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## Following Racialized Motherhood from the Plantation to the Courtroom

Rachel Greer Parker

*Bard College*

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Following Racialized Motherhood from the Plantation to the Courtroom

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Rachel Parker

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## Introduction

If you were to walk down the streets of Englewood, Chicago, you may encounter numerous hand-made signs displaying the following plea:



Figure 1. Jim Young, Photograph, 2015. Handmade signs displayed in Englewood, Chicago.

These signs have been recently erected in Englewood, in an attempt to deter the gun violence that plagues the community. According to the *Chicago Tribune's* 2016 publication of "Crime Trends in Englewood," Englewood ranks sixth out of Chicago's seventy-seven neighborhoods for the greatest concentration of violence. Fatal shootings are a frequent occurrence in this

area, and children are often the victims of the uncontrollable gun violence that has skyrocketed throughout the city. On March 20, 2016, a seven-year-old boy was found dead in his home with a bullet hole in the side of his head. The boy appears to have shot himself, but the details of the occurrence remain unclear (*ABC Chicago*, 2016). Just one month later, a one-year-old girl was shot in the head and killed while seated in the back of a moving car (*ABC Chicago*, 2016). Despite the public awareness of violence crimes occurring in Englewood and other Chicago neighborhoods, little has been done to counter the frequent shootings. Mayor Rob Emanuel has called for tougher gun laws and penalties for possession of illegal firearms, yet the violence continues throughout the city. As a result of the passive efforts of the Chicago Police Department, Englewood residents have started to take matters into their own hands.

Beginning at 4 PM each day, a group of mothers congregates around the 7500 block of South Harvard Avenue in Englewood, Chicago. They belong to an organization called Mothers Against Senseless Killings, which is a grassroots organization that was founded in response to the fatal shooting of thirty-four-year-old Lucille Barnes on June 24, 2015 (*CNN*, 2015). These women dedicate four hours of each day to actively patrolling the neighborhood in bright pink shirts with the words “MOMS ON PATROL” printed across the front. They work to ensure that the children of Englewood return from school safely by casting a watchful eye on one of the most dangerous areas in the city. These mothers refer to themselves as a “supplemental force” to the Chicago Police Department (*CNN*, 2015), and actively work to reduce the crime rate in their community.

On the Mothers Against Senseless Killing website, the organization shares their opinion on why local activism is a critical element for social change:

There is no one waiting and wishing to take care of our sons. There is nothing but cautious optimism, constant worry and an abundance of prayer. That is all we have. We

need more. We need a collaborative effort of mothers of every race, religion, color, creed and of every educational, economic and social background to help amplify the voices of those mothers whose wails, moans and cries for help, don't seem to be loud enough for those that can affect change to hear them.

The children of Englewood remain largely unprotected by law enforcement officials, as there is “no one waiting and wishing” to defend them. Parents helplessly watch as crimes and lethal shootings continue to flood the streets of Chicago’s inner-city neighborhoods. All these mothers have to defend their children is “cautious optimism, constant worry, and an abundance of prayer.” But despite the bleak circumstances, these women have remained strong enough to organize their own coalition to resist the violence. The Mothers Against Senseless Killings encourage mothers of “every race, religion, color, creed and of every educational, economic, and social background” to join the fight against the killing of innocent children. These mothers work to draw attention to the “wails, moans, and cries for help” of the women who have lost a child amidst the constant bloodshed. They hope that a cooperative approach will “amplify the voices” and encourage change on a legislative level.

This sentimental description on the Mothers Against Senseless Killings website is designed to evoke a strong response from the reader, and encourage support for the organization’s mission. It appeals to mothers on an emotional level, regardless of whether or not they have lost a child. In addition to raising awareness about local conflicts, the Mothers Against Senseless Killings organization raises larger critical questions about the origins of racial politics in the United States. Why are these primarily African American children subjected to the perpetual threat of violence or death? Why must their mothers protect them without the help of the police or the State? What role has motherhood played in the demand for legal change in the United States? One may begin to answer these questions by exploring the



literature produced during two cruxes of racial change in the United States: Emancipation and the Civil Rights Movement.

This project will discuss the ways in which maternal appeal has been used to generate support for the emancipation of slaves and the Civil Rights Movement. The first chapter, “Motherhood in Bondage,” explores the themes of motherhood and domesticity in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Both authors use maternal suffering to alleviate the racial tension that divides free and enslaved women. For example, Jacobs states that one of her primary intentions of writing the narrative is to persuade the free female reader to support the emancipation of slaves: “But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the collection of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse” (4). Because Jacobs is attempting to influence the opinions of Northern women, she chooses to strategically construct topics that will “arouse” empathetic emotions. This reaction may inspire some form of change, ranging from an increased awareness about the realities of slavery to supporting the Abolitionist Movement.

The fundamental themes that are explored throughout this text, namely the violation of motherhood and sexual purity, are likely to produce deeply unpleasant feelings in the female reader. Not only are these “two millions of women” sharing similar experiences with Jacobs; most of these women are in situations that are “far worse.” If Jacobs’s situation is somehow not unpleasant enough, the suggestion that other women are facing exponentially worse circumstances may provide the necessary push. This assertion sets the mind to wandering, as it imagines the potential for other dreadful circumstances that lie outside of this text.

The second chapter, “Motherhood on Trial,” examines the role of maternity in the Emmett Till Murder Trial of 1955. The influence of motherhood on the outcome of the trial will be discussed by reviewing the ways in which Mamie Till and Carolyn Bryant are depicted in the media coverage. The exploration of the FBI transcript of the trial and Mamie Till’s biography, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*, will contribute to an informed analysis of the events that transpired in the summer of 1955. It has been argued that the brutal murder of Emmett Till was the primary catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement, and this chapter will illuminate how Mamie Till openly expressed her grief to inspire support for racial equality in the United States. In her biography, she writes:

Motherhood, children, would come to symbolize so many aspects of the movement that was growing out of our suffering. Children and the mothers of children would be there. [...] A new generation of leaders ultimately would point our way. But it was their mothers who would nurture the movement. Mothers also would guide and they would lead. (Till 2003, 346)

For Mamie Till, mothers and children played an imperative role in the Civil Rights Movement. Maternal “suffering” is said to inspire “many aspects” of the movement itself and is an inseparable component of the political conflict. In this moment, the woman is both a mother and an activist, fighting for the protection of her own children and the liberation of her people. She must “guide and lead,” as she takes both her child and the nation by the hand and navigates through the complicated racial politics of the time. Just as a mother raises and tends to her children, she must also use her affection and intellect to “nurture the movement.”

What Harriet Jacobs, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mamie Till, and the Mothers Against Senseless Killings have in common is their ability to show the nation a reflection of itself. This reflection exposes sections of the social and political sphere that are not functioning justly and require immediate change. But these women use their maternal identities in a variety of ways,

as their articulations offer different perspectives on similar issues. By putting these moments in conversation with one another, the effectiveness and limitations of maternal appeal as rhetorical device will be explored.

## Chapter One:

### Motherhood in Bondage

As the residents of Norfolk, Virginia, opened their copy of the American Beacon on July 4th, 1835, their eyes may have fallen on a notice for the capture and return of a servant girl named Harriet. They may have periodically thought back to the \$100 reward for the “light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high” throughout their celebration of Independence Day. Perhaps they were outraged to learn that “she speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address,” but felt slightly better after rationalizing that this servant girl was and always would be nothing more than a slave. What these individuals could not have known was that Harriet the servant girl would go on to write a compelling piece of Abolitionist literature that continues to inform current discussions of race and gender in America.

After twenty-one years of enslavement, Harriet Jacobs finally escaped from the confines of the Flint family plantation in 1835. Jacobs spent many years in hiding, and was then purchased for \$300 and freed by Cornelia Willis, an active abolitionist in Boston (Jacobs, xx). During the 1850’s, Jacobs secretly wrote *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* with the intention of exposing the extraordinary suffering of those who had been kept as slaves and remained in bondage. Jacobs recounts a collection of the institution’s evils, including physical torture, psychological torment, and the perversion of the family structure and female purity. Prior to the publication of her writing, Jacobs spoke to Harriet Beecher Stowe about her experiences in bondage, with the hope that Stowe would assist in the publication of *Incidents*

*in the Life of a Slave Girl*. But Stowe was more interested in appropriating Jacobs's material in her own novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This prompted Jacobs to publish her autobiography independently. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* documents Harriet Jacobs's experiences as a slave, while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is comprised of multiple interweaving plotlines that follow the lives of various characters.

Although there was a divergence between Stowe and Jacobs, both authors produced works of literature that grapple with similar issues. In addition to thematic parallels, these texts were both produced during a period of heightened tension in the United States. The looming possibility of a civil war occupied the national conscience, and these concerns are reflected in the writing of both Jacobs and Stowe. These novels use sentimental appeal to illuminate problematic sections of the social and domestic sphere, and to challenge mid-nineteenth century conventions. In Jane Tompkins's essay *Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Literary History*, published in 1987, she writes, "The power of a sentimental novel to move its audience depends upon the audience's being in possession of the conceptual categories that constitute character and event" (544). Tompkins's claim that the sentimental novel is able to "move its audience" suggests that a form of change occurs in the reader after the text is experienced. This shift is inspired by an emotional response, which is often prompted by deeply ingrained moral standards. But this reaction can only be exercised by the reader that is "in possession of the conceptual categories" that the subject of the text encounters. It is therefore imperative for an author of sentimental literature to select topics that are within the reader's scope of experience.

