

Caleb Smith Harriet Jacobs among the Militants:
Transformations in Abolition's Public Sphere,
1859–61

By the fall of 1859, Harriet Jacobs had come to doubt that her autobiography would ever appear in print. She had quarreled with Harriet Beecher Stowe, who condescendingly offered to write up some of the details of Jacobs's life for the *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853). She had traveled to London, seeking an English publisher, but returned to New York disappointed and embarrassed. According to Jean Fagan Yellin's biography, though, Jacobs was "shaken out of her melancholy" and inspired to finish her manuscript in October when she learned of the raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, undertaken by John Brown and his interracial band of insurgents.¹ She contacted the radical Boston publishing house Thayer and Eldridge, which brought out the Scottish abolitionist James Redpath's *The Public Life of Captain John Brown* and his collection of documents relating to the Brown case, *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*, in 1860. The firm produced the plates for Jacobs's narrative, then went bankrupt before publication was complete. The title page of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which was finally printed and bound in January of 1861, indicated simply that it had been "published for the author." But Jacobs made the connection explicit when she composed, as her concluding chapter, "a tribute to Brown."²

As readers of *Incidents* know, the piece on the martyr of Harper's Ferry does not appear in the book. Now lost, it was apparently suppressed by Lydia Maria Child, the prominent white abolitionist who, at the request of Thayer and Eldridge, had agreed to edit and promote Jacobs's narrative. Child gave her reasons, briefly, in a letter

dated August 13, 1860: "I think the last Chapter, about John Brown, had better be omitted. It does not naturally come into your story, and the M. S. is already too long. Nothing can be so appropriate to end with, as the death of your grand mother."³ Child explained her objections in terms of the organic development of Jacobs's narrative, and of a gendered propriety—but as studies of these negotiations by Bruce Mills and Albert Tricomi suggest, the revision was part of Child's larger design for *Incidents*, an effort to dissociate it from Brown's militancy and align it with the Garrisonian circle's program of "nonviolent reform."⁴

It was a delicate operation. *Incidents* was revised, published, and reviewed at a moment of crisis for the antislavery press. Between 1850 and 1859, William Lloyd Garrison and others had articulated a well-developed theory of how literature should move reading publics to action. Its appeal to the sympathetic heart would inspire a feminine readership to exercise moral influence over the male authorities who made and enforced the law, and its invocation of a "higher law" would provoke a limited form of civil disobedience against the fugitive slave statutes. In the wake of Brown's raid, with the wide circulation of his prison writings and his "Address to the Virginia Court," the antislavery pacifists confronted the possibility that such documents might exhort readers towards a more radical, militant opposition to the slave codes, including armed intervention in the South. The incendiary power of language became a matter of controversy and careful scrutiny. Brown's case divided the movement not only on the problem of violent means in the struggle but also on the question of how reading publics could be expected to respond to published indictments of the slave law. Would they exert their influence on the legislatures and the judges in the interest of gradual reform, or would they enforce their own judgments with force?

Previous scholarship on Child's suppression of Jacobs's final chapter emphasizes the editor's effort to make the narrative conform to the generic conventions of sentimental literature. Tricomi argues that Child "directed [Jacobs's manuscript] away from the combustible militarism of [Brown's raid] . . . and foregrounded those melodramatic and sentimental parts illustrating the destruction of families and especially the sexual victimization of girls and women under slavery, along with the devastating effects this abuse brought to their grieving mothers."⁵ Mills seems to think that such a revision was for the best, while Tricomi attempts to reimagine the radical version that may have been destroyed

in revision. Beneath this apparent disagreement is a deeper consensus: both interpretations of the episode maintain the categorical opposition between a Romantic masculinity and a sentimental femininity that has governed so much commentary on antebellum literary history.⁶ As represented in the abolitionist press, however, Brown's martyrdom was a story rich with melodrama, and Jacobs's testimony to the sexual vulnerability of enslaved people, men as well as women, elicited responses other than the cathartic tears of her Christian sisters. Indeed, what makes this partially lost episode so compelling is its potential to unsettle such commonplace distinctions, which continue to influence scholarship on antislavery literature.

More significantly, both Mills and Tricomi assume that Child accomplished her design—that *Incidents* became, under her guidance, a sentimental appeal for nonviolent moral and legal reform. Focusing on the vexed issue of Jacobs's self-expression, on the scene of writing and revision, they suggest that the militant aspects of her work are available only through an effort to reconstruct her "intentions" out of the incomplete record of her correspondence ("A," 219). Another prospect comes into view, though, from a historical study that turns from the scene of composition to that of reception. For the most part, the anti-slavery press did welcome the book in Child's terms, as an exposé of cruelty that would move public sentiment against the slaveholders, but at least one published response predicted that Jacobs's testimony would move its public to wrathful violence. Writing for the *Weekly Anglo-African* in April of 1861, the anonymous reviewer praised Jacobs's "words of fire" and prophesied that her book would provoke readers to "tear down the cursed system which makes such records possible."⁷ No less than Brown's jeremiads from the Charles Town jail, Jacobs's *Incidents* was, in this account, an incendiary call to arms. The reviewer welcomed Jacobs's contribution to a circum-Atlantic project of black resistance, liberation, and uplift that traversed the boundaries of race and gender. Close attention to the context and rhetoric of this review, I will argue, reveals how it restored the connection between Jacobs and Brown that Child had tried to sever.

This essay revisits Jacobs's *Incidents*, then, with special attention to its distinctive mode of address, namely testimony, and to the kind of persuasion it was imagined to exercise in the volatile circumstances of 1861. Along the way, it returns to the question posed in Charles Nichols's classic article, "Who Read the Slave Narratives?" and draws from recent studies of the antislavery press by scholars including

Dwight McBride, Robert Fanuzzi, and Jeannine Marie DeLombard.⁸ Rather than emphasizing the ethical and political aspects of Jacobs's critique that have become perceptible through the lenses of later theories, I examine how *Incidents* appealed to the public sphere of its own time, where readers were invited to constitute themselves as normative communities by making judgments about the legitimacy of law. I should probably admit, from the start, that my endeavor involves some informed speculation about Jacobs's lost chapter and about the source of the *Anglo-African's* review. But my reading is no more speculative than those concerned with the author's intentions, and I hope to rest my claims, finally, on the significant evidence that the *Anglo-African* conscripted Jacobs's book into the militant cause. The anti-slavery press, I argue, foresaw the narrative's reception not only by an isolated, sympathetic "Reader" but also by a counterpublic, a collective readership animated by a common assent to its invocation of higher law. At stake in the forgotten struggle to shape the reception of *Incidents*, beyond the hidden truth about the slave system, was the capacity of a sovereign community, through reform or revolution, to transform the world.

