowded conditions that ensued also created thousands of orphans. According to a report from Wilmington, North Carolina in 1866 printed in the *American Missionary*, General Sherman's march through the South had sent 12,000 refugee freedpeople into the city, of whom one-third died by summer's end, leaving behind "crowds of young orphan children" without family and the Freedmen's Bureau had no homes for them. Evoking the notion of ragged child directly, the letter writer explained: "Some have found refuge in Freedmen's families, some are staying with parties who cannot feed them—most of them are knocking about, starving and naked—*becoming street children*. You in New York know full well what that means."¹²⁶

Another means of getting freedchildren off of the streets, though it was an avenue open only to boys, was through military service. The before-and-after portrait of "Drummer Jackson," a boy enlisted into the Union army at Port Hudson, Louisiana, combined the idea of the ragged child's reform and the potential of male slaves to serve the nation in war. [Fig 8, 9] Before-and-after portraits of slave men appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in 1864 to promote the recent enlistment in the Union army and to argue that, indeed, slaves could look and fight like men. One such series featured an anonymous "escaped" slave, before his enlistment (taken of him sitting down, artlessly looking

¹²⁵ Jim Downs, "The Other Side of Freedom: Destitution, Disease, and Dependency among Freedwomen and Their Children during and after the Civil War," in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 78-103; Testimony of Miss Lucy Chase before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, Portsmouth, VA, 10 May 1863, Berlin et al, *Freedom*, Series I, Vol. II, p. 152; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 82; Robert Harrison, "Welfare and Employment Policies of the Freedmen's Bureau in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Southern History* v. 72 n. 1 (February 2006): 75-110.

¹²⁶ "Orphans among the Freedmen," *American Missionary* v. 10 n. 4 (April 1866):73.

straight ahead) and after (standing in uniform, with backpack and canteen, leaning on his rifle and gazing off into the distance.) When the photographic portrait of Gordon's "Scourged Back" was made into an illustration for *Harper's Weekly* in 1863, his before-and-after portraits (very similar in pose to those of the unknown "escaped slave") appeared on either side of the picture of his heavily scarred back.¹²⁷ The portrait of "Drummer Jackson" also played upon the theme of male slave-turned-soldier. In the first image, Jackson was dressed in a shirt so tattered it barely clung to his frame, and stood before the camera, hands at his side, in bare feet. This was Jackson as a slave (as he was found) working for the Confederate Army. Time seems to have elapsed for the second photograph, in which Jackson (whose hair had grown longer and his face fuller) appears in uniform as a drummer for the United States Colored Troops.¹²⁸ Yet Drummer Jackson's portrait also drew upon idea of the ragged child, redeemed. While suggesting that slave boys and men could be disciplined and productive if given proper work, it also made appeals for the rescue of vulnerable slave children in tattered clothes. This argument was furthered by the pride Jackson seemed to show through his upright posture, his uniform, and his drum.

The story of the ragged slave child rescued through the intervention of the northern army may have had some utility for individual northerners who viewed themselves as rescuers. For instance, there are the two surviving photographs of a child named Paul LeBeau, who appears to have been adopted by Charles Rumford, a lieutenant

¹²⁷ "The Escaped Slave" and "The Escaped Slave in the Union Army," *Harper's Weekly* 2 July 1864; "A Typical Negro," *Harper's Weekly* 4 July 1863, p. 429.

¹²⁸ Joseph T. Glatthar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), illus.

in the Union army from Delaware.¹²⁹ [Figure 10, 11] There is no evidence that Rumford had Paul LeBeau's portrait taken for any public sale or display, and the circumstances of Paul's redemption have not survived. What remain are simply two portraits of him, the first taken in DeVall's Bluff, Arkansas in November of 1865, when Paul was six years old. He stood barefoot, with pants worn through with holes. One pant leg was rolled up above the ankle, as if to make him look especially ragamuffin. He held his cap in his hand. His jacket was in fair shape, if a bit long in the sleeves, looking borrowed. He stood alone before the camera, as had the "slaves" from the Penn School photos and the boy and girl from Virginia. The second portrait was taken in 1870 in Wilmington, Delaware, Rumford's home. Rumford stood with his back to the camera, looking towards a painted horizon in a landscape of sky and distant palm trees. Paul LeBeau, age eleven, sat kneeling on the floor, looking directly into the camera. Was Rumford looking back to his days of military service in the South, and to the redemption of the freedboy he brought to Delaware? Did it reflect his mastery (sexual or otherwise) over the boy he had redeemed? Whatever meaning we might take from these portraits, it is clear that Paul LeBeau was part of a story Rumford told himself after the Civil War, a story that was not complete without the image of the boy he had rescued from slavery, fed, and clothed—the child he had himself changed from ragged to tidy.

The teachers at Port Royal in South Carolina produced their own "contrast" portraits of freedboys. [Figures 12, 13] In the first of the images, two young boys appear in tattered clothes, the youngest of them nibbling on a piece of what looks like hard tack.