Lysander Spooner, an Abolitionist lawyer and political philosopher also emphasizes the role of shared experience in generating sympathy in his 1946 legal tract entitled *Poverty*:

human virtue, which consists in one's doing good to others than himself, depends almost entirely upon sympathy - [...] This sympathy, or susceptibility is mostly [...] the result of having had, in some measure, a similar experience with others, or of [...] having had social relations with them. [...] And it is from the sympathy [...] that much, perhaps most of the kindness, shown by one human being towards another, results.  
(45)

For Spooner, sympathy is a critical component for an individual's motive to do "good to others than himself." The use of the term "susceptibility" suggests that the individual is exposed and made somewhat vulnerable by sentimental appeal; emotions seem to overcome their logic in these moments. One is most responsive to suffering if "some measure" of a "similar experience" is shared. The principles that influence moral standards develop from shared "social relations," and it is the violation of these principles that inspires the most "kindness, shown by one human being towards another." A combination of the thoughts of Tompkins and Spooner may suggest that a sentimental novel describing a widely shared "similar experience" will be able to excite a sympathetic response in a vast audience.

The experience of motherhood is not limited by a geographical location, and is able to appeal to an array of individuals in various social groups. This is why constructing a political argument from the perspective of the mother is persuasive in the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. This chapter will explore the ways in which Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Beecher Stowe use maternal appeal as a rhetorical device to advocate for the abolition of slavery. But the characters in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* complicate assumptions about this form of sentimental appeal, for the influence of maternal suffering does not neatly break at gender lines. In fact, there are female characters

in these sentimental texts that are entirely unresponsive to the emotional suffering of mothers and children. It is often the wives of slaveholders that inflict the harshest punishments, as they subject their female slaves to the most degrading cases of sexual humiliation. As Frederick Douglass notes in his own 1845 autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, the slave mistress is “never better pleased than when she sees them under the lash” (17). Because there are numerous women that are insensitive to maternal empathy, it cannot be assumed that sentimental appeal is effective on all women.

Both authors also reject the assumption that maternal appeal is confined to a domestic setting. This literature is more interested in how the events that take place in the household and the marketplace are crisscrossed, and how this overlap complicates the distinction between economic affairs and emotional suffering. The slave auction is a consolidation of emotional affliction and fiscal gain. In a chapter describing a slave auction, Stowe writes, “The benevolent gentleman is sorry; but then, the thing happens every day! One sees girls and mothers crying, at these sales, *always!* It can’t be helped, &c.; and he walks off, with his acquisition, in another direction” (306). It is not that all men who participate in the selling and purchasing of slaves are devoid of sentimental feeling, for there are “benevolent” men who appear to be “sorry.” Their innate feelings of guilt cannot be entirely ignored. Any number of reasons may be given to excuse behavior that feels morally wrong, including that these things “happen every day” and that “it can’t be helped.” But in any case, it is clear that men are also deeply affected by the process of breaking up families. Although he has gained an “acquisition,” an aversion to the practice remains in the conscience of the slave owner. He walks “in another direction,” but is unable to escape the feelings of guilt that accompany his

new economic gain. These moments indicate that a reluctance to the practice of slaveholding can be felt by both women and men, even when it is activated by maternal suffering.

Due to negative associations that cast a shadow over black motherhood during slavery, Stowe and Jacobs needed to construct works that could counter these stigmas. The treatment of African American women as mere breeders and objects of lustful temptation was a fundamental practice of American slavery. Slaveholders refused to acknowledge the relationship between a slave mother and her child and were able to deny female slaves the right to this emotional attachment. As a result, the female slave was unable to claim ownership over the maternal instincts that were presumably shared amongst white women.

Frederick Douglass provides a particularly chilling example of this behavior in his narrative: “Mr. Covey [...] bought her, as he said, for a breeder. [...] After buying her, he hired a married man of Mr. Samuel Harrison, to live with him one year; and him he used to fasten up with her every night. The result was, that, at the end of the year, the miserable woman gave birth to twins” (58). Caroline is purchased to populate the plantation of Mr. Covey, and is labeled a “breeder.” This implies that Caroline’s only function is to give birth to children who will inevitably be regarded as the property of Mr. Covey. She has no power to claim her children as her own, and it is inherently assumed that she can be separated from her offspring without any consideration for her maternal attachment. Not only is she “breeder” as opposed to a mother; she also functions as a sexual object for Mr. Samuel Harrison. Mr. Covey pays Mr. Harrison to rape Caroline “every night” of the year, and he even has sexual access to her after she has become pregnant. Douglass refers to this behavior as “profitable as well as pleasurable,” (16) since these men are receiving economic rewards that function as incentives for their sexual exploitation.



These practices were heavily fortified by the legislation of the time, with a notable backing from the 1740 Slave Code of South Carolina. This document is a compilation of laws that are put in place “for the better ordering and governing negroes and other slaves.” The very first of fifty-seven sections establishes the following precedent:

And by it enacted [...] That all Negroes [...] and all their issue and offspring, born or to be born, shall be, and they are hereby declared to be, and remain forever hereafter, absolute slaves, and shall follow the condition of the mother, and shall be deemed, held, taken, reputed and adjudged in law, to be chattels personal, in the hands of their owners and possessors (Section I).

The term “offspring” is used as opposed to “children,” which may be an attempt to strip the infant of its human-like qualities. Newborn animals are frequently referred to as “offspring,” and the comparison of a slave to a beast is advantageous for the agenda of the slaveholder. Additionally, the definitive language of this act leaves no potential for exceptions in the system. All children, regardless of whether or not they are “born or to be born,” will assume their predetermined position as “absolute” property “forever.” It is noted that children will always “follow the condition of the mother,” which conveniently removes the responsibility of paternity from the father. Because the slave owner commonly assumes what Douglass refers to as the “double relation of master and father,” (19) the law seeks to ensure that these products of pleasure and profit will remain disconnected from the father. With this act in place, slave owners were free to rationalize their wicked behavior with a claim that they were merely following the law. But an evident contradiction exists between the 1740 Slave Code of South Carolina and the practice of removing enslaved children from their mothers at birth. Even though the child is immediately separated from care and protection of its mother, there is still a legal tie that exists between the woman and the child. The slave is not allowed to exhibit maternal affection, but she simultaneously remains attached through the claim that the child will “follow the condition of the mother.” This inconsistency is one of many examples

where a mother's connection to her children is legitimate only when it benefits the slaveholder, and is deemed invalid when it threatens the order of slaveholding.

Now that the stigmas associated the slave mother have been reviewed, one may recognize why it was essential for Jacobs to construct a narrative to combat these assumptions. Throughout *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacob relies on the assumption that women share instinctive compassion for the sacred relationship between mothers and their children. By depicting female slaves first and foremost as mothers, Jacobs encourages the reader to abandon ideas of female slaves as property that is unable to feel genuine (or “white”) emotion. The following passage is an example of how Jacobs frames her descriptions of slavery through a maternal perspective:

Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened the irons upon his wrists; could you have heard her heart-rending groans, and seen her bloodshot eyes wander widely from face to face, vainly pleading for mercy; could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, *Slavery is damnable!* (26)

Although a slave auction was likely a foreign scene for white Northern females, the recognition of the intimate bond between mother and child may be familiar. Losing a child is a pinnacle fear of the compassionate mother, and Jacobs draws upon this feminine angst to generate sympathy for this helpless woman and child. This description evokes emotion through the physical, audible, and visual response of the slave mother. The action of “clinging” is a tangible expression of desperation, as the mother attempts to protect her child before it is removed from her. The physical reaction is accompanied by the “heart-rending groans,” which express a form of grief that is too great to be articulated by language. The combination of these responses suggests that this woman is nowhere near emotionally barren. This separation does not fully achieve its goal to “blunt and destroy” (Douglass, 16) the

mother's inherent affection for her child, countering the assumption that slave mothers are less attached to their children than white mothers.

Harriet Beecher Stowe is also concerned with the separation of slave families, and she emphasizes how this practice devastates numerous characters. Aside from the slave traders and a few owners, every character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* belongs to a family unit. One of the primary plotlines of this text is oriented around Eliza, a young domestic servant of the Shelby family. She is married with one child named Harry and has been allowed to raise him on the Shelby estate. But when Mr. Shelby experiences a sudden financial crisis, it is decided that he must sell Eliza's son to a slave trader. In response, Eliza generates a plan to escape to Canada with Harry to protect him from the inevitable dangers of the slave trade. Eliza's dilemma is encountered in the opening chapter of the novel and is the reader's first encounter with the negative consequences of slavery. Because Stowe chooses to begin the novel with maternal conflict, it is suggested that this theme will be explored in great depth throughout the text.