From Critique to Testimony

Incidents has been canonized as a classic critique of the ideologies that supported the enslavement of African Americans and the sexual subjection of women in the nineteenth century. Hazel Carby describes Jacobs's book as "the most sophisticated, sustained narrative dissection of the conventions of true womanhood by a black woman author before emancipation."⁹ In similar terms, Mark Rifkin calls it "an incredibly sophisticated analysis of the relation between law, white privilege, and ideologies of private space."¹⁰ In an illuminating interpretation that applies the methods of critical legal studies to place Jacobs's work in the context of antebellum criminal trials, Saidiya Hartman argues that "the textual performance of seduction" in *Incidents* "reveal[s] the role of law in sustaining and defining virtue."¹¹ The appeal of Jacobs's work, in all of these influential accounts, is in its capacity to expose—dissecting, analyzing, revealing—the structures of power that would otherwise lie concealed within such notions as benevolent paternalism, feminine chastity, and domestic love.

It would take one who had endured slavery, according to Jacobs, to bring its dark secrets to light. "Only by experience can any one realize

how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations.”¹² The men and women who worked with the author to publish and promote *Incidents* were careful to represent it as an honest, uncoerced account of her experiences, related in her own voice. Much of the critical commentary on the narrative, too, concerns the question of authenticity. Yellin’s studies of Jacobs’s life and times established that her narrative had in fact been “written by herself,” as the original title page indicated, with only minor revisions by Child.¹³ Still, the legibility of the narrative as a work of ideology critique depends on the critic’s responsiveness to its “sophistication,” the literary strategies through which it exposes the violence of a political and legal system. Jacobs pointed out again and again that her book was a sincere and factual record, but critics have insisted on the artfulness of its composition, which “reimagin[es] the possibilities and economics of citizenship” and persuades its readers through a literary seduction.¹⁴ Indeed, Jacobs’s complicated relationship with her audience—her efforts to navigate the sexual norms of the evangelical abolitionists as well as the contested status of African American self-expression—required elaborate techniques of encoding and displacement.¹⁵

Studies of the rhetoric and form of *Incidents* have demonstrated its subtle complexities, establishing it as a literary work that demands close reading as well as careful historical contextualization. The critics have exploded the received wisdom about sensational genres inherited even by Nichols, who assumed that slave narratives “lacked any significant literary quality.” In the process, however, the analysis of Jacobs’s ideological and legal critiques has tended to set aside what Nichols calls the “crucial problem” of the narrative’s “timeliness,” its capacity to make a difference in its own time and place.¹⁶ How did Jacobs and her collaborators imagine that a reading public, in the crisis years of 1859 to 1861, would respond to her protest? By what media and by what means, in other words, might the critique of the slave codes be expected to lead to their abolition?

These are questions about the antislavery movement’s conception of the public sphere. In order to address them, it may be useful to approach *Incidents* not as a work of critique but as a piece of testimony. Jacobs, of course, described her desire to address the public in this way: “I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is” (*I*, 6). If critique is an interpretive practice that seeks to disclose the operations of power within normative discourses and institutionalized knowledges,

testimony might be defined, by contrast, as a ceremonial mode of truth-telling performed before a public invested with the authority to decide a question of justice. The distinction is imperfect, of course, but it does help describe how the abolitionist press understood its own project.¹⁷

As DeLombard explains, Garrison and his influential circle of authors, editors, and publishers had been working since the 1830s to shape a distinctive tradition of antislavery literature that “exploited the public’s enthusiasm for legal spectatorship even as it appropriated the imagery of the courtroom to bring the ‘crime’ of slavery before the court of public opinion.”¹⁸ Circulating the testimony of enslaved and formerly enslaved people, the antislavery press helped to create a tribunal of mass public sentiment that could be imagined as an alternative to the courts, an arena of justice that was both more democratic and more capable of honoring the higher truths of divine law. The movement circulated such testimony in an effort to turn the collective conscience of a reading public against the statutes of the legislatures and the decisions of the judiciary. It was before this print-mediated court of public opinion that Jacobs was called as a witness.

By 1861, the personal stories of fugitives and ex-slaves had become a familiar part of the abolitionists’ effort to move public sentiment against the slaveholders, but Jacobs’s book offered the rare testimony of a woman, documenting the peculiar terrors of sexual vulnerability and violation. An 1862 review of the English edition referred to Jacobs’s book as “the first personal narrative in which one of that sex upon whom chattel servitude falls with the deepest and darkest shadow has ever described her own bitter experience.”¹⁹ Jacobs presented herself as a woman addressing other women, on behalf of her sisters in bondage. “There is no shadow of law to protect [the slave girl] from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men” (*I*, 45). At times, she drew from the conventions of the sentimental novel, appealing to the sympathetic heart and hoping to reach a wide audience through international circulation. But she began by asking for God’s blessing and by pledging to tell the truth: “Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction” (*I*, 5).

Jacobs’s story, as Hartman observes, is recounted “from the perspective of the dispossessed and non-contractual subject” (*SS*, 103). Enslavement in this narrative is not merely a matter of physical domination. It is a condition of insecurity and exposure that follows from the

law's refusal to recognize the validity of verbal commitments. "No promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding," Jacobs writes (*I*, 13). Loans made in good faith are never repaid. The last wishes of the dying are forgotten or ignored. Pledges of love are dishonored. Jacobs describes a whole range of swindles and betrayals, but she gives special attention to the problem of marriage. A wedding ceremony among the enslaved is "a mere form, without any legal value" (*I*, 217). "The husband of a slave has no power to protect her," and the young narrator has no hope of entering "a home shielded by the laws" (*I*, 59, 83). In such a world, the ordinary conventions of the romantic love plot have no place. Another kind of narrative will have to be told: "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage" (*I*, 302). Thus the problem of legal promise making gives the narrative its plot. Jacobs describes her flight from a corrupt territory of broken homes and empty oaths into a space of freedom where she and her interlocutors can bind themselves through speech acts.

Conceiving of her book as a kind of evidence against the slaveholders, Jacobs submitted it to the court of public opinion. She committed herself to "the painful task of confessing," and she addressed her audience as a tribunal of judgment in her case: "Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader!" (*I*, 83, 86). The offense to be expunged, however, was not her escape from the house of her master, Dr. Flint, an act that she assumed would be recognized by an antislavery readership as legitimate disobedience. Jacobs was openly, unapologetically defiant of the slave codes: "I regarded such laws as the regulations of robbers, who had no rights that I was bound to respect" (*I*, 281). Her transgression, the crime to be delicately revealed and sympathetically viewed, was her decision to become the lover of the white man she called Mr. Sands, in hopes that he might help her and her children obtain their freedom.