¹²⁹ Samuel Canby Rumford, "Life Along the Brandywine Between 1880 and 1895," Claudia L. Bushman, ed. *Delaware History* 23 (Fall-Winter 1988): 105.

Handwritten beneath their portrait is the word “Slaves.”¹³⁰ But on closer inspection, it appears that this photograph of ragged “slaves” was part of a series of photographs of freedchildren, one of which (by way of contrast to “slaves”) was labeled “Freedboys”

The freedboys pictured stood at almost regimental attention before the camera, dressed in suits. The portrait of “slaves” was taken in the same studio as “Freedboys” and the portrait of Elsie and Puss. The backdrop behind the “slaves” is the same canvas that hung behind the freedchildren and their teachers, though the “slaves” stood in front of a different section of it. Instead of the neat furrows of farmland in Elsie’s picture, behind the “slaves” hung a muted watery landscape dotted with palmettos. The rough plank floor on which the “slaves” stood was, in the other images, covered over by a carpet. Whereas these two “slave” boys appeared in ragged overalls and barefeet, the “Freedboys” were posed standing upright, in suits of clothes and shoes—clothes that suggested not physical labor, but book learning. The freedboys stood close together, upright, some with hats in hand, and all of them wearing suits, suggested the orderly, gentlemanly behavior in which the boys were being trained. (On the backdrop, to the right, there maybe be a regiment of soldiers, but it is unclear.) Within one space, then, with clothing and studio props, the photographer had created dutiful schoolchildren from “slaves.”

The two images, “slaves” and “freedboys,” demonstrated for propaganda purposes the results of the Penn School’s educational mission among freedpeople. And it is in this context that most reformers narratives of slave children transformed appeared—

¹³⁰ Previous historians have taken the image of “slaves” at face value, assuming that the boys were, in fact, slave children See, for instance, Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964) 142-143. It is not clear who wrote the word “slaves” on the portrait, nor is it clear when they wrote it.

that is, in the context of schooling. As teachers, they placed particular emphasis on the relationship between education, civilization, and racial progress among the former slave population. In the writings and photographs of benevolent societies in the South after the Civil War, the themes of education and discipline are inextricable. As in the North, in addition to reading and ciphering, schools served as teachers of morality, hard work, and self-control, the fundamentals of Victorian-era Protestantism.¹³¹ When in 1864 Major General Nathaniel Banks created a system of Sunday schools within the Department of the Gulf, he did so “for the purpose of giving greater care, industry, and intelligence to the laboring classes of freedmen, and inspiring them with a higher sense of their obligations to society, to their race, *and to all rightful authority....*”¹³² As E. M. Wheelock, one of the leaders of the AMA in Louisiana, remarked, “our military expeditions do the pioneer work of blasting the rock and felling the forest. Education follows to sow the grain and raise the golden harvest.” It was, too, a means to instill the self-control and self-possession desired of workers in a free labor economy. Wheelock put the matter bluntly: as the “small pacific army of teachers and civilizers” advances upon the South “the school-house takes the place of the whipping post and scourge.”¹³³

The role of schools as civilizing institutions was common enough in the nineteenth century, although many northern teachers feared at times that they had met their match with the freedchildren in their charge. In the end, however, they would

¹³¹ Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 109.

¹³² Emphasis added. Office of the Commission of Enrollment, Dept of the Gulf to Major General Banks, Commander, Dept of the Gulf, New Orleans, February 24, 1864. AMA microfilm, Louisiana, Reel 1 [45386.]

¹³³ “Education of the Freedmen in Louisiana,” *American Missionary* 8 (November 1864) p. 258; Robert C. Morris, *Reading, Writing, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), chap. 5; Saidya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press), chap. 4.

always see progress. A missionary teacher named Josiah Beardsley, working in Baton Rouge, for instance, reported that when he began his labors among the freedchildren there “most of them were ignorant of any restraint and the order and discipline of the school-room were entirely new. In fact, we could obtain nothing like order except by means of a severe and rigid discipline. The dress, habits, and appearance of the scholars were far from neat and attractive. Not a day passed without two or three fights among the pupils when at their plays, and these were often severe and bloody.” Yet the swift intervention of white northern teachers like himself, Beardsley argued, had nearly erased the brutal effects of slavery. “We are now fully convinced that that colored children can learn,” Beardsley proclaimed. “In some ten years experience in the schools of my native state, I have never seen greater advancement in the same time.”¹³⁴

Indeed, the most difficult tasks, in the view of missionaries, were not intellectual but rather disciplinary and moral. “It must be admitted,” Beardsley added, “[the children] are prone to deceive and pilfer, but perhaps no more so than any people would be after such a manner of life. To deceive and to pilfer have been a part of their education. By means of the one they have often escaped the lash of a cruel master, and by the other they have sometimes been able to satisfy the pang of hunger.”¹³⁵ Another missionary teaching in New Orleans remarked of the freedchildren in his charge “most of them are quite as smart as white children, but perhaps [one] cannot judge on so short a trial.” There were some “exceptions,” however, and “a few seem nearly as degraded as the brute creation....Stealing prevails to an alarming extent. I feel that nothing but the

¹³⁴ “Testimony of a Teacher,” Baton Rouge, February 13, 1865. AMA microfilm, Louisiana, Reel 1 [45614.]