In addition to deconstructing the racial barrier that may divide the reader and the slave, Stowe must also use sentimental appeal to navigate around the legal issues of slaveholding. Stowe was likely aware of the fact that her white readers may respond to Eliza's escape plan with skepticism, especially because the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 had been passed just two years before the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As a result of this act, many Northerners were reluctant to show any degree of support for runaway slaves or the Abolitionist Movement. The act states that no person "shall harbor or conceal such fugitive, so as to prevent the discovery and arrest of such person", or else they could face "a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars, and imprisonment not exceeding six months" (Section VII). As a result of the Fugitive Slave Act, assisting runaway slaves was no longer a question of moral

conviction; it became a serious crime that was punishable by law. The growing reluctance to support runaway slaves made it necessary for Stowe to justify Eliza's choice to flee the Shelby's estate.

In an effort to inspire support for Eliza's decision, Stowe directly addresses the external reader shortly after the plan for escape is revealed:

If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader [...] how fast could *you* walk? How many miles could you make in those few brief hours, with the darling at your bosom, - the little sleepy head on your shoulder, - the small, soft arms trustingly holding on to your neck? (46)

This passage resembles the writing of Harriet Jacobs, for both authors directly address the maternal reader before they provide a description of suffering. Stowe asks the "mother" to imagine Harry as her own child, rather than confining the pain of this moment to the world of the text. This may prompt a moment of internal reflection in the reader, increasing the passage's ability to persuade. The child is forcefully "torn" from the mother's embrace and affection, which evokes feelings of physical and emotional violence. Stowe then asks, "If it were *your* Harry [...] how fast could *you* walk?" A mother may be more likely to respond to this moment with feelings of pity after she has imagined herself in Eliza's position. The description of young Harry is also full of language that has the potential to arouse an emotional response. He is referred to as "the darling at your bosom," which allows the maternal reader to feel as close to this child as she would her own. Harry is positioned with "the little sleepy head on your shoulder" and the "small, soft arms trustingly holding on to your neck," as if he is clinging to the mother that turns the pages. This description also reinforces the idea of Harry as a young and vulnerable child, who must rely on his mother for protection from the "brutal trader." In this moment, he is not merely "offspring" that can

be detached from his mother, as documents such as The Slave Code of South Carolina would like to imply. After this passage, Eliza's decision to run away feels less like a violation of the law and more like a measure taken out of necessity.

Although the relationship between maternal figures and children are essential for Stowe's advocacy against slavery, she must have also been aware that not all readers could relate to these experiences. To open up her text to a wider audience, Stowe includes the character of Miss Ophelia, who serves as an example of a female character that is not relatable through the lens of maternity. Unlike the other female characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Miss Ophelia is unmarried and without children. She channels her diligence and intellect into domestic work, and does not seem to be driven by sentimental feeling. Miss Ophelia uses logic to form her opinions, as opposed to the emotional reactions that are produced by the wives and mothers. When Miss Ophelia encounters slaveholding on the St. Clare estate, she shows an immediate aversion to the practice. When debating with St. Claire about his own opinions on slaveholding, Miss Ophelia argues, "I think you slaveholders have an awful responsibility upon you, [...] I wouldn't have it, for a thousand worlds. You ought to educate your slaves, and treat them like reasonable creatures" (161). While the compassionate female characters emphasize the emotional drawbacks of slavery, Miss Ophelia is concerned with the logistical consequences. She is primarily critical of the lack of education that is perpetuated by the institution. She argues that because slaves are deliberately deprived of intellectual cultivation, they do not have the ability to transcend their lowly status. Miss Ophelia's rationale uses logic rather than sentimentality and is able to appeal to the reader's intellect.

This could be especially helpful for reaching the male audience or women without children, who might find it difficult to connect to the maternal characters.

Although Miss Ophelia immediately recognizes some of the logistical faults of slavery, she still struggles with a prejudice that the other compassionate female characters are able to surpass. She refers to the slaves as “creatures,” and despite her high moral standards and opinions of the institution, she maintains an aversion to slaves throughout a majority of the novel. This reluctance is the strongest when the character of Topsy, a young African American child, is introduced. St. Clare purchases Topsy for Miss Ophelia, with the expectation that Miss Ophelia will put her theories of educating slaves into practice. This would require Miss Ophelia to develop an intimate relationship with the child, and she is initially hesitant. She is said to approach “her new subject very much as a person might be supposed to approach a black spider” (219). Unlike a majority of the other female characters in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Miss Ophelia’s racial aversion is not superseded by a maternal instinct. She is reluctant to make physical contact with Topsy and thinks of their relationship as strictly educational.

Because Mrs. Ophelia does not appeal to the female reader through maternal similarities, Stowe includes some characteristics that make her accessible to this audience. This may explain why Miss Ophelia is such an avid housekeeper. She exhibits exceptional homemaking abilities, and it is this “order, method, and exactness” (144) that makes her likable and engaging. While Stowe uses the other female characters to produce a sentimental response to maternal suffering, Miss Ophelia is used to generate a metaphorical argument against slavery.

Her household diligence prompts her to reorganize the chaotic structure of the St. Clare estate, and it is in these moments that many valuable comparisons between domestic order and moral behavior are made.

The domestic metaphor is also used to describe the drawbacks of the slave trade and relies more on intellect than visceral feelings. The scene that explores Dinah's kitchen is as an example of how Stowe uses this device in her narrative. Dinah is the primary cook of the St. Clare family and is introduced when Miss Ophelia is attempting to reinstate order in the St. Clare household. Miss Ophelia is appalled by the conditions in which she finds the kitchen, for it "generally looked as if it had been arranged by a hurricane blowing through it, as she had about as many places for each cooking utensil as there were days in the year" (189). Dinah is a splendid cook, but her methods strike Miss Ophelia as unproductive and chaotic. Aggravated by this discovery, Miss Ophelia voices her concerns to St. Clare. To her surprise, he is already aware of the conditions of her operation, and rationalizes her methods with the following response:

"Don't I know that the rolling-pin is under her bed, and the nutmeg-grater in her pocket with her tobacco, - that there are sixty-five different sugar-bowls, one in every hole in the house, - that she washes dishes with a dinner-napkin one day, and with a fragment of an old petticoat the next? But the upshot is, she gets up glorious dinners, makes superb coffee; and you must judge her as warriors and statesmen are judged, by *her success*" (194)

A 19th-century woman who asserted her intelligence in the domestic setting may have responded to a "nutmeg-grater in her pocket with her tobacco" with a cringe. Maintaining an organized and productive kitchen with "sixty-five different sugar-bowls" seems nearly impossible, and a woman who prided herself on order would have been inclined to feel a sense of repulsion towards Dinah's methods. But St. Clare explains that he does not mind the

disarray, for “she gets up glorious dinners” as a result. In his opinion, Dinah’s production of impressive meals justifies her disorderly system. Therefore, St. Clare feels as though there is no reason to interfere as long as the output is worthwhile.

But to the domestic female, this reasoning may have not been enough to justify the chaotic behavior. This reader may find herself asking, what about the wasted dinner napkins? What other tasks could be accomplished in the amount of time it takes to retrieve the rolling pin from under the bed? Why are Dinah and St. Clare satisfied with this approach when they both recognize its faults? It is mentioned that St. Clare visited the north and was “impressed with the system and order of his uncle’s kitchen arrangements” (190). In an attempt to replicate this order in his own home, St. Clare installed “an array of cupboards, drawers, and various apparatus, to induce systemic regulation” (190) to assist Dinah in her domestic work. St. Clare is under the impression that introducing physical means of organization to Dinah’s chaotic approach will motivate a change in her behavior and therefore yield more efficient results. But despite his efforts, Dinah continues with her original methods. Rather than “induc[ing] systemic regulation”, these new appliances provided, “more hiding-holes [...] for the accommodation of old rags, hair-combs, old shoes, ribbons, cast-off artificial flowers, and other articles of vertu” (190). It is evident that Dinah is set in her wasteful ways, and that no external methods for organization will affect these habits.

On the surface, Miss Ophelia’s experiences in Dinah’s kitchen may be read as a humorous anecdote. But the nature of Dinah’s unorganized and wasteful behavior also functions as a metaphor that articulates Stowe’s concerns with the unregulated practice of slavery in America. Although slaveholding clearly yields a substantial profit for those who



participate, the mechanics of the institution resemble some of the faults of Dinah's kitchen. Vast amounts of merchandise can be produced, but not without tradeoffs. The blatant cruelty of slaveholders is overlooked because of the profits yielded by their institutions, just as St. Clare overlooks the disorder of Dinah's kitchen because he is primarily concerned with "her success". St. Clare's installation of the new appliances and cupboards resembles the numerous attempts to enact a system that could maintain order within the erratic practice of slavery.