The sacrifice of feminine virtue is a "painful and humiliating memory," but Jacobs makes no attempt to conceal it. She offers a full confession: "I know I did wrong" (*I*, 86). She submits her case to the reader's judgment, and she asks for a pardon. In the process, she hopes to revise the terms in which her plea is decided. "The slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (*I*, 86). Indeed, the ambition of Jacobs's narrative is to transfer the burden of readers' moral condemnation from herself to the system of slavery. She will become, for them, the key witness to an otherwise secret knowledge.

“Could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, *Slavery is damnable!*” (I, 38). Her testimony will provide a corrective to the public’s incomplete vision, provoking an utterance of judgment, a curse against the slaveholders.

In all of these crucial passages, where Jacobs reflects on the genre and reception of her book, she attends not only to the hidden violence of slavery but also, with great care, to the public life of the law, with its ceremonies of performative speech and its rituals of justice. “One of the most notable . . . aspects of Jacobs’s critique of white power,” Rifkin notes, “is the extent to which it references national law and symbols.”²⁰ Born in 1813, Jacobs had been a teenager at the time of Nat Turner’s insurrection in Southampton, Virginia. She described the terror that came to her home town of Edenton, North Carolina, in its wake—vigilante mobs tearing through the houses of the enslaved; innocent men and women framed for conspiracy; confessions forced with the lash and the paddle. She devoted a chapter to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and to the organized civil disobedience in the Northern states, pausing to praise a Massachusetts politician who had sheltered her for a time: “This honorable gentleman would not have voted for the Fugitive Slave Law, as did the senator in ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’” (I, 292). (Here she carried on her quarrel with Stowe by insisting, again, on the difference between her testimony and the novelist’s fiction.) In private correspondence and in the pages of her narrative, she lamented the Supreme Court’s decision in the Dred Scott case (1857) as an outrage against black humanity.²¹

Most of all, Jacobs sought to expose how the legal dehumanization and dishonor of the enslaved encroached into the nominally private scenes of domestic life. Her narrative, in Carby’s reading, “demystified a convention that appeared as the obvious, common-sense rules of behavior and revealed the concept of true womanhood to be an ideology, not a lived set of social relations.”²² Detailing her delicate erotic negotiations with her master and others, Jacobs resisted the rhetoric of seduction which, in antebellum courtrooms, had recast white rapists as the victims of women’s erotic designs. Thus Jacobs’s rewriting of the scene of seduction, as Hartman argues, accomplished “a reversal in which the standards of virtue are deemed inappropriate in measuring the lives of enslaved women” (SS, 105).²³

For Hartman, the critical insight of *Incidents* is that feminine virtue, far from being a quality exercised by any transcendent, au-

tonomous self, is historically contingent, secured by the structures of law and power. Thus Jacobs's critical performance "historicizes virtue" (SS, 104). What remains unhistoricized in Hartman's account, however, is the relation between Jacobs's testimony and its reception by the reading public to whom she addressed her appeal. Hartman writes that *Incidents* "creates a dramatic vortex that engulfs the reader and vividly displays the relentless forces of sexual undoing; even the most obdurate reader cannot resist such entreaties" (SS, 106). This is, in its way, a fascinating metaphor for nondeliberative persuasion. But the sense that Jacobs's narrative was an irresistible force, compelling the assent of every reader, seems to be projected onto 1861 from the perspective of a late twentieth-century interpretive community, where Jacobs's critique of the slave system has become a norm.

The point is not the obvious one, that Southern and proslavery readers in 1861 would have done everything they could to discredit Jacobs's testimony. Rather, in the months of crisis leading up to the Civil War, there was a deep fissure within the antislavery campaign itself. The audience before whom Jacobs testified was divided between two modes of fidelity to higher law, and its reception of her narrative was shaped by the disagreement. Under what circumstances might the standards of virtue have been "deemed inappropriate," and by whom? What sort of audience might have been expected to hear Jacobs's testimony and to pronounce judgment against the slaveholders? These questions, which preoccupied the antislavery press from 1859 to 1861, are basic to an understanding of how Jacobs's narrative could have been imagined as an appeal to a contemporary public capable of reforming the law, or as a call to militant resistance.

The Rights of Conscience and the Obligations of Law

In the decade between the Compromise of 1850 and the outbreak of the Civil War, the Christian antislavery movement in the North developed a program for reform that combined moral suasion with occasional acts of civil disobedience, especially against the Fugitive Slave Law. The organizing idea behind much of this resistance was that of higher law, or the duty of conscience in relation to the will of God, as distinguished from the citizen's obligations to the state. Invoked by New York's William H. Seward on the floor of the US Senate in 1850,

the higher law soon became a key concept for the antislavery movement and one of the most controversial topics of the antebellum period. An 1851 pamphlet described a civil society animated and factionalized along these lines: "It is agitated in clubs and coffee-rooms, in the cars and on the steamboats, in the street, the store and the market-place; everywhere where men go, goes with them this inevitable idea, of the conflict between the Rights of Conscience and the Obligations of Law."²⁴

Both the advocates and the critics of higher-law doctrine, however, knew that it was a dangerous idea, easily appropriated by enthusiasts and potentially tending toward faction and strife. The minister John C. Lord, addressing New York's "Union Safety Committee," foresaw an "abyss of ruin" opened up by "fanaticism and treason": "the spirit of disunion, once evoked, may extend its malign influences until . . . having accomplished its ruin of the South, the states at the North should divide, and each set up for itself."²⁵ The many sermons and pamphlets that invoked the will of God against the statutes and the courts, therefore, did their best to establish a set of regulating boundaries, managing the reception of higher-law exhortations by an unpredictable public. Indeed, while scholarship on higher law in the antislavery campaign has focused on the content of its arguments against the slave codes, discussions of the concept in the antebellum pulpit and press attended with equal care to the performative force of its invocation.²⁶