¹³⁵ Josiah Beardsley to Rev. George Whipple, Baton Rouge, 7 June 1864. AMA microfilm, Louisiana, Reel 1 [45470G.]; Patricia Brady, “Trials and Tribulations: American Missionary Association Teachers and Black Education in Occupied New Orleans, 1863-1864,” *Louisiana History* 31 (Winter 1990), 8.

interposition of Omnipotence can check it. It is beyond all human control.” By the end of the month, however, the children had advanced so well in their studies that the same teacher was “puzzled, not knowing how much of their apparent progress to attribute to my having become accustomed to their oddities. I can see decided improvement not only in prompt obedience and order, but also intellectually and morally.”¹³⁶

Proof of success, however, was closely tied to the improved physical appearance of students. Nineteenth-century accounts of charitable cases depended upon descriptions of the body and its poor appearance to lend authenticity both to the objects of their charity and to the stories they told about them.¹³⁷ In the case of street children and freedchildren, description of their ragged appearance and its subsequent improvement lent authenticity to benevolent societies’ civilizing mission. In an article reprinted in the *American Missionary* the writer recounted a visit to Beaufort, South Carolina for a Sunday school meeting. “‘One year ago,’ said a high military officer to the writer, ‘they were all in rags, that is to say those that had rags.’ Now they were all neatly dressed, walked in regular procession, sat with perfect decorum.”¹³⁸ A visitor to a freedmen’s school in Vicksburg writing to *Harper’s Weekly* in 1866 was impressed, as well, by the tidy appearance of the pupils. “One of the most noticeable features of these schools for freedmen is the cleanliness and good clothing of a majority of the scholars. Of course, there are ragged and rough specimens, but these are not the rule.” The neat appearance of

¹³⁶ E.M. Birge to Rev. George Whipple, New Orleans, June 2, 1864. AMA microfilm, Louisiana, Reel 1 [45467.]; E.M. Birge to Rev. George Whipple, New Orleans June 27, 1864. AMA microfilm, Louisiana, Reel 1 [45489A.]

¹³⁷ Susan M. Ryan, “Misgivings: Melville, Race, and the Ambiguities of Benevolence,” *American Literary History* (MONTH, 2000), 686; According to historian Anna Davin, in London schools in the nineteenth-century, “the question of appearance was closely connected [to training in orderly habits]: it became the visible proof of educational success or failure.” Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School, and Street in London 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), 134.

¹³⁸ “Sunday School Meeting in Beaufort, Abridged from the ‘Free South’ of April 25th,” *American Missionary* v. 7 (June 1863): 126.

the pupils (“from the grandma down to the infant”) convinced him of the eminent success of emancipation. “It is one of the many evidences I have found in Mississippi of the general well-being of the negroes, and their capacity to take care of themselves.”¹³⁹

This change in appearance probably had more to do with freedpeople’s newfound autonomy and their desire to wear (and to dress their children in) what they wanted, clothes paid for with the wages they had earned.¹⁴⁰ But reformers nonetheless read the change in appearance of their pupils as a sign of their own success as educators.

Northern observers also chose to see improved dress and overall appearance as evidence of former slaves’ potential as human beings, and proof of their lack of inferiority based on race. An AMA teacher in Florida summed up the sentiments of many: “I could not help thinking it is not the color of their skin, that makes any one degraded, but their habits. If people are crushed down all their lives by the heel of oppression, can we expect them to rise all of a sudden & be a bright intelligent class of community, without even the dust of their past conditions clinging to them? A great many of them do shake it off & get up brighter than would be expected. The jewels are here, & we have an interesting work to polish them up for this world, & I hope, for the world to come.”¹⁴¹

The teacher’s choice of metaphors is telling—the “dust of their past conditions” and the earnest work required in order to “polish them up”—because they are metaphors domesticity and cleanliness, metaphors that will become ever louder over the second half

¹³⁹ “Pictures of the South,” *Harper’s Weekly* 23 June 1866, p. 398.

¹⁴⁰ See Tera Hunter’s discussion of freedwomen’s dress in *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-3.

¹⁴¹ E.B. Eveleth to Rev. George Whipple, 29 April 1865. Quoted in Joe M. Richardson, “‘We Are truly doing Missionary Work’: Letters from American Missionary Association Teachers in Florida, 1864-1874,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* v. 54 n. 2 (October 1975), 185-186. <http://palmm.fcla.edu/FHQ/index.shtml>. Portions of this letter were also printed in the *American Missionary*. Letter from Miss Eveleth, Jacksonville, FL 4 February 1865, *American Missionary* v. 9 (March 1865): 79.

of the nineteenth century in the writings of reformers and admen alike. By the late nineteenth century, following slave emancipation in the U.S. South and the spread of European colonialism, civilization's progress became a consumer spectacle, told through images of domestic cleanliness—most prominently with soap advertisements. In representations of domestic rituals, according to Anne McClintock, “animals, women, and colonized people” and I would add, in particular, children, were transformed in spectacles of Victorians' devising. By the late nineteenth century, the mass marketing of late Victorian imperialism, according to McClintock, would “distribute evolutionary racism on a hitherto unimagined scale.”¹⁴²