Multiple acts of legislation were passed in an attempt to structure the institution, but just like the "array of cupboards, drawers, and various apparatus" of Dinah's kitchen, there was no way to eliminate all of the "hiding-holes" used by slaveholders and slave traders. The Slave Code of South Carolina, passed in 1740, is an example of legislation that was enacted to help instill order in an otherwise unpredictable system. This act, which was instituted "For the better ordering and governing Negroes and other slaves in this province", is comprised of a series of laws meant to control the African American population. The intentions of this document appear to be varied, for some laws are introduced to protect slaves while others are clearly enacted to repress the population. Section XXXVII illustrates a slight concern for the wellbeing of enslaved individuals:

And in the case any person or persons shall willfully cut out the tongue, put out the eye, castrate, or cruelly scald, burn, or deprive any slave of any limb or member, or shall inflict any other cruel punishment, other than by whipping or beating with a horse-whip, cow-skin, [...] every such person shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds. (Section XXXVII)

Although surrendering one hundred pounds is clearly not just compensation for an offense as serious as castrating or removing the tongue of a slave, this act does attempt to reduce the degree of cruelty on plantations. But this "systematic regulation," to use Stowe's terminology, did not produce changes in the behavior of slave owners. Numerous slave narratives recount

methods of punishment that not only break this law but also surpass this document's imagination of the cruelty that could be inflicted. In Harriet Jacobs's chapter, "Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders," she recalls a particularly merciless planter who was known for his brutality throughout neighboring plantations. To punish one of his slaves for retreating to the woods after a particularly severe whipping, he was "placed between the screws of the cotton gin, to stay as long as he had been in the woods. [...] He was then put into the cotton gin, which was screwed down, only allowing him room to turn on his side when he could not lie on his back" (54). The incoherence that existed between the formal legislation and actual practice of "ordering and governing Negroes" was used as a primary argument for the abolition of slavery. Although Harriet Jacobs's articulation of this brutality may have inspired action from a particular audience, this direct approach could not have appealed to all readers. This is why Harriet Beecher Stowe's use of the domestic metaphor may be equally as effective as Harriet Jacob's outright demonstration of cruelty.

Thus far, it has been shown that the maternal and domestic appeal used by Stowe and Jacobs help the audience surpass racial barriers. But if both authors assume that women should be able to empathize with the position of a mother, regardless of her identity as a slave, what about the white women of the South who own slaves? Are they unresponsive to the sorrows that are depicted throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*? By examining the relationship between Linda (Harriet Jacobs's pseudonym for herself) and Mrs. Flint (Jacobs's primary slave mistress), speculations may be made about why Jacobs's primary intention is to appeal to Northern women who do not own slaves.

Mrs. Flint is a jealous and conniving slave owner, who is endlessly occupied with her husband's sexual advances towards Linda and their other female slaves. Frustrations

regarding her husband's infidelity translate into relentless aggression, which is then directed towards her slaves. She is entirely unsympathetic to the sexual humiliation that these women are constantly subjected to. As a result, she reduces them to "the objects of her constant suspicion and malevolence" (34). Jacob's explanation for this dissonance is that the institution of slavery "deadens the moral sense," (40) and therefore strips these women of their innate maternal instincts. This "deadening" is a result of constant exposure to the toxic influences of slavery, which infiltrate and destroy the slaveholding mother's own family structure.

Despite the fact that slave owners and traders use endless methods to destroy the maternal feelings of the slave mother, it is frequently the white Southern woman who experiences this deadening. Jacobs initially depicts the wives of slaveholders as virtuous and sympathetic, but they are eventually polluted by the influence of owning slaves. This transformation is evident in Jacobs's description of the newlywed Southern bride:

The poor girls have romantic notions of a sunny clime, and of the flowering vines that all the year round shade a happy home. To what disappointments are they destined! The young wife soon learns that the husband in whose hands she has placed her happiness pays no regard to his marriage vows. Children of every shade of complexion play with her own fair babies, and too well she knows that they are born onto him of his own household! (Jacobs, 39)

Jacobs feels sympathetically towards these "poor girls", for they know not what their future as a slave mistress holds for them. The young brides imagine their marriage as a union that will remain sincere, through which they will live out their lives in a "sunny clime." They expect "flowering vines" to flourish in this pleasant condition, which possess the capability to "shade a happy home." These natural metaphors depict matrimony as a harmonious process, which cultivates growth and prosperity in the "happy home." But Jacobs is suggesting that these women are "destined" for "disappointments," as their initial expectations of marriage are

nullified. The inevitable influence of slavery permeates the Southern family structure immediately. When this mistress views the first mulatto baby born from one of her slaves, there is a moment of poignant realization. The “flowering vines” that were supposed to shade her household now resemble a thick cluster of thorns, ever darkening her original hopes for a “sunny clime.” Constant reminders of her precarious marriage surround her as she watches the “Children of every shade of complexion play with her own fair babies.” Because she has surrendered her authority to the same hands that “she has placed her happiness,” she remains powerless and devastated. This woman possesses no ability to confront her husband about the violence committed against her own household and the female slaves. As a result of this powerlessness, the Southern bride begins to search for others that are more defenseless than she. It is no surprise that her spiteful eye falls upon her female slaves, onto which her feelings of vengeance are transferred. The hierarchy of power that exists between the husband and his wife is reproduced between the wife and the female slave. This frequently inspires violent emotions in the originally cheerful bride, which materializes in her treatment of the female slaves and their children.

Although the Southern bride is not a legally defined as a slave, many parallels can be drawn between the restricted life of an antebellum wife and an enslaved woman. Both groups are faced with the similar predicament of existing as the property of the patriarch, and both will remain powerless in interactions with white men. While the slave master inhibits the slave’s freedom, he simultaneously deprives his own wife of agency. John Stuart Mill discusses these similarities in his 1869 publication of *The Subjection of Women*. This essay served as a crucial piece of literature for the Women’s Rights Movement, as it argues for

equal employment opportunities and suffrage for women. Mill also illuminates how the economic and educational constraints that are placed on women perpetuate a form of domestic slavery:

All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds. [...] All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have — those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man. (54)

Mill immediately defines the distinction between the “forced slave” and the “willing one.”

Unlike the slave who is obedient out of a fear of punishment, the wife is expected to adhere to every command because she *wants to*. The wife should not comply because she is forced to, but because she is eager to be her husband’s “favorite.” While the master subjects the slave to physical domination (including such practices as shackling, abuse, and starvation), the husband controls his wife by putting “everything in place to enslave their minds.” The nature of this servitude consists of a lack of education, economic dependence, and sexual subordination. But these categories are not mutually exclusive, for wives and slaves alike have been abused, denied the right to learn, not rewarded for labor, and refused ownership of their sexuality.

The defining difference is the fact that the wife is expected to voluntarily agree to these constraints while the slave is forced to comply. As Mill states, the wife is continuously told that it is her “duty” to “live for others.” Regardless of the fact that children that are evidence of her husband’s adultery may surround her, she is expected to pay no mind because she is committed to satisfying her husband rather than herself. In addition to all of these

expectations, women must “have no life but in their affections,” which are defined by Mill as “the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man.” Mill suggests that children function as a material entity that binds the husband to the wife.

Maintaining control over the family is the woman’s only opportunity to hold power and remain connected to her husband. Using this logic, it is not surprising that the Southern bride responds to her husband’s infidelity with rage and violence. Because the husband is fathering children with his female slaves, he is severing the “indefeasible tie” that exists between husband and wife. The wife is no longer able to rationalize that she has power as the mother of her husband’s children. A mere glimpse around the plantation reveals the fact that her husband has produced children with multiple women. Therefore, the “indefeasible tie” is severed and the wife loses her only opportunity to preserve the minutest degree of power. This feeling of helplessness may lead the Southern wife to abuse her authority over her female slaves in an attempt to compensate for her own powerlessness.

The influence of this power dynamic between slave and slave mistress is illustrated by Stowe’s character, Marie St. Clare. This woman resembles Mrs. Flint both in her treatment of her female slaves and her inability to accomplish anything that is remotely productive. It is also evident that Marie St. Clare does not possess a prevailing maternal connection with her own daughter, Evangeline (who is usually referred to as Eva). Marie is said to lack any “capability of affection, or much sensibility, and the little that she had, had been merged into a most intense and unconscious selfishness” (141). Marie embodies Jacobs’s theory of the Southern wife’s “deadened moral sense,” for she is unable to feel “affection” towards her slaves and her own daughter. The remaining energy takes the form of Marie’s “unconscious

selfishness,” which is expressed throughout the entire novel. Just as Jacobs’s grandmother raises Mrs. Flint’s children, Eva receives a majority of her parental affection from a domestic servant named Mammy.

The bond between Mammy and Eva is quite strong, as emotional and physical affection are frequently exchanged between the two. When Eva and her father, Augustine St. Clare, return from an extended trip, Marie responds to Eva’s delighted greeting with bitterness: ““That’ll do, - take care, child - don’t, you make my head ache,’ said the mother, after she had kissed her” (150). Demonstrating affection towards her own child is clearly exhausting for Marie and does not appear to come naturally as one may expect. She even attempts to restrict the amount of love she receives from Eva by telling her to stop kissing her because it is making her “head ache.” All of Marie’s concerns revolve around her constant need for attention, and she fails to express any interest in the wellbeing of her own daughter.