Warning against the destructive tendencies of higher law, the Illinois minister J. M. Peck attacked its adherents not only on substance but also on "style": "What a catalogue of fanaticism, insubordination, criminality, and folly, is here given; and yet this is a true picture of hundreds of fanatics, and of the style and spirit of their address, in the northern States."²⁷ In Massachusetts, meanwhile, the minister J. G. Forman, who had been removed from his pulpit in West Bridgewater on account of his radical stance against slavery, insisted that "the Christian citizen reserves to himself the right to judge in every case whether the legislation of a government is consistent with the law of God"—but Forman's call for civil disobedience began and ended with resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law in the North.²⁸ Even the defenders of higher law were wary of "false prophets" whose enthusiastic exhortations might bring on the horrors of war.²⁹

As for the higher law in imaginative literature, the version endorsed by Child and her circle was most clearly illustrated by such works as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In a letter discussing her involvement with

Jacobs's narrative, Child paused to observe, "I think, upon the whole, I prefer Mrs. Stowe to all other writers in the world."³⁰ The scene cited by Jacobs, for instance, describes how Senator and Mrs. Bird react to the heartrending testimony of the fugitive Eliza. The demure lady of the house responds with a critique of the Fugitive Slave Law and a pledge to civil disobedience: "It's a shameful, wicked, abominable law, and I'll break it, for one, the first time I get a chance."³¹ Moved by the moral influence of his wife, the senator donates ten dollars to the fugitive's cause and, in a clandestine act of subversion against the law he helped to establish, arranges her passage northward. The man of public authority has abandoned the logic of political compromise and market negotiation. The moral power of women's appeal to the sympathetic heart, exercised in the private space of the kitchen, has made him weep with regret and give his money away in charity. Along the way, though, the range of his action is clearly circumscribed. Eliza is no Dred, and the secretive civil disobedience practiced by the sympathetic Birds stops well short of insurrection.

In the last months of 1859, as John Brown's trial in Virginia became the defining mass-media event of the season, the abolitionist press was exposed to renewed charges of stirring up rebellion with its reckless invocations of higher law. Brown's widely reprinted "Address to the Virginia Court" cited the "law of God" as his guiding principle, against the corrupt statutes of the slaveholding states: "Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life, for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this Slave country, whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments,—I say, let it be done!"³² Brown foretold his own martyrdom, and his letters and speeches seemed, to some, to recruit their readers to take up the fight that he had begun. In a frequently quoted note to Virginia Governor Henry Wise, composed on the day of his execution, Brown assumed the authority of a judge, pronouncing a verdict and sentence on the state: "I, John Brown, am quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood."³³

This time, the description of the violent tendencies of higher-law rhetoric did not come only from its antagonists in the unionist or proslavery camps. Analyzing the style, circulation, and reception of Brown's writings, Henry David Thoreau's "The Last Days of John Brown" (1860) described how a "circle" of readers had been summoned to militant action. These men and women were so "wonderfully stirred" by

Brown's published words, Thoreau observed, that not even the ideal of the rule of law could justify his hanging.³⁴ To them, Brown had exposed a truth about justice that was ordinarily shrouded by the language of the law. "They saw that what was called order was confusion, what was called justice, injustice, and that the best was deemed the worst."³⁵ Exhorted like a congregation to witness Brown's incendiary "revelation," these militants would not condemn him based on the dead letter of a statute; they heard the law itself indicted according to the higher standard of justice he invoked. "The great lesson of the tragedy," as the Reverend George Cheever put it in a sermon on Harper's Ferry, "is this: If the men of peace will not apply God's law against the sin of Slaveholding, in the shape of argument and earnest truth and the maledictions of God, the men of war will put it in the shape of bullets, and fight it out, and God will let them."³⁶ Brown's texts led a growing community to feel that the slaveholding legal order had no foundation in their assent. It aligned the will of this faction with another, more just law that awaited a revolutionary founding.

"At the time Child was revising Jacobs's manuscript," Tricomi observes, "John Brown had become a polarizing figure not only for the North and South but among abolitionists as well" ("A," 244). Pacifists like Garrison and Child found themselves accused of recklessness and rabble-rousing, and they did their best to defend their position in the press. Not since 1851 had they made such a systematic effort to define the obligations of conscience in relation to the rule of law. They revisited the problem of civil disobedience, reflecting with a new clarity on the modes of address through which they hoped to turn their public against the slave system.

The celebrated minister Henry Ward Beecher, Stowe's brother, was one of several writers who set out to distinguish his antislavery principles from Brown's doomed, fanatical raid. Beecher freely acknowledged that he had the "reputation," especially in the South, "of being a tolerably stout abolitionist,"³⁷ but he would not allow Brown's folly to represent the cause. "Because [slavery] is a great sin, because it is a national curse, it does not follow that we have a right to say any thing . . . that we may happen to please. We certainly have no right to attack it in any manner that will gratify men's fancies or passions" ("S," 263). Beecher described Brown's raid as a "miserable" piece of military incompetence, the "failure" of an enthusiast; against such feverish aggression, he raised a call for "Christian quietness and

patient waiting" ("S," 263, 265). He glorified the union as a sacred spiritual brotherhood, binding North and South in "a common national life" ("S," 263).

It is easy to imagine how Thoreau, not to speak of the insurgents who had fought with Brown, would have appraised Beecher's sermon. (Thoreau's "Last Days" included a contemptuous reference to an unnamed "preacher" who "eulogized the man, but said that his act was a failure."³⁸) For Redpath, Brown's first biographer and his faithful defender in the press, Beecher seemed to have delivered the supreme document of the Northern ministry's cowardice. Redpath had emigrated to the United States from England in 1849, "in the wake of the Chartist agitation," bringing with him, as Albert Von Frank shows, a distinctive style of revolutionary politics that distinguished him and his circle from the pacifist Garrisonians.³⁹ Reprinting Beecher's text in *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*, Redpath singled it out as a piece of "that hypocritical cant which *talks* of sympathy for the Slave, and, at the same time, extinguishes all effective attempts to help him." Such "pusillanimous preachers" as Beecher were willing to wring their hands and lament the slave system, but they were terrified by the prospect of action.⁴⁰ Redpath's rough distinction between words and deeds, however, did not quite account for the full range of Beecher's program for the antislavery movement. Beecher had his own thoughts on both language and action, and his own vision of how a moral force might bring down the slave system.

Even in the face of the hostile response to Brown's raid, Beecher would not retreat entirely from civil disobedience. "If there were as many laws as there are lines in the Fugitive Slave Law," he declared, "I would disregard every law, but God's, and help the fugitive!" ("S," 267). Returning to the model of higher-law activism that had taken shape in 1850, echoing the Mrs. Bird of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he argued that resistance to such an unjust statute was obedience to God. But Beecher was careful, after Harper's Ferry, to draw a clear boundary around the zone where such resistance should be practiced. In the North, the rights of conscience would prevail in 1860 as they had since 1850—but now the invocation of higher law became an occasion to define its boundaries, the limits of legitimate disobedience. "I do not believe we have a right to carry into the system of slavery exterior discontent" ("S," 267). Beecher pictured a divided nation, a barricade running along its seam. "I stand on the outside of this great cordon of

darkness, and every man that escapes from it, running for his life, shall have some help from me." The free states might remain a field of action, but the South would await the mild, reforming influence of a different kind of moral force.