Such “evolutionary racism”—where black skin, scrubbed white in advertisements was a symbol of the imperial mission—was not prevalent in post-Civil War accounts. Most appeals for benevolence towards the freed population were appeals for the “progress” of the black race. Indeed, most teachers failed to find any connection between skin color and intellectual ability. For the most part, teachers making their observations about skin color and intellect admitted that they could find nothing to suggest that black children were less intelligent than white children or non-white children of lighter skin. The American Missionary Association, on a standard report form, asked their teachers whether they could detect any difference between “mulatto” children and black children in terms of ability. Most teachers who wrote of their earliest experiences with freedchildren in the classroom found that skin color was not an indicator of a child's intellectual ability. A teacher in Norfolk, Virginia wrote that among the children in his charge “very few are pure blacks, but color is no criterion of excellence. The boy of the

¹⁴² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 35, 209; Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, Part two.

ebony face learns just as well as his classmate with a complexion nearly as light as the little ones I used to see in [northern] Industrial Schools.”¹⁴³ In the reports from teachers working for the AMA in Louisiana, in answer to the question of whether mulatto’s excelled, many respondents wrote simply, “No.” For most who worked with freedchildren and those who promoted benevolent work in the South, the shades of skin color soon became largely irrelevant.¹⁴⁴ Progress was not measured biologically, on a scale from African to Anglo-Saxon, but in the effectiveness of the education brought to the freedpopulation, as it had been brought to Africa, to the streets of London, and would be taken, as well, to the Native Americans in the West.

Rather than a progression towards Anglo-Saxonism read on the skin, they saw the education of freedchildren as the march of the black race as a whole towards civilization. Consider, for instance, the observations of a representative of the American Missionary Association in Louisiana. The Reverend E.H. Alden claimed to have witnessed the evolution of freedchildren from savages to civilized children. It was not a natural process, however, but rather a transformation driven by the arrival of northern benevolence. After visiting a school for freedchildren in New Orleans, Reverend E.H. Alden described the freedchildren this way, as moving through the stages of mankind: “I feel more and more interested in these poor colored people and am daily forgetting that they are black,” he wrote. Looking over his classroom he saw “children in all stages of progress from those taken from the cotton press where the officers of the Red River expedition left them in all their savage wildness and ignorance which a barbaric master has produced, to those who have learned to read and write and understand the rudiments

¹⁴³ *American Missionary* v. 9 (June 1865), 124.

¹⁴⁴ Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, chap. 5.

of Geography and Arithmetic, and Grammar and are daily manifesting deep wells of affection and love, good taste and judgment and a keen intellect...”¹⁴⁵

Alden’s letter bears the stamp of nineteenth-century recapitulation theory, that is, that the child in its development reenacts the evolution of the species. The evolutionary transformation of the children from “savage wildness” to “good taste and judgment” seems to have been, in Alden’s mind, also an evolution away from blackness (or at least toward his “forgetting” about their blackness) and towards civilization. Yet it was education, in Alden’s telling, that rescued freedchildren from “savage wildness” and even from blackness. Through geography, arithmetic, and grammar, Alden claimed, they were transformed into humans (rather than black people or savages) with taste and judgment.¹⁴⁶ Another missionary in Louisiana saw a similar progression away from savagery in freedchildren’s rapid advancement from simple letters to arithmetic. “The country schools are prosperous and thronged,” he reported “and although they have been in being but a few months, they are rapidly demonstrating the capacity of the African to receive our civilization. Children who eight weeks ago were beginning the alphabet, are now reading in First Readers, and solving with facility problems in the primary rules of arithmetic.”¹⁴⁷

Because of their capacity for rapid progress, many reformers pinned hopes upon freedchildren most of all. Edward Philbrick wrote from South Carolina in 1862 that he

¹⁴⁵ Rev. E.H. Alden to Rev. George Whipple, New Orleans, June 11, 1864. AMA microfilm, Louisiana, Reel 1 [45472.]

¹⁴⁶ The AMA’s editors, fond of such accounts of swift success, encouraged reports like Alden’s. After studying contributions to the *American Missionary* from teachers in Georgia, historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall came to the conclusion that “the descriptions of the children’s performances are so glowing, so predictable in both style and content, that they are rendered highly suspect as true reflections of the educational process.” Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 116.