Marie’s reaction to the return of Eva dramatically contrasts the exchange between Eva and Mammy that takes place in the same scene: ““O, there’s Mammy!’ said Eva, as she flew across the room; and, throwing herself into her arms, she kissed her repeatedly. This woman did not tell her that she made her head ache, but, on the contrary, she hugged her, and laughed, and cried” (150). In this moment, Eva is able to kiss Mammy “repeatedly,” unlike her mother who barely gives Eva one kiss. Rather than telling Eva that her kisses make her “head ache” like Marie, Mammy “hugged her, and laughed, and cried.” Mammy’s reaction to Eva’s affection resembles what one would expect from a mother who has not seen their child in many weeks. The differences in Eva’s relationship with Marie and Mammy support the argument that maternal affection is not inherent in all women, and is likely to be absent in female slaveholders.

Feelings of resentment often arise between the non-maternal wife and the devoted slave mother. This attitude defines the relationship between Marie and Mammy and inspires a majority of Marie's criticism of her faithful servant. Despite Mammy's dedication to the St. Clare family, Marie remains unsatisfied and hostile towards Mammy. Marie discusses her displeasure with Mammy's inability to abandon the maternal connection she maintains towards her own children. It is revealed that Mammy has a husband and children, but when Marie married Augustine she forced Mammy to leave these children behind and move to the St. Clare estate. Marie comments on Mammy's maternal affection in conversation with Miss Ophelia: "They were dirty little things - I couldn't have them about; and besides, they took up too much of her time; but I believe that Mammy has always kept up a sort of sulkiness about this" (154). Although Marie and Mammy both share the identity as a mother, Marie's sympathies do not extend to her servant. Marie refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of Mammy's family by assuming that she can easily sever the relationship between wife and husband, mother and child. Marie's primary complaint is that these children "took up too much of her time," and she expects Mammy to prioritize her duties as a slave over her responsibilities as a mother. The grief that would logically accompany a ruptured family is labeled as "sulkiness," and Marie seems to believe that Mammy is choosing to hold on to these feelings of resentment. This mindset demonstrates how dangerous it is for female slaves to show any maternal affection towards their children, for these feelings are instantly labeled as a flaw that may depreciate the value of the slave.

While Mammy is able to maintain an unwavering love for Eva and her own children, Marie fails to cultivate a meaningful relationship with her only child. Marie's lack of maternal



compassion is evident in her inability to care for Eva throughout the novel. This behavior reveals the fact that merely birthing a child does not produce a substantial relationship, and that these bonds are not inherent in all women. This absence of affection is fully revealed after Eva becomes very ill towards the end of the novel:

Marie St. Clare had taken no notice of the child's gradually decaying health and strength, because she was completely absorbed in studying out two or three new forms of disease to which she believed herself was the victim. It was the first principle of Marie's belief that nobody ever was or could be so great a sufferer as herself (250).

Marie is unable to tend to the needs of her dying child because she is insistent on being recognized as the true sufferer. Although Augustine and the servants of the St. Clare family are well aware of Eva's "gradually decaying health and strength" Marie seems to take "no notice." There is not even the slightest outward recognition of her daughter's decline, and no action is taken to alleviate the suffering caused by Eva's illness. Rather than tending to the needs of Eva, Marie spends her days complaining about her alleged experience as "the victim" of an endless list of symptoms. Despite the fact that Marie is surrounded by a dying daughter and multiple servants who endure the perpetual hardships of enslavement, she maintains the belief that "nobody ever was or could be so great a sufferer as herself." This leaves no room for any extensions of sympathy and suggests that Marie will also be devoid of these feelings in the future.

It is Mammy who exhibits all of the genuine maternal compassion, as she remains highly concerned with Eva's illness. It is said that Mammy's "heart yearned towards her darling," (267) demonstrating a deeply emotional connection between Mammy and Eva. Mammy appears to be the true maternal figure, for she attends to the physical and emotional

needs of Eva that are blatantly neglected by Marie. Despite the fact that she is both a slave and has been forcefully removed from her own family, Mammy does not share Marie's tendency to label herself as the "victim" or "sufferer."

Once Marie is finally able to acknowledge her daughter's illness, she begins to use Eva's condition as an excuse to generate sympathy for herself. As Eva's health declines, Marie's demands increase: "Twenty times in a night, Mammy would be roused to rub her feet, to bathe her head, to find her pocket-handkerchief, to see what the noise was in Eva's room, to let down a curtain because it was too light, or to put it up because it was too dark" (267). These requests are clearly unnecessary, for who needs a foot rub and a shampooing in the middle of the night? Because the curtain is constantly raised and lowered based on it being "too light" and then immediately "too dark," it seems as though Marie is creating arbitrary tasks to keep Mammy busy. Perhaps Marie recognizes the unique bond shared between Eva and Mammy and is keeping Mammy occupied to hinder the development of affection. Marie does require Mammy to occasionally "see what the noise was in Eva's room," but this is not because Marie wants Mammy to care for Eva. Marie's efforts to keep her child's primary caretaker from her necessary duties expose underlying feelings of jealousy. Marie may be envious of the parental dynamic that exists between Mammy and Eva, and could behave this way as a result of her observations. Insensitivity and selfishness are also displayed, for she deprives her ill child of care and affection. All of Marie's behaviors are motivated by a pervasive selfishness, which is a trait that is absent in all of the affectionate mothers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Harriet Beecher Stowe may be using Marie to suggest that not all women possess inherent affection towards their children.

Although maternal affection is a primary theme in most slave novels, this topic can be traced back to literature preceding *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft comments on this subject: "Natural affection, as it is termed, I believe to be a very faint tie, affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy; and what sympathy does a mother exercise who sends her babe to a nurse, and only takes it from a nurse to send it to a school?" (87). Wollstonecraft argues that "natural affection" does not inherently exist between a mother and her child; if it does, she believes it to be a "very faint tie." This "sympathy" must be "habitual," which suggests that it is necessary to constantly facilitate an affectionate relationship between mother and child. A woman cannot merely give birth to a child and expect a genuine bond to form without further effort. Wollstonecraft is especially critical of mothers who rely on the nurse and the school to raise her children, for nurturing and educating are the primary means for developing affection.

The thoughts of Wollstonecraft can be applied to the characters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to develop a more thorough understanding of why the slaveholding women are frequently devoid of maternal sympathy. As previously discussed, Mammy is the primary caretaker of Eva. All of the duties that would typically be fulfilled by the mother are assigned to Mammy. These include dressing Eva, serving as her primary playmate, and providing the love and compassion that Marie refuses to display. Marie seems to embody Wollstonecraft's description of the unaffectionate mother, and it comes as no surprise that Eva is very fond of Mammy. It is common for the children of slave owners to developed a much more intimate

relationship with the female slaves than with their own mothers. After all, it is the slaves who exhibit limitless affection for the children of their owners, while the mistresses spend their time idling or punishing others.

As a result of the intimate relationships that form between children and their slaves, it is the white children in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* who are amongst the most articulate adversaries for the abolition of slavery. When the reader is first introduced to Eva, she is six years old. Her exposure to slavery has been confined to the relatively humane treatment of her own servants on her family estate in Louisiana. When her father asks for her opinion on their ownership of slaves, she responds that their way is "pleasantest" (168), because "it makes so many more round to you love" (168). Due to the close relationship between Eva and her family's slaves, she understands slavery as a relationship that produces "love."

But as Eva matures over the years, she is exposed to the most frequent evils of slaveholding practices. Tom tells Eva about the history of Prue, who is a familiar slave on a neighboring estate. Very early in her own life, Prue was purchased for the purpose of breeding slaves for the market and every child but one was sold in a series of slave auctions. Prue's only remaining child was used by her mistress as a means to motivate harder work and was placed in another room where Prue could not tend to it, but she could hear it crying through the walls. Eventually, the child died. After being purchased by Eva's neighbors, Prue turns to alcohol and is killed from a whipping that was issued to punish her for drinking. Upon being told some of this information and overhearing other parts, Eva suddenly forms a strong stance against slavery. She is able to recognize that her relationship with Mammy and the other

slaves is rare, and she is compelled to advocate against the institution. She becomes more contemplative and troubled as the novel progresses, and eventually shares her concerns with her father:

Poor old Prue's child was all she had, - and yet she had to hear it crying, and she couldn't help it! Papa, these poor creatures love their children as much as you do me. O! do something for them! There's poor Mammy loves her children; I've seen her cry when she talked about them. And Tom loves his children; and it's dreadful, papa, that such things are happening, all the time! (254)

Eva is especially troubled by the fact that Prue could not tend to her own child, despite the fact that she "had to hear it crying." By insisting that slaves "love their children as much as you do me," Eva is attempting to inspire the same form of sympathy that Stowe is working to instill in the reader. Eva's ability to defend and empathize with Prue is quite radical when compared to the opinions of those who surround her. She certainly does not learn this compassion from her mother or her father, who both support the institution of slavery. Instead, she develops her own sense of morality by observing her surroundings with the simplicity and open-mindedness of a child who has not yet formed racial biases. The strong connection that Eva has formed with Mammy leads her to condemn the practice as "dreadful" because she is able to equate the feelings of Mammy with the experiences of Prue. Mammy functions as a mediator for Eva to understand the harsh realities of slavery.