Condemning Brown's raid, Beecher also lingered over the old man's style of exhortation. He accused Brown of the sin known to the antebellum ministry as "evil speaking": "the *spirit* of rebuke," Beecher wrote, "may be as wicked before God, as the spirit of the evil rebuked" ("S," 264). Nothing was to be gained for the antislavery cause, and much might be lost, in the divisive exhortations Brown was delivering in the courtroom and in the press. The best path toward emancipation was not "revolution"; it was "a change of public opinion in the *whole community*." Brown's fiery rhetoric would provoke faction and strife. Beecher's conciliatory address, by contrast, would seek to improve the world without dividing it against itself. His Christian sympathy, he said, extended to the slaveholder as well as the slave. Despite his recognition of the "great cordon of darkness" that divided North from South, he allowed himself to imagine a national "community" capable of reforming itself through a slow process of reason and reflection, guided by the wisdom of a common God.

"There must be a Christian public sentiment," a normative force that would be felt not only in the legislatures but also in the plantation houses and slave cabins of the South ("S," 278). Indeed, Beecher advised, the work of abolition should begin not at the federal armory but in the domestic interior. The moral force of public sentiment should be brought to bear on the "three elements" at the heart of all civilized and Christian life: female chastity, domestic love, and the bonds of parental affection. "The moment a woman stands self-poised in her own purity," he continues, "the moment man and woman are united together by bonds which cannot be sundered during their earthly life; the moment the right of parents to their children is recognized—that moment there will be a certain sanctity and protection of the Eternal and Divine government resting upon father, and mother, and children; and Slavery will have had its death-blow struck!" ("S," 278). Feminine virtue, holy matrimony, and children: the expansion of these blessings to the enslaved was Beecher's alternative to Brown's militancy. Against the apocalyptic exhortations of the martyr, the preacher offered the alternative of moral influence, spoken in a woman's voice: "I stand up in behalf of two million women who are without a voice, to declare that there ought to be found

in Christianity, somewhere, an influence that shall protect their right to their own persons" ("S," 277). Such was the program of nonviolent abolition that Jacobs's narrative would be invited to serve.

Child had played her own complicated and ambivalent role in the public conversation about Brown's case. "I sympathize with you," she wrote in an open letter addressed to the prisoner in the Charles Town jail, "in your cruel bereavement, your sufferings, and your wrongs. In brief, I love and bless you."⁴¹ She offered to travel to the South, to nurse him in his cell. Soon, she found herself publicly attacked for overstepping the bounds of feminine modesty, and she did her best to answer her critics. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune* dated November 10, 1859, she suggested that she had not intended for her correspondence with Brown and Wise to be made public.⁴² Elsewhere, she seemed to wish that she had never allowed herself to become associated with the Harper's Ferry raid at all, although her pamphlet on the case was a runaway best seller, with over 300,000 copies in print ("A," 244).⁴³ In the end, she defended the rights of antislavery authors to make their case in the court of public opinion, but she also distinguished her own nonviolent ethics from Brown's militancy. "Believing in peace principles, I cannot sympathize with the method you chose to advance the cause of freedom."⁴⁴ This was the perspective she brought to her work on Jacobs's manuscript.

While she and Garrison may have disagreed with Beecher on the question of disunion, they shared his aversion to violence and his faith in the reforming power of moral influence. Child's introduction to *Incidents* recognizes that the "delicate" sexual matters explored in the narrative are likely to scandalize some readers, but she expresses her hope that the exposure of these "monstrous" facts will help to turn public opinion against the slave system. She ends with two calls to action. The first is for women: "I do it with the hope of arousing conscientious and reflecting women at the North to a sense of their duty in the exertion of moral influence on the question of Slavery, on all possible occasions." The second is for men: "I do it with the hope that every man who reads this narrative will swear solemnly before God that, so far as he has power to prevent it, no fugitive from Slavery shall ever be sent back to suffer in that loathsome den of corruption and cruelty" (I, 8). Child's gendered vision of Jacobs's reception recalls the familiar ideology of separate spheres. Women exercise their "moral influence." Men make binding oaths and take public actions.

What may be less apparent, however, is that Child also circumscribes the field of masculine action. Implicitly distinguishing her model of antislavery practice from that of Brown, she calls for civil disobedience against the Fugitive Slave Law, but not against the slave codes in general. Like Beecher's sermon on Brown, Child's introduction to Jacobs's narrative lays a cordon between the Northern field of masculine civil disobedience and a Southern "den of corruption" that awaits the redeeming influence of a woman's voice. Her men solemnly swear before God, but they do not join Brown in cursing the nation. They love and bless the wretched, but they do not quite say, with the readers Jacobs imagined for herself, "*Slavery is damnable.*"

In the same letter that explained the suppression of the Brown chapter, Child asked Jacobs for more details about the experience of North Carolina's enslaved people in the violent reprisal that followed Turner's 1831 revolt: "What were those inflictions? Were any tortured to make them confess? and how? Where any killed? Please write down some of the most striking particulars, and let me have them to insert."⁴⁵ Mills suggests, plausibly, that Child would have expected readers to understand these passages as oblique, coded reflections on the John Brown case.⁴⁶ But Child's express wish was for stories of black suffering, not of insurrection. Jacobs provided the awful details: "Every where men, women, and children were whipped till the blood stood in puddles at their feet. Some received five hundred lashes; others were tied hands and feet, and tortured with a bucking paddle, which blisters the skin terribly" (*I*, 98). Such passages guide the reader's vision away from the scene of armed resistance, toward the "particulars" of abjection and death.

Readers in search of Jacobs's thoughts on the justification and limits of civil disobedience would more likely have sought them in her penultimate chapter, "The Fugitive Slave Law." There, Jacobs took up the crucial relation between the rights of conscience and the obligations of law. Like many others, she saw the 1850 bill as the most egregious corruption of the nation's legal system, proof that the evils of slavery had encroached beyond the borders of the South. She described a "reign of terror" among the African Americans of the Northern states, where "the thrilling voices of poor hunted colored people went up, in an agony of supplication, to the Lord" (*I*, 286). Their cries, she observed, were of no consequence to lawmakers who had sacrificed the Christian commandment of love to the conveniences of security, money, and power.