¹⁴⁷ “Education of the Freedmen in Louisiana,” *American Missionary* 11 (November 1864), 257.

did not have much faith in changing adult freedpeople into free laborers, and only through the help of the schools would there be a new black working class. “I do not believe much can be made out of this generation by free labor, nor out of the next without teaching them to read, and am sorry so little has been done in the teaching department.”¹⁴⁸ A schoolteacher in Florida, too, looked to the next generation. Most of the freedpeople near her school in Jacksonville were “so filthy in their habits, have always been driven almost to death with work and all the time they had from work, which was very little, they took for rest; and can we expect them to go suddenly from that manner of life and become neat thrifty housekeepers? It will take time; perhaps till the next generation. I think they do as well—perhaps better—than any other class of people under the same circumstances.”¹⁴⁹

There was another kind of before and after portrait related to schooling, with which we are already somewhat familiar. In portraits like that of Elsie and Puss with Harriet Murray, viewers could watch civilization arrive as the children and their teacher focused on the book at the center of the image. The presence of the book in Murray’s lap suggested, in a more subtle ways than “As We Found Them” and “As They Are Now,” the transformation of freedchildren from ragged to civilized. Along with Miss Harriet Murray, other teachers at the Penn School posed for portraits with their students. Laura Towne, who directed the Penn School, appeared in a portrait with her students Amoretta, Dick, and Maria. Towne sent a letter to a friend in March of 1866, beginning with: “I send the enclosed picture of me with three of my pets.”¹⁵⁰ **[Figure 14]** The girls in the photograph with him, Maria Wyne and Amoretta, Towne described as “bright”; Amoretta

¹⁴⁸ Edward Philbrick, 16 November 1862, in Ware, ed. *Letters from Port Royal*, 110.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Miss Eveleth, Jacksonville, FL 4 February 1865, *American Missionary* v. 9, p. 79.

¹⁵⁰ Towne, Letter from St. Helena, March 9, 1866. *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 172.

was “as sharp as a needle” and Maria was good at math, she was “very dull and slow” in reading. Amoretta, wearing a white head kerchief, was a candidate for baptism, what the Gullah people on the South Carolina coast called a “seeker.”¹⁵¹ Towne described Dick, however, as her “right hand man, who is full of importance, but has traveled and feels as if he had seen the world. He is incorrigibly slow and stupid about learning, but reads bunglingly in the Testament, does multiplication sums on the slate, and can write a letter after a fashion.”¹⁵² Dick, in Towne’s representation, was more a trusted servant struggling to learn his letters than a young scholar. Whereas the girls were considered clever and promising, Towne’s characterization of Dick seemed to have already placed him in her service.

Despite Towne’s doubts about Dick as a student, it was the book that held the group together. Towne seems almost aggressive in her insistence that the children pay attention to the book in her hand, suggestive not just of learning, but of submission, of discipline. Another group portrait, produced by the Society of Friends, makes Towne’s point even more emphatically. **[Figure 15]** Instead of a pair of “contrast” portraits or a single group portrait, this image was constructed as a tableau, a scene that all at once, from beginning to end, told the story of the redeemed slave child. A schoolteacher with great, long skirts sat holding a book open in her lap, directly in front of a kneeling black child in bare feet and plain dress. The ragged child was facing civilization in the form of a book and a white woman. On either side of the woman stand two girls in polka dot print dresses. These girls have already learned to read the book, have already been welcomed into civilization. While the smaller of the two holds the teacher’s hand, the

¹⁵¹ Margaret Washington Creel, “*A Peculiar People*,” 287-288.

¹⁵² Emphasis added. Letter from St. Helena, March 9, 1866. Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 172.

taller girl points to the book with one hand while propping a basket on her head with the other. Learning to read and cipher, her pointed finger seems to argue, will make you like me: a clean, competent worker. In this story of civilization, as with the others, written and visual, clean, proper clothes and upright posture was evidence of an inner transformation. This image, though, is both the most explicit and the most succinct about northern reformers' visions for the future of freedpeople in the South. With the civilizing mission, the bourgeois ideals of industrial society could be imposed upon the young bodies of black children (and Native American children, and street children) thus demonstrating for northern audiences their pliability and promise as free laborers rather than slaves.

There were other, more disturbing manifestations of this desire to transform young slaves into free laborers. There is evidence that white northerners in the North applied to the Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana and to missionaries in South Carolina, to have black children sent to them. It was not unusual in the nineteenth century for working class children and poor orphans to be "apprenticed" to employers in exchange for food and shelter. Although ripe for abuse, apprenticeship was used, ostensibly, to keep children out of the streets.¹⁵³ The system, administered by local courts, had a sinister underside after (as we will see in the next chapter) for people of color, free and freed in the antebellum and postbellum South. But in many cases in which northerners' sought black child labor after the Civil War, the arrangements were not proposed as formal apprenticeships, but rather, as a means of employment for freedchildren from the South (only *some* of them orphans or children separated from their families). Indeed, the evidence from northern missionaries and reformers of black children being placed with

¹⁵³ See Chapter 4.

white families in the North suggests that southerners were not the only ones who knew cheap labor when they saw it. It is unclear how many freedchildren might have gone to the North through such arrangements. Most, of course, did not. Yet given what we know of reformers' campaigns marketing the civilizing of the freed black child, their efforts to secure individual children for northern employers seem a logical, if extreme, edge of their philosophy.