For the remainder of the novel, Eva strongly advocates for the emancipation of all slaves. This serves as a testament to the strength of the maternal relationship, for this connection allows Eva to transcend racial stigmas by forming opinions based on empathetic rationale. Additionally, Harriet Beecher Stowe uses Eva and other children to express views that may have been considered too radical for adult characters to uphold. By presenting this straightforward logic through the lens of a child, Stowe is able to present moral criticism without coming across as too confrontational.

The attempt to instill adversarial values in children has been employed in several other texts meant for the young reader. *The Slave's Friend* is an example of a didactic work of Abolitionist literature that is written specifically for the purpose of influencing the opinions of children. The American Anti-Slavery Society first published *The Slave's Friend* in 1836 and continued to release periodic publications for the next two years. In the essay, *The Slave's Friend: An Abolitionist Magazine For Children*, Christopher Geist speculates that this text was written to appeal to children between the ages of six and twelve. Each magazine issue is composed of a series of short stories, poems, and excerpts of Scripture. One issue includes a tale called *The Hyena*, which draws numerous parallels between the behavior of hyenas and slave masters. The author of this fable is not identified, and it is unclear where exactly this story was first produced. The following excerpt is likely to inspire a sense of awareness similar to Eva's realization about the moral wrongs of the slaveholding institution:

In the South of Africa these ferocious beasts are numerous. They prefer human flesh to any other [...] The hyenas pass by the calves, and take the children from under the mother's kaross; and this in such a gentle and cautious manner, that the poor parent has not missed her child until the cries of her little innocent have reached her from without, when a close prisoner in the jaws of the monster. (5)

Although *The Hyena* does not directly address the topic of slavery, this story is located in the middle of the magazine amongst other tales that directly discuss the moral wrongs of slaveholding. Due to this context, the young reader would be able to carry over the abolitionist themes of the other stories to this one. Despite the fact that hyenas inhabit the entire continent of Africa, this author chooses to set the story "In the South of Africa." This establishes a regional similarity between the Southern states of America and the Southern portion of Africa and increases the likelihood that the young reader will connect the events that follow to their prior knowledge about slavery in the South. The behavior of both the hyena and the slave

trader is primitive and barbaric, and this comparison helps the young reader analogize between the behavior of wild animals and the actions of those who participate in the slave trade. The hyenas prefer to “take the children from under the mother’s kaross” in a “gentle and cautious manner” to avoid the detection of the child’s mother. This resembles the way in which slave traders prefer to steal children from their mothers.

The practice of discreetly separating mothers and children is depicted by Stowe in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In the fifth chapter, the reader is introduced to a slave mother and child that are on board a cargo ship. A discussion transpires between two slave traders, who plan to remove the child from his mother and sell it on the slave market. After “taking the sleeping child up,” Haley tells the other trader to be careful not to “wake him up, and set him to crying, now; it would make a devil of a fuss with the gal” (117). Both Haley and the hyena are careful to avoid the detection of the mother until “the cries of her little innocent have reached her from without.” In both moments, the thief is only revealed after the stolen child begins to cry. But both mothers cannot protect their children after hearing the frantic sobs, for it has already been taken “prisoner in the jaws of the monster.” There are evident similarities between *The Hyena* and the slave traders discussed in Abolitionist texts. These parallels help the young reader develop a moral opposition to slavery, which is similar to the values that are articulated in texts such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

The use of emotional appeal to instill Abolitionist values in children is as imperative as the engagement of adults, as children become the next generation of agents who advocate for social change. But despite the intended age range of a piece, the use of sentimental language has the potential to convince an audience that the institution of slavery is problematic in a

number of ways. Both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Harriet Jacobs construct narratives that use maternal appeal to articulate the moral wrongs that are perpetuated by slavery. Their descriptions illuminate contradictions in the social and legal sphere, and function as a rhetorical device to advocate for the abolition of slavery. But the use of maternal appeal as a means for surpassing racial barriers does not end with Emancipation, as it continues to appear throughout the centuries that follow the Civil War.



## Chapter Two: Motherhood on Trial

On August 31, 1955, two teenage boys set out on the Tallahatchie River with the hopes of locating an ideal area for fishing. While on this trip, they made a monumental discovery: two child-sized knees floating above the surface of the water. These feet were attached to a mangled body of fourteen-year-old Emmet Till. Three days prior to the discovery of Till's body, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam had taken it upon themselves to seek retribution for Emmett Till's alleged offense against a white woman. Numerous sources have disputed what actually transpired between Emmett Till and Carolyn Bryant. It is most commonly noted that while Emmett was in the Bryant's grocery store, he supposedly engaged with Carolyn in a flirtatious manner, and then directed a "wolf whistle" at Carolyn as he was leaving the store. Bryant, the husband of Carolyn and the father of their two children, and Milam acted shortly after this occurrence. The two men sought to redress this matter by kidnapping Emmett Till from his uncle's home, furiously beating him until his face was nearly unidentifiable, shooting him, and dumping the body into the Tallahatchie River with a 75-pound cotton gin around his neck. In *Getting Away With Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*, Chris Crowe notes that "The body had swollen to almost twice its normal size [...] one side of the victim's forehead was crushed, an eye had been gouged out, and the skull had a bullet hole just above the right ear. The neck had been ripped raw by the barbed wire wrapped around it" (Crowe 2003, 64).

Although there are numerous facets of this case that deserve to be examined, the role that Carolyn Bryant and Mamie Till played in the events surrounding murder trial will be the

primary focus of this chapter. The murder of Emmett Till is a flash in American history that illuminates the deeply rooted biases that maintain a strong hold on the American consciousness. This event demonstrates how the polarized treatment of black and white motherhood does not end with the abolition of slavery. The murder of Emmet Till functions as a medium through which the expectations for black and white mothers can be examined. This analysis will demonstrate how Carolyn Bryant's identity as a mother was constructed and emphasized in a very different fashion than that of Mamie Till. By reviewing the trial testimonies of Carolyn and Mamie alongside the depictions of both women in the media, it will become clear that motherhood functions as a site on which entrenched biases unfold.

Before discussing the details of the Emmett Till murder trial, this event must be contextualized in relation to the stirring racial tension of the 1950's. The Emmett Till Murder Trial followed in the wake of the Supreme Court Case *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka*, which took place in 1954, just one year earlier. Many Americans firmly opposed this ruling, and this hostility played a significant role in how Emmett Till was received on his trip to Mississippi. In an effort to overturn the "separate but equal" precedent that was established in 1896 by *Plessy V. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court ruled that the racial segregation of the public school system "deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities," and was unconstitutional. But despite this newly enacted law, desegregation was not immediately instituted in all public schools. The defiance of this ruling was especially prominent in the Southern States, where the ruling of *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka* was criticized and often disregarded. In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, it is noted that "although some school districts began busing students from one neighborhood to another in an effort to achieve integration, many southern states sought to obstruct the

integration through ‘massive resistance,’ and in 1965 less than 10 percent of the South’s black students were in integrated schools” (Wilson 2008, 82). A disparity emerged between the formal requirements of *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka* and the actions of American citizens. Despite the fact that the racial integration of schools was mandated, there was an active resistance to keep African American children out of white schools. This is illuminated by the fact that more than 90 percent of the black students in Southern states remained segregated ten years after this Supreme Court Case.

Soon after the Supreme Court issued the ruling of *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka*, Governor John Bell Williams of Mississippi expressed his opinion of the decision in his “Address on the Integration of Public Schools of Mississippi,” given in 1954. In this speech, Williams refers to racial integration as a “radical so-called civil rights experiment that could be dreamed up by the witchdoctors of the pseudo-liberal left and their fellow revolutionaries.” Williams did not see any merit in the desegregation of public schools. He was also skeptical of the Supreme Court’s ability to produce far legislature, as he refers to its members as the “pseudo-liberal left” and “revolutionaries.” Williams goes on to label the Supreme Court’s ruling as “the most important problem facing [...] our state and one that concerns the future of the things nearest and dearest to us, our children.” In an attempt to persuade the listener, Williams draws upon the parental fear of his audience. He characterizes African American children as dangerous or threatening and suggests that they could spoil the entire “future” of white children in desegregated public schools.

Frederick Sullens, the editor of the Jackson, Mississippi *Daily News*, was quoted by the New York *Times* when he expressed his opinion of the *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling before the American Society of Newspaper Editors meeting: “Mississippi will

not obey the decision. If an effort is made to send Negroes to school with white children, there will be bloodshed. The stains of that bloodshed will be on the Supreme Court steps” (New York *Times*, 1954). This statement foreshadowed the impending violence that would occur a few months later. Sullens not only admitted that desegregation would be blatantly avoided; he also acknowledges that this defiance will result in the “bloodshed” of African American children.