“What cared the legislators of the ‘dominant race’ for the blood they were crushing out of trampled hearts?” (*I*, 287). Jacobs offered her praise and gratitude to the women and men of conscience who were willing to obey the call of the heart, even if it required them to break the laws of the land.

For the most part, then, Jacobs rehearsed abolitionism’s familiar defense of civil disobedience, emphasizing the assistance granted to fugitives in the North. But Jacobs’s chapter on the Fugitive Slave Law also includes an arresting surprise. This is the story of Luke, an enslaved man from North Carolina who is debased and abused by his “bed-ridden master.” Jacobs describes the master as a “young man [who] became prey to the vices growing out of the ‘patriarchal institution.’” Without giving a name to his “vices,” she lingers over his “excessive dissipation” and his “despotic habits”: “As he lay there on his bed, a mere degraded wreck of manhood, he took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism Some of these freaks were of a nature too filthy to be repeated.” This broken and vicious creature forces Luke to work half-naked, chains him to his bedposts, and flogs him with a cowhide. When the young man’s limbs become completely “palsied,” he is no longer able to raise the lash, but he calls in the local constable to assist him in his despotic business. “Luke learned from experience,” Jacobs writes, “how much more the constable’s strong arm was to be dreaded than the comparatively feeble one of his master.” The agent of law enforcement becomes a kind of prosthetic, extending and fortifying the body of a “disgusting wretch” who is disfigured by his freakish desires (*I*, 288–89).

Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman has done much to unfold the meaning of Luke’s story, showing how, decades before the establishment of legal or medical models of “perversion,” the critique of slavery pushed Jacobs to develop a pathological conception of queer desire: “It is the patriarchal institution, with its emphasis on the master’s entitlement and his unfettered control over the bodies of others that Jacobs holds responsible for the master’s homoerotic desires and behaviors. For her, the master is prey to an institution that corrupts both its victims and its benefactors.”⁴⁷ The reading is true to the spirit of Jacobs’s polemic. What it does not examine, though, is the peculiar placement of the episode in a chapter devoted to the Fugitive Slave Law. Jacobs introduced the passage with a slight awkwardness—“This brings up one of my Southern reminiscences” (*I*, 287). She concluded it by

narrating her encounter with Luke in a Northern city, now a fugitive on his way to Canada. But Jacobs also mentions that Luke escaped from slavery after the death of his cruel master (*I*, 290). The point of documenting the “strangest freaks of despotism” is not simply to justify one man’s flight from intolerable conditions.

The placement of the episode in this particular chapter makes a different kind of sense, though, if it is read in another way, as an allegory of Southern power. Jacobs’s depiction of the “mere degraded wreck of manhood” diagnoses not only the psychology of one master’s desire but also, more generally, the enervated condition of white masculinity under the patriarchal institution. The master is a monster, but he is an absurdly feeble one. Unable even to lift his arm, he is totally dependent on his servants for his daily care and on the institutions of law for his authority. Take away these crutches, and he becomes as helpless as an “infant” (*I*, 288). Such, Jacobs suggests, would be the enemy confronted by the men of the North, when the conflict came at last. Her models of civil disobedience include the benevolent gentlemen and ladies who shelter her from Dr. Flint’s agents, but she also takes the occasion to remember her brother, who responds to the news of the Fugitive Slave Law with a pledge of “stern hostility to our oppressors” (*I*, 287).

In at least one letter, Jacobs expresses her regret that she was not more closely involved in the process of revision: “I know that Mrs Child . . . will strive to do the best she can more than I can ever repay but I ought to have been there that we could have consulted together.”⁴⁸ Like Brown’s “Address to the Virginia Court,” the original conclusion of Jacobs’s *Incidents* may have called on its public to enforce a judgment through violence. Since Jacobs’s final chapter has not survived, it is impossible to know exactly how she may have handled Brown’s case. In the early history of her critical reception, however, is some evidence that the resonance between her testimony and Brown’s address remained audible, at least to a few.

Words of Fire

As Yellin’s biography suggests, the reviews that appeared in the anti-slavery press in the months following the publication of *Incidents* were almost all favorable; the movement welcomed Jacobs’s testimony before the court of public opinion. Closer reading of these notices, though, reveals that the reviewers who praised the book found different ways

of responding to its call. On one side were those who admired the pleasing style and lively plot. Thus the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, a New York paper aligned with the Garrisonian cause of disunion, announced that “the book has a vivid dramatic power as a narrative, and should have a wide circulation.”⁴⁹ The following week, the *Standard* reprinted Jacobs’s preface, Child’s introduction, and authenticating statements by Amy Post and George Lowther. The reviewer imagined how Jacobs’s book might move its readers to action in the cause of reform: “If this narrative of the terrible experiences of a noble woman in slavery could be read at every fireside in the free States, it would kindle such a feeling of moral indignation against the system and its guilty abettors, and such a determination to resist and exterminate it by every legitimate and rightful means, as would put an end, once and forever, to all those projects of compromise by which politicians are now endeavoring to ‘reconstruct’ the broken Union.”⁵⁰ The key phrase, “legitimate and rightful means,” marks the limit of resistance. It draws the line between influence and enthusiasm, between a principled civil disobedience and a fanatical militancy, between the firesides of the free North and the fields of an abandoned South.

To another camp of readers, though, the fire kindled by Jacobs’s narrative promised to burn through all such boundaries. This was the furious reaction of the *Weekly Anglo-African*: “No one can read these pages without a feeling of horror, and a stronger determination arising in them to tear down the cursed system which makes such records possible. Wrath, the fiery messenger which goes flaming from the roused soul and overthrows in its divine fury the accursed tyrannies of earth; will find in these pages new fuel for the fire, and new force for the storm which shall overthrow and sweep from existence American slavery.”⁵¹ In this review, there is no talk of “legitimate and rightful means.” There is a prophesy of apocalyptic wrath against the curse of slavery. The fire in question is no domestic hearth in the free states but a militant movement making its way into the South.