In addition to her duties as schoolteacher in South Carolina, Laura Towne also took on the task of finding black children to send to her friends in the North. To a friend she wrote: "I wish you could have the comfort the Heacocks have in the little darkies they sent North. The two young girls are strong and able to do pretty much all the work of the house." She explained that the girls worked without wages "but are to have the privilege of schooling" (a privilege they had in South Carolina, too.) Even more revealing, Towne declared that "the experiment" (referring to the Heacocks' young workers) "has been a perfect success, and every few weeks some one sends to them for another girl or boy, and all have given satisfaction so far."¹⁵⁴ A boy named Pompey Jenkins, about nine years old, whom Towne referred to as "my little oaf" was swept up in her scheme as well. Pompey had suffered mistreatment at the hands of a man who had taken him from the orphan asylum in Charleston to "mind child" and Towne had considered sending him back to the asylum but feared he would suffer a similar fate again. In a letter to a friend, she wrote "Doesn't Mr. Thompson want such a little boy? Tell him this boy is about ten, is black as coal, hearty and strong." Towne recounted that Mrs. Thompson had spoken to her "about bringing a child North" and hoped that she would consider Pompey. "I will

¹⁵⁴ Letter, April 27, 1867, Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 182.

bring him North when I come, without expense to her.”¹⁵⁵ In another letter North, Towne again seemed to be filling orders for children. But the aunt of the child in question was unwilling to send him to the North to work. “About your boy, I can’t get my choice—Evans,” Towne wrote to a friend. “His aunt won’t let him come for even ten dollars a year. I am in some doubt about Solomon being useful. I fear he has been a pet; but there is no hurry, and I am looking round, and, as Solomon is in school every day, I am judging of his capacity by little trials.”¹⁵⁶

Towne was not the only white northerner endeavoring to place freedchildren in northern households as workers. Like Towne, an AMA teacher in Georgia, Rebecca Craighead, enthusiastically sought to accommodate her friends in Ohio who “want[ed] girls.” Craighead had been appointed the matron of the AMA orphanage in Atlanta and did her best to keep freedpeople from interfering with her placement of freedchildren in white homes, in essence, making orphans of them despite protests from their kin. “My idea is that *they* have no further claim upon them, and that we have a right to find homes for such, just as much as though they had no relatives.”¹⁵⁷ Craighead placed out as many children as she could—by one count, as many as eighty-five children at one time—and was eventually censured by her superiors at the AMA.¹⁵⁸

Some in the North, however, appealed directly to the Freedmen’s Bureau for freedchildren. A Mr. John F. Maxfield of New York wrote to Louisiana’s Superintendent of Freedmen, Rev. T.W. Conway, requesting that a “col’d girl” be sent to him, for whom

¹⁵⁵ Letter 12 April 1868, Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 192-194.

¹⁵⁶ Letter 13 February 1874, Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, 234.

¹⁵⁷ Rebecca M. Craighead to Rev. E. Smith, 5 May 1867, Georgia, Archives of the AMA, Amistad Research Center. Quoted in Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 36.

¹⁵⁸ Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 152.

he would furnish the transportation costs. At the bottom of his letter (signed “Your Brother in Christ”) he included a postscript a description not unlike those of a slaveholder in search of a new servant: “...I want a cold girl say 10 years old if possible one that is smart-looking and large enough to wash dishes.” Maxfield was not only specifying a particular kind of worker, he also went further to request that her appearance be to his liking.¹⁵⁹ Another man from New York, apparently a personal friend of Conway’s, also made application on Maxfield’s behalf, stating that Maxfield “is desirous of obtaining a colored girl to take into his family as we have Mary,” suggesting that he, too, had been able to secure custody of another freedgirl. He even suggested a girl named Cecilia, whom he apparently encountered on a visit to Conway’s house in Louisiana.¹⁶⁰ He assured Conway that the child “would have a good home in Mr. Maxfield’s family,” though he failed to mention the duties of dishwasher. Such proposals illuminate the extent to which black children after emancipation were still vulnerable to being valued and marketed according to their capacity to labor. Northerners’ descriptions of freedchildren, in words painfully close to the language of the slave market—Pompey as “black as coal, hearty and strong” or a girl “smart-looking and large enough to wash dishes”—reinforced the idea that their bodies were being bought as well as their labor.

According to *Harper’s Weekly*, clearly there was a demand for the labor of freedchildren, or at least an enthusiasm for placing out black “orphans.” The magazine ran a story on “Southern Emigrants” in 1867, featuring the Freedmen’s Bureau’s

¹⁵⁹ John F. Maxfield to T.W. Conway, New York, 29 June 1865. Asst Comr, Letters Received, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives, (hereafter BRFAL), microfilm Reel 11. On slaveholders’ painfully similar behavior in the slave market see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁶⁰ Clarke J. Hepburn to T.W. Conway, Brooklyn, NY, 29 June 1865. Asst Comr, Letters Received, BRFAL, Reel 8.