There are two primary components of *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka* that are relevant to the Emmett Till Murder case. The first is that a disregard for legally mandated desegregation was especially concentrated in Southern states. Vast cultural differences continued to divide the nation, as Southern schools openly refused to comply with the requirements established by the Supreme Court. This unwillingness demonstrated the greater mentality in regards to racial equality in the South. Emmett Till was raised in Chicago, and despite some racial tensions that existed in the North, Emmett could not have been familiar with the severe attitudes of white Southerners. Chris Crowe notes in *Getting Away With Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*: “For Emmett and other Blacks living in Chicago, life was markedly better than it was in the South. [...] In general, the quality of life - housing, education, employment, entertainment, and social opportunities- was significantly better for Blacks and Whites in Chicago than it was in most Southern Cities” (27). As Emmett pulled into the train station in Grenada, Mississippi in 1955, he was likely unaware of the contentious climate he was entering.

In Mamie Till’s biography, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America*, she emphasizes, “Money wasn’t like other places in the Jim Crow

South. It was worse. It was much worse. The dangers were hidden, and a lot more treacherous. It was a place with racial attitudes as rigid as an oak tree in the dead of winter. People who lived in the area knew where the lines were, knew not to cross them” (195). If Money, Mississippi was “much worse” than the other Southern communities that openly defied the laws enacted by the Supreme Court, one can only imagine how hostile its residents were at the time of Emmett’s arrival. It is unlikely that a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago could completely understand the “hidden” and “treacherous” dangers of deeply rooted racism in Mississippi. The African Americans who had lived in Money for many years understood “where the lines were,” which required very calculated behavior. Making physical contact, or even eye contact, with a white woman was considered to be one of the most offensive crimes an African American could commit.

In addition to being unfamiliar with the restricted freedom of his “Southern counterparts,” Emmett probably did not fully understand the stigmas associated with black children that were being disseminated by individuals such as Governor John Bell Williams and Frederick Sullens. By crossing the Mason-Dixon line, Emmett’s body was transformed from that of an innocent fourteen-year-old boy to a physical expression of the racial conflict in the South. In her novel, Mamie notes, “To Bryant and Milam, he had represented everything they had refused to recognize in black people. He was confident and self-assured, and he carried himself with a certain dignity they felt they had to beat down, beat back, beat to a bloody pulp” (304). This lynching was more than retaliation prompted by Emmett Till’s interaction with Carolyn Bryant. In this moment, Emmett represented what white Southerners had been avidly fighting against since the abolition of slavery: an educated and independent

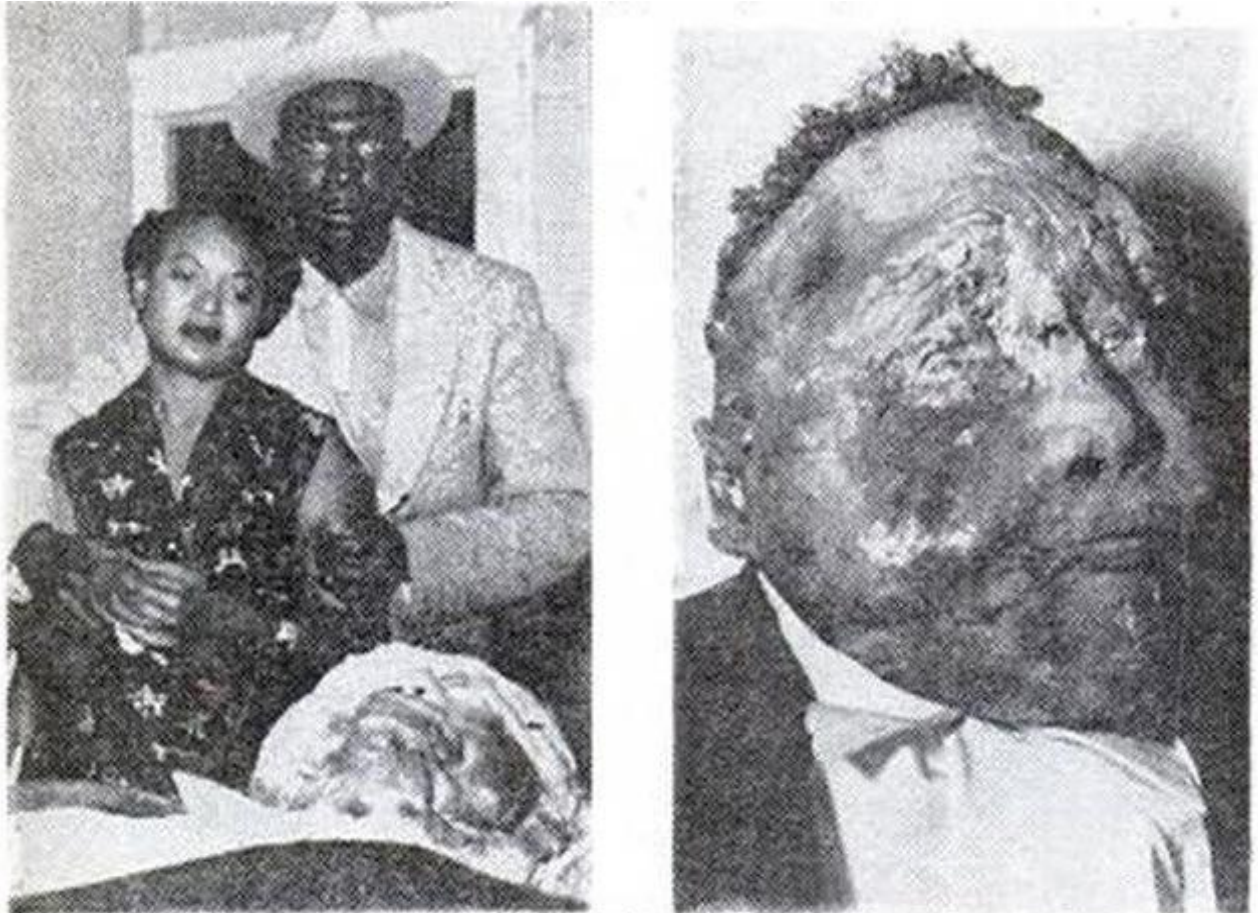
black child. On the other hand, Bryant and Milam embodied the active resistance to “beat down” and prevent the prosperity of African American children. Only three days passed before the seemingly inevitable confrontation occurred.

The open-casket viewing of Emmett’s body took place in Chicago from September 3 to September 6, 1955 (Crowe, 123). This somber occasion drew a crowd of upwards 600,000 individuals, who gathered outside of Roberts Temple of the Church of God in Christ in Chicago to mourn the death of Emmett Till (Crowe, 19). John R. Tisdale discusses the impact of the widespread media coverage on the national demand for racial equality in his essay, *Different Assignments, Different Perspectives: How Reporters Reconstruct the Emmett Till Civil Rights Murder Trial*. He writes,

The murder trial, in which the jury acquitted the brothers, was a ‘critical increment’ in civil rights history because it drew the attention of national and international media to Mississippi on a scale unmatched in the middle of the century. [...] It was one of the first civil rights events covered by the emerging medium of television. (Tisdale 2002, 39).

This degree of national and international media coverage of a racially motivated lynching in Mississippi was unprecedented in the United States. There may have been a general awareness of the horrendous crimes that were transpiring throughout the nation, with a particularly dense concentration in Southern states. But this moment provided undeniable physical evidence of the continual brutality. With the emergence of television, widespread media coverage of the Emmett Till Murder Trial publicly exposed the consequences of racial violence that had been hidden for so long. As a result of the media’s involvement in the events surrounding the trial, the American public could no longer deny that these events were taking place.

One of the most sensational reports of the murder appeared in *Jet* magazine on September 15, 1955. This article included an image of Emmett's battered body resting in the casket, which aroused a widespread reaction of shock and horror. The following image is an excerpt from the article titled, "Nation Horrified by Murder of Kidnapped Chicago Youth:"



*Mrs. Bradley got first look at brutally battered son in undertaker's morgue. More than 600,000, in an unending procession, later viewed body (r.).*

Figure 2. Photographs of Mamie Till at The A. A. Rayner Funeral Home in Chicago, *Jet* Magazine,

September 15, 1955

The initial viewing of these two photographs may instill feelings of uneasiness or repulsion in the viewer. The image on the left shows Mamie Till viewing the body of her “brutally battered son” when she first received the body. The photograph on the right is a close up of Emmett’s disfigured face as it was presented at the open-casket funeral. In *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America*, Mamie reflects on her experience at the morgue:

I had started out doing this item analysis with the kind of detachment a forensic doctor might have, but I wasn’t a forensic doctor. I was Emmett’s mother and I was overwhelmed by a mother’s anguish as I continued tracking Emmett through his night of torture. Step by step, as methodically as his killers had mutilated my baby, I was putting him back together again, but only to identify the body. (215)

Mamie was required to positively identify this body as the remains her son. In an attempt to disengage herself from her overpowering maternal grief, she began this task by viewing the body with the “kind of detachment a forensic doctor might have.” But as one may imagine, it would be quite difficult for a mother to calmly view the mangled corpse of her own child. Mamie was not a doctor or an undertaker, and it was impossible to approach this task with impartiality. Mamie could not simply view the body and then determine it was Emmett; her “mother’s anguish” forced her to imagine Emmett “though his night of torture.” As she surveyed the corpse from head to toe, she pictured the ways in which Bryant and Milam had inflicted these wounds. Less than a month had passed since Mamie viewed the eager face of her only son as he boarded the train to Mississippi, and all that remained in this moment was a swollen and mutilated corpse.