The *Weekly Anglo-African* and its counterpart, the *Anglo-African Magazine*, had been founded two years earlier, in 1859, by the black abolitionist Thomas Hamilton. From the beginning, these periodicals served as a forum for extreme antislavery opinion. In its first year, the *Anglo-African* devoted substantial space and commentary to Brown’s raid, trial, and execution. It compared the martyr of Harper’s Ferry to the enslaved insurrectionist Nat Turner, and it did not shy away from the prospect of intervention in the South.⁵² It recognized

that the mass press had made Brown's death an international spectacle, factionalizing public opinion around a ceremony of punishment: "The lightning wires of the press summoned a larger number of witnesses than ever before looked upon the dying of one man. That sad hour from eleven till noon found concentrated on John Brown's gallows the attention, the sympathy, the hate, or the love of thirty millions of people! What an audience to gather, and how nobly taught!" Emphasizing the heroism and sacrifice of the African American men who had fought with Brown, the *Anglo-African* attacked Henry Ward Beecher's conciliatory sermon as a misrepresentation of the nature and the consequences of this historic crisis.⁵³

In March of 1861, just two months after the appearance of Jacobs's *Incidents*, Hamilton sold the *Anglo-African* to an organization called the Haytian Emigration Bureau. The group's mission was to resettle African Americans to the Caribbean island under the presidency of General Fabre Geffrard. But the head of the Bureau, it turns out, was the fierce disciple of John Brown, James Redpath.⁵⁴ After taking over the paper and the magazine, Redpath disagreed with some of his contributors, including the ex-slave Henry Highland Garnet, about the proposition of resettlement in Haiti, but he did his best to maintain his ties with them in the common cause of radical abolition.⁵⁵ If anything, Redpath took the publication in an even more militant direction. In the installment for April 13, 1861, alongside the review of Jacobs's *Incidents*, he printed one of many calls for rebellion: "Only through the Red Sea of civil war and insurrection can the sins [of the oppressor] be washed away."⁵⁶ The crimes of this guilty land would never be purged away but with blood.

It seems most likely, then, that Redpath himself is the author of the review that harkens to Jacobs's "words of fire." The piece relates a vision of Jacobs's reception that has much in common with his preface to *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*, in which Redpath describes his intention in collecting public responses to Brown's raid as an effort to galvanize militancy. For this editor, the use of antislavery texts was not to inspire Christians to exert their moral influence. It was to fire up an insurrection: "My desire to preserve these papers arises . . . from the hope that I may thereby fan the holy flame that their action kindled, until, becoming a consuming fire, it shall burn up, with thoroughness and speed, every vestige of the crime of American Slavery."⁵⁷ In their cadences, in their imagery, and in their political fury, the lines antici-

pate the “fiery messenger” of the *Anglo-African’s* review of Jacobs’s *Incidents*. In the end, though, what matters is not so much Redpath’s own authorship of the review as its clear identification with the most uncompromising faction of the abolitionist crusade. Reading the two pieces together strongly suggests that the reviewer’s endeavor was to join Jacobs’s narrative to the body of radical writings on Brown, to enlist her narrative and her readers into the cause of insurrection. What the author may or may not have known, along the way, was that Jacobs had made her own effort to forge the same connection. His con-
 scription of Jacobs to the militant cause performed, perhaps unwittingly, an act of curatorial restoration.



A premise of my approach in this essay is that literary interpretation, no less than composition and revision, is performed within specific historical contexts, shaped by the lines of antagonism and affiliation that organize the lives of communities. I have argued that Child’s revisions did not confine readers of Jacobs’s testimony to a nonviolent, reformist response; a militant reception, which may have been truer to Jacobs’s own design, remained available to some. In making this argument for a historical reconstruction of the contexts of critical reading, I would also extend its insights to other territories and other eras. If the premises of the approach are carried all the way through, the opposition between historicism and presentism becomes insubstantial. Readings of *Incidents* by Yellin, Carby, Hartman, and others made their own significant interventions in institutional and intellectual histories. Nichols, for his part, published “Who Read the Slave Narratives?” in 1959, in the midst of the Civil Rights struggle. His project was to transform what had been discounted as a genre of sensational entertainment into a form of evidence. “However overdrawn the abolitionists’ view of slavery, it is doubtful whether anti-slavery men falsified the facts,” he wrote. “The attempt on the part of their detractors to justify slavery and caste status is clearly designed to undermine those basic human rights which the Negro in America is still so often denied.”⁵⁸ The historical study of reception was, itself, undertaken with one eye on the present. It is in this spirit that I have sought to recover some neglected links between Jacobs and the transnational, multiracial, and militant movements of her time.

Notes

- 1 Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 140. Throughout, my account of Jacobs's life and times draws from Yellin's biography and from her edited collection, *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008).
- 2 Yellin, *A Life*, 140.
- 3 Lydia Maria Child to Harriet Jacobs, August 13, 1860; in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:279. See also Yellin, *A Life*, 141.
- 4 Bruce Mills, "Lydia Maria Child and the Ending to Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *American Literature* 64 (June 1992): 256; Albert H. Tricomi, "Harriet Jacobs's Autobiography and the Voice of Lydia Maria Child," *ESQ* 53:3 (2007): 216–52. The episode is also discussed briefly in David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 462.
- 5 Tricomi, "Autobiography," 219. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "A."
- 6 I refer to the polarized understandings of the antebellum canon that emerged from Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977; reprint, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998); and Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985).
- 7 "Linda," *Weekly Anglo-African*, April 13, 1861; reprinted in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:349.
- 8 Charles H. Nichols, "Who Read the Slave Narratives?" (*Phylon Quarterly* 20:2 [1959]: 149–62); Dwight A. McBride, *Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolition, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2001); Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition's Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003); Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007).
- 9 Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 47.
- 10 Mark Rifkin, "'A Home Made Sacred by Protecting Laws': Black Activist Homemaking and Geographies of Citizenship in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *differences* 18:2 (2007), 75.
- 11 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 104. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as SS.
- 12 Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861; reprint, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 6. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *I*.