“Employment Agency” (a unit established under General Otis Howard in Washington, D.C. intended to lessen the crowded conditions among freedpeople who had migrated into the city from the South.)¹⁶¹ The government agency collaborated with private agencies and societies so that “the negroes are induced to come North as house-servants and field laborers.” In the same article, the writer announced that the colored orphan asylum at Charleston was full of children and that “Miss Chloe Merrick of Syracuse, New York” had opened a similar asylum in the former home of the rebel General Finnigan, at Fernandina, Florida. “Each of these ladies furnish Northern people with these young colored children as servants upon application, and our citizens in want of such, or anxious to find worthy objects of sympathy and charity, are advised to apply direct to these ladies.”¹⁶² The writer thus left open the possibility that while some might seek a cheap source of labor among orphaned freedchildren, others might reach out to former slave children out of “sympathy and charity.”

Orphaned freedchildren or children who had been left in orphan asylums until their families could care for them were the primary objects of northern reformers attentions in campaigns for sending freedchildren to the North. Laura Haviland, working for the Freedmen’s Aid Commission, passed through Missouri in 1865, gathering orphaned and destitute children, along with a few mothers and grandmothers, all to be taken to an orphanage in Michigan. According to Haviland, while waiting with her group at a train depot, “various remarks were made as to what I was going to do with all this company”:

¹⁶¹ Harrison, “Welfare and Employment Policies of the Freedmen’s Bureau,” 75-76.

¹⁶² “Southern Emigrants,” *Harper’s Weekly*, vol. 8 no. 3, 1867, Pp. 492-493.

Said one, "I reckon she's got a big plantation to stock with a picked set of young niggers, she's going to train to her own liking." Said another, "I am going to ask where she is going with them." At length one ventured, "Will you please excuse me, madam, if I ask you where you are taking all this company?"

"Certainly," was my answer; "I am glad to inform you. I am taking these orphan children, who have been picked up on the streets, and out of freedmen's homes, to an orphan school in Michigan. By order of the State Freedmen's Aid Commission, they will be sent to school until good homes can be secured for them, where they will be taught habits of industry, as well as to improve their intellects. We of the North think they can learn, if an opportunity is provided."¹⁶³

Haviland's explanation of where she found the children is both a story of discovery and of rescue. Some of the children she had "picked up on the streets" (as a reformer would ragged, unattended children) and others she "[picked] out of freedmen's homes." Her plan was to find "good homes" for them where they would be "taught the habits of industry" (again, the irony of such statements directed at freedchildren is almost too much to take) and where they would become educated. Her answer, by her account, seemed to satisfy the questioner. Another bystander, "who had a large number of slaves," told her they would be better off with her [going north], since it "would be a right smart of a while before it'll be settled here to have schools for 'em."¹⁶⁴

If some northern reformers thought they were helping freedchildren by sending them North, the outcome of these experiments was always uncertain. Catherine Lawrence, for instance, who had "discovered" and adopted Fanny Lawrence, placed Fanny's two sisters in northern households with the understanding that the girls would be well cared for and educated. When Lawrence returned later to see the girls, however, she found to her dismay that both had been put to work as domestic servants for the families

¹⁶³ Laura Smith Haviland, *A Woman's Life-Work* (New York: Arno Press, 1969[1881]), 377.

¹⁶⁴ Haviland, *A Woman's Life-Work*, 377-378.

who had agreed to adopt them, and had not received the promised schooling.¹⁶⁵ Towne, in her letters at least, did not pretend to send children North for any other purpose than to fill the labor needs of her friends. If the freedchild represented, for northerners, the future of the South—the ragged child redeemed—she also represented the working-class future of black people. As we will see in the next chapter, children who were sent North with the aid of reformers were often sent without the permission of parents or guardians, who then filed fervent complaints with the government to have their children returned.

It was not long, however, before benevolent societies would turn their attentions away from the freedchildren in the South. As early as 1867, societies that needed private funding to continue their work were already aware of the northern public's waning enthusiasm for charitable contributions. That year, a leader of the Friend's Freedmen's Association requested their teachers in the South to enlist the help of the freedmen's themselves to raise money, as "the zeal of the Northern people is beginning to flag perceptively."¹⁶⁶ Public support of government aid, too, was falling precipitously. In his final report as the Freedmen's Bureau's superintendent for education, in 1870, John W. Alvord, predicted: "Education associations, unaided by Government, will of necessity largely fall off. The states South, as a whole, awake but slowly to the elevation of their lower classes. No one of them is fully prepared with funds, buildings, teachers, and actual organizations to sustain these schools."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Catherine S. Lawrence, *Autobiography, or, Sketch of Life and Labors of Miss Catherine S. Lawrence who in Early Life Distinguished Herself as a Bitter Opponent of Slavery and Intemperance, and Later in Life as a Nurse in the Late War; and for Other Patriotic and Philanthropic Services*, rev. ed. (Albany: James B. Lyon, Printer, 1896), 184-190.

¹⁶⁶ Phillip C. Garrett to George Dixon, 19 October 1867, Friends Freedmen's Association, letters sent, 1867-1868, Friends Freedmen's Association Records. Quoted in Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, 243.

¹⁶⁷ Alvord, *Tenth Semi-Annual Report*, 3.

A letter from Quaker Lucretia Mott begins to explain the shift in attention away from the plight of the South's freedpeople, even among those engaged in benevolent and missionary activities. Expressing frustration with fund raising efforts she wrote in 1869: "The claims of the Indians—so long injured & cheated & wronged in so many ways, seem now, with many of our Friends, to take the place of the Freedmen, so that we can hardly collect money eno' to pay our 8 or 10 teachers [in the]] South." Lucretia Mott would later report, too, that donations for freedpeople in the South were slow in coming because people thought the government would pay the bills if private money did not.¹⁶⁸

Mott's fears about the shifting attentions of her fellow reformers, and those of her government, were not unfounded. In 1877, the Congressional compromise that put a Republican in the White House also withdrew federal troops from the South, leaving the freed black population to fend for itself against the terrible swell of white supremacy. Meanwhile, in the twenty years following the Civil War, and as a result of the last Indian wars, the destitute Native American population had been confined to reservations in the West. Reformers and missionaries, concerned that reservations only reinforced the old "Indian ways", began to focus renewed energy on civilizing the Native American population and aiding their assimilation into American society, with particular attention and resources devoted to the education of Native American children. Reformers were not the only ones directing resources towards the assimilation of Native Americans. With the Dawes Act (1887) the federal government had begun to break up the reservation system in favor of private property in the form of individual land holdings, in an effort to

¹⁶⁸ Mott to Josephine Griffing, 25 December 1869 and 17 May 1870, in Josephine Sophia Griffing Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. Quoted in Lori D. Ginzburg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 179.

teach the Indians the fundamentals of capitalism. And by 1891, attendance at government-sponsored reservation schools was mandatory.¹⁶⁹

In their propaganda campaign for the assimilation of the American Indian, however, reformers seem to have drawn upon earlier campaigns for inspiration, particularly regarding representations of the Native American child. The children attending the Indian Industrial Training School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, established in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt, were the subjects of some of the most familiar images of Native Americans in the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁰ The Carlisle photographs appeared in sets of two, such as the portraits of Chiricahua Apaches taken upon their arrival at Carlisle from Fort Marion, Florida in 1886. (After the surrender of the Chiricahua Apaches fighting with Geronimo that year, the rest of the Chiricahua tribe had been sent by train to Florida and housed in a decrepit military fort.) The children in the photographs had been sent to Pennsylvania, where they were to learn American ways, at a far remove from the supposedly un-civilized, un-Christian practices of their people. Pratt used the

¹⁶⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 63. See also Frederick E. Hoxie, *The Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians 1888-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁰ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 36-51. Pratt also worked closely with General Samuel Chapman Armstrong of the Hampton Institute, in Virginia, an industrial school established for the children of former slaves that also began accepting Native Americans in the 1870s. Lonna M. Malmshiemer, "'Imitation White Man': Images of Transformation at the Carlisle Indian School," *Studies in Visual Communication* 11 No. 4 (Fall 1985): 54-75. See also Laura Turner, "John Nicholas Choate and the Production of Photography at the Carlisle Indian School," and Molly Faust, "Visual Propaganda at the Carlisle Indian School," both printed in the exhibition catalog for *Visualizing a Mission: Artifacts and Imagery of the Carlisle Indian School 1879-1918* (Carlisle, PA: Dickinson College) Pp. 14-23. Such photographs were also reproduced as illustrations. See "Indian Education at Hampton and Carlisle," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 62 (April 1881): 659-675. Accessed through "The Making of America" <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu>.

photographs, taken by photographer John Nicholas Choate, as proof of his successes at the Carlisle Institute.¹⁷¹ [Figures 16, 17]

The viewer first sees the children on their arrival, dirty and disheveled, some in traditional dress, others in rumpled, second hand jackets and pants, several of them barefoot. In the second frame, the same children appeared again, a few months later, in a portrait studio, posed standing and seated. The boys had dressed in tailored suits and the girls wore neat blouses and trim skirts with pleats along the bottom. There were many other such portraits made of Native American children in the late nineteenth century, accompanied by many of the same convictions about the civilizing of a “savage” race that accompanied the northern reform efforts in the postbellum South. For Native Americans, one reformer declared; “We need to *awaken in him wants.*” It was necessary “to get the Indian out of the blanket and into trousers—and trousers with a pocket in them, and with a *pocket that aches to be filled with dollars!*” Pratt himself argued that savagery was a product of cultural learning, not a condition natural to Native Americans as a race, and that the habits of industry and discipline could be taught to Indian children, just as to white children.¹⁷² The rhetorical and visual similarities between efforts to reform freedchildren and assimilate Native American children, therefore (like those between street children, African children, and freedchildren) illuminate the evolving strategies and priorities of nineteenth-century reform. But perhaps more important, they show us that reformers’ visions of black freedom in the South were part of a longer and wider story of “savagery” and “civilization” in the nineteenth century. It was this story that the portrait of Harriet Murray, Elsie, and Puss, with backdrop and open book, began to tell.

¹⁷¹ Despite Pratt’s claims, many Native American children struggled to preserve their own identity in the face of his civilizing mission. See Adams, *Education for Extinction*, chap. 7.

¹⁷² Quoted in Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 23; on Pratt’s philosophy, 52.