- 13 Yellin, *A Life and Family Papers*. On the tradition of writing by enslaved and free black women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see also Frances Smith Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production of African American Women, 1746–1892* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993).
- 14 Rifkin, “A Home Made Sacred,” 75.
- 15 See William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986), esp. 240–41; and Jacqueline Goldsby, “‘I Disguised My Hand’: Writing Versions of the Truth in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and John Jacobs’s ‘A True Tale of Slavery,’” in *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, ed. Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 11–43.
- 16 Nichols, “Who Read the Slave Narratives?,” 151, 152.
- 17 Some of the conventions of testimony, as a genre of antislavery literature, are discussed in McBride, *Impossible Witness*. On Jacobs’s narrative as testimony, see Deborah M. Garfield, “Earwitness: Female Abolitionism, Sexuality, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” in Garfield and Zafar, *Harriet Jacobs*, 76–79.
- 18 DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 6–7.
- 19 [Amelia Chesson], “Domestic Slave-Life in the Southern States,” *Morning Star and Dial* (London, March 10, 1862; reprinted in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:366).
- 20 Rifkin, “A Home Made Sacred,” 75.
- 21 On the Dred Scott case, see Jacobs to Amy Kirby Post, March 1857, in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:231–33; and Rifkin, “A Home Made Sacred.”
- 22 Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 49
- 23 On rape and legal personhood in *Incidents*, see also Andrea Stone, “Interracial Sexual Abuse and Legal Subjectivity in Antebellum Law and Literature,” *American Literature* 81 (March 2009): 65–92.
- 24 Ainsworth Rand Spofford, *The Higher Law Tried by Reason and Authority: An Argument Pro and Con* (Cincinnati, OH: Truman and Spofford, 1851), 6. A useful introduction to the range of abolitionism’s invocations of higher law is George Edward Carter, *The Use of the Doctrine of Higher Law in the American Anti-Slavery Crusade, 1830–1860* (PhD diss, University of Oregon, 1970).
- 25 John C. Lord, “*The Higher Law*” and *Its Application to the Fugitive Slave Bill* (New York: Published by Order of the “Union Safety Committee,” 1851), 16, 15.
- 26 Here I distinguish my approach from one of the most sustained and original discussions of higher law in recent criticism, Deak Nabers’s *Victory of Law: The Fourteenth Amendment, the Civil War, and American Literature, 1852–1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2006). Nabers observes that “it is often difficult to determine whether Garrison was

more committed to the constative matter of the arguments he prosecuted or the performative matter of the social and political effects those arguments might have had in the immediate contexts in which he delivered them" (49). Whereas Nabers focuses on arguments that can be extrapolated from their immediate contexts, my interest is precisely in performative utterances and their reception in a specific historical period. Along the same lines, I suggest that the abolition movement made free use of exhortation, seduction, and other nonrational modes of persuasion, in addition to the deliberative rationality emphasized by Fanuzzi in *Abolition's Public Sphere*.

- 27 J. M. Peck, *The Duties of American Citizens: A Discourse, Preached in the State-House, Springfield, Illinois, January 26, 1851* (St. Louis, MO: T. W. Ustick, 1851), 20.
- 28 J. G. Forman, *The Christian Martyrs; or, The Conditions of Obedience to the Civil Government* (Boston: W. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1851), 30.
- 29 Spofford, *Higher Law Tried by Reason*, 42.
- 30 Child to Lucy Searle, February 4, 1861, in Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 1:296.
- 31 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: Norton, 1994), 69. My reading of the scene follows Brook Thomas, *Cross-Examinations of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe, and Melville* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 122; and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 228–29. On women's "influence" as a theme in the antebellum press, see Douglas, *Feminization*.
- 32 "Address of John Brown to the Virginia Court, Nov. 2, 1859, on Receiving the Sentence of Death, for his Heroic Attempt at Harper's Ferry, to Give Deliverance to the Captives, and to Let the Oppressed Go Free" (broadside) (Boston: printed by C. C. Mead, Liberator Office, 1859). The body of recent scholarship on Brown's case is vast. On the legal and political dynamics of the trial, see Brian McGinty, *John Brown's Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2009); and Robert Ferguson, *The Trial in American Life* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007). On the public memory of Brown and Harper's Ferry, see Paul Finkelman, ed., *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1995); John Stauffer and Zoe Trodd, *Meteor of War: The John Brown Story* (New York: Brandywine Press, 2004); and *The Afterlife of John Brown*, ed. Andrew Taylor and Eldrid Harrington (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); and Blakeslee Gilpin, *John Brown Still Lives! America's Long Reckoning with Violence, Equality, and Change* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2011).
- 33 W. E. B. DuBois, *John Brown* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 219.

- 34 Henry David Thoreau, "The Last Days of John Brown," in *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Viking, 1966), 679.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 679.
- 36 George B. Cheever, *The Curse of God against Political Atheism: With Some of the Lessons of the Tragedy at Harpers Ferry* (Boston: Walker, Wise and Company, 1859), 24.
- 37 "A Sermon by Henry Ward Beecher, Preached at Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, on Sunday Evening, October 30, 1860," reprinted in *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*, ed. James Redpath (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), 266. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "S."
- 38 Thoreau, "Last Days," 677.
- 39 Albert J. von Frank, "John Brown, James Redpath, and the Idea of Revolution," *Civil War History* 52 (June 2006): 148. John Brown's thinking about insurrection, according to von Frank, was significantly informed by his exchanges with "refugees from the English and Continental revolutions of 1848" (143).
- 40 Redpath, *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*, 7, 5.
- 41 Child to John Brown, October 26, 1859, in *Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Henry Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia* (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860), 14.
- 42 Child, *Correspondence*, 13.
- 43 The sales figure is provided in Reynolds, *John Brown*, 462.
- 44 Child, *Correspondence*, 14.
- 45 Child to Jacobs, August 13, 1860; in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:279.
- 46 Mills, "Child and the Ending," 257.
- 47 Aliyyah Abdurh-Rahman, "'The Strangest Freaks of Despotism': Queer Sexuality in Antebellum American African American Slave Narratives," *African American Review* 40 (summer 2006): 223–37, 224, 231–32.
- 48 Jacobs to Amy Kirby Post, November 8, 1860; in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:284.
- 49 "Our Boston Correspondence," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861; reprinted in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:328.
- 50 "New Publications," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 23, 1861; reprinted in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:333.
- 51 "Linda," *Weekly Anglo-African*, April 13, 1861, reprinted in Yellin, *Family Papers*, 1:349.
- 52 "The Nat Turner Insurrection," *Anglo-African Magazine*, December, 1859, n.p.
- 53 "John Brown, The Martyr," *Weekly Anglo-African*, December 10, 1859, n.p. On the cross-racial alliances among the militants, see John Mead, "Declarations of Liberty: Representations of Black/White Alliance against Slavery by John Brown, James Redpath, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3:1 (2009), 111–43.

- 54 The authoritative source on Redpath is John R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008). On the Haytian Emigration Bureau, see also Willis D. Boyd, "James Redpath and Negro Colonization in Haiti, 1860–1862," *The Americas* 12 (October 1955): 169–82.
- 55 See "Resignation," *Weekly Anglo-African*, April 6, 1861, n.p.
- 56 "A Carbonari Wanted," *Weekly Anglo-African*, April 13, 1861, n.p.
- 57 Redpath, *Echoes of Harper's Ferry* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), 5.
- 58 Nichols, "Who Read the Slave Narratives?," 161.