But the anguish that is inspired by this photograph is not limited to the mother who must admit that this is what remains of her only child. The image itself generates anxiety in the general viewer; even without knowing Emmett, we are made uncomfortable by this pairing.



Our eyes may momentarily dart from the image, searching outside of the page for visual relief. But for some reason, we may be tempted to return after a moment. Although this display of brutality is horrifying, it is simultaneously captivating. It alarms us, disturbs us, but at the same time intrigues us. It makes us want to look at it again and again, in an attempt to understand something that we cannot immediately grasp. What is it about these photographs that prompt a constant return? What is brought into focus that wasn't already there? Fred Moten grapples with the similar questions throughout *In the Break: The Aesthetics of The Black Radical Tradition*. He writes:

And why is the memory of this mutilated face, reconfiguration of what was embedded in some furtive and partial glance's refusal, so much more horrible, the distortion magnified even more than the already incalculable devastation of the actual body? Does the blindness held in the aversion of the eye create an insight that is manifest as a kind of magnification or intensification of the object - as if memory as affect and the affect that forges distorted or intensified memory cascade off one another, each multiplying the other's force? (Moten 2003, 199)

For Moten, this photograph amplifies the “incalculable devastation” of Emmett Till's body. As the image is examined, feelings of nervousness mixed with guilt rush through the viewer. One may partially “glance” at the mangled remains, but only for a moment. An innate aversion to this depiction of violence forces the viewer to look away. But even after the gaze is redirected, an inescapable “memory” of the disfigured face remains. This memory returns to the viewer even after their eyes have been averted, and is said to be even more “horrible” than the mutilated body. The visual absence and mental presence of this photograph cause a “magnification or intensification” of the pain it initially inspires. We view the image; we experience repulsion; we redirect our gaze; the shock reverberates; we return to the image. This photograph generates emotional discomfort that continues to increase with each viewing.

But as Moten states, there is a form of “refusal” that takes place in this moment. Just as the glance refuses to view the image all at once, the photograph refuses to divulge the actual details of the occurrence. The way in which the violence was carried out is left to the imagination of the viewer, which contributes to the “intensified memory.” The viewer cannot be sure about the moments that exist outside of this photograph, and it is this uncertainty that causes the greatest unease. These feelings of anxiety are only a fragment of the emotional weight endured by Mamie Till when she received Emmett’s dismembered body. She knew as little as the general population did about the events that transpired on the evening of August 28, 1955. Much like the viewer of the first two photographs, Mamie was left with two images in her mind: her son as he had looked as he boarded the train to Mississippi on August 21, 1955, and the mutilated corpse that she received at the Chicago train station in a coffin (Crowe, 35).

The power of this image is evident in its continual circulation since its original publication in *Jet Magazine* in 1955. This photo refuses to be silenced by the time that has elapsed since the murder of Emmett Till and continues to remind viewers of this horrific incident. The widespread publication of Emmett’s disfigured body can be largely attributed to Mamie Till’s decision to “Let the world see what I’ve seen” (Till, 219). Mamie chose to express her maternal grief publicly by authorizing the circulation of these images and holding an open-casket funeral. By allowing the public to participate in the mourning of Emmett Till, Mamie ensured that the death of her son would not be easily forgotten. Moten remarks on Mamie’s decision to display the remains of her son: “Ms. Bradley opens, leaves open, reopens, the violent, ritual, sexual cutting of his death by the leaving open of the casket, by the

unretouching of the body, by the body's photograph, by the photograph's transformation in memory and nightmare [...] That leaving open is a performance" (200). Moten emphasizes that Mamie's decision to display Emmett's body "opens, leaves open, reopens" the physical and emotional trauma that is inflicted. This allows the mangled body to remain alive in the minds of the American public, as opposed to being silenced after a discreet burial. This decision is referred to as a "performance," suggesting that its shock is ongoing and ever changing.

Although the physical display of violence has the power to inspire immediate sympathy and arouse anger in the viewer, there is also a prolonged impact of this photograph. Nearly a century of racial tension had transpired since Emancipation, and this underlying pressure could finally be viewed through an accessible medium. In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry discusses the physical suffering of the body, and its relationship to cultural forces. She notes,

The extreme of the hurt body and unanchored verbal assertions (pain & interrogation in torture; casualties & verbal issues in war) are laid edge to edge. In each, a fiction is produced, a fiction that is a projection image of the body; the pain's reality is now the regime's reality; the factualness of corpses is now the factualness of an ideology or territorial self-definition. (Scarry 1985, 143)

The "extreme [...] hurt" of Emmett Till's body not only functioned as an expression of substantial violence; it also exemplified the "unanchored verbal assertions" that accompanied racial conflict in the United States. The African American community was not only subjected to physical harm; intangible violence also encompassed the daily lives of these individuals. Although emotional and psychological threats operate on a subtler basis, their impact is equally as detrimental. This may explain why the open-casket funeral and circulation of this

photograph generated such a monumental backlash. Both the abstract and concrete persecution of African Americans are “laid edge to edge” for the entire world to view. Just as Scarry claims “the factualness of corpses is now the factualness of an ideology,” the undeniable torment that is expressed by Emmett’s body becomes a reality of the larger group. The “factualness” of his corpse cannot be disputed; this image provided a legitimate testimony for the physical and emotional brutality being committed against African Americans. In her biography, Mamie discusses her decision to open the casket at the funeral and publicly reveal the violence committed against her son:

On the one hand, as a mother, I couldn’t bear the thought of people being horrified by the sight of my son. He had always been such a fine young boy and I was so very proud of him. But, on the other hand, I felt that the alternative was even worse. After all, we had averted our eyes far too long, turning away from the ugly reality facing us as a nation. (224)

This passage reveals how difficult this choice was for Mamie, as she was torn between the duality as a mother and a Civil Rights activist. Her maternal feelings initially made her want to shield Emmett’s body from the public gaze, for she did not want the world to be “horrified by the sight” of her son. But her desire to reveal the atrocities occurring in the South outweighed this original reluctance. In an attempt to expose “the ugly reality facing” the nation, Mamie decided to authorize the viewing of Emmett’s body and the circulation of the troubling photograph. As a result, Mamie stepped forth as both a grieving mother and an influential public figure in the Civil Rights Movement. She actively spoke out against the murder of her son, and as a result she attracted large-scale attention to the injustice of the crime.

Rather than containing her grief to the boundaries of her own domestic space, Mamie openly displayed her emotionalism in the public sphere. Newspapers that supported Mamie

frequently included photos of her openly grieving at public events, especially during the funeral and the trial. In an article written in *The Chicago Defender*, a newspaper founded for African-American readers, featured a large photo of Mamie Till with her family after receiving Emmett's body:



NEAR COLLAPSE from shock and grief, Mrs. Mamie E. Bradley sobs hysterically as the body of her son, 14-year-old Emmett Till, is taken from train at Chicago's Illinois Cen-

tral Station. Mrs. Bradley's condition made it necessary for her to use wheel chair during this ordeal. Offering comfort in photo are Crosby Smith of

Mississippi, an uncle of the lynched boy; and Mrs. Lillian Smith, of Chicago, aunt of Mrs. Bradley. Defender photo by Rhoden.

Figure 3. Photograph of Mamie Till at Chicago Illinois Central Station, *The Chicago Defender*,

September 24, 1955

The caption of the photo reads, “Near collapse from shock and grief, Mrs. Mamie E. Bradley sobs hysterically as the body of her son, 14-year-old Emmett Till, is taken from train at Chicago’s Illinois Central Station. Mrs. Bradley’s condition made it necessary for her to use wheel chair during this ordeal.” Those who are skeptical of Mamie’s emotionalism argued that these moments are a staged performance, as opposed to an occasion that prompts legitimate grieving. But the assertion that Mamie would need a wheelchair as a result of “shock and grief” adds a layer of physicality to Mamie’s pain. In her biography, Mamie writes, “I had to be brought up in a wheelchair. I was too weak and just couldn’t stand up at the moment the train pulled in” (207). The suggestion that Mamie’s suffering was so great that she was rendered physically weak to the point of being disabled countered the claim that her grief is a mere construction. This outward demonstration of grief generated sympathy from the readers of *The Chicago Defender*, and Mamie certainly deserved compassion from the public. But despite the national outcry against the murder of Emmett Till, the trial did not produce the outcome that Mamie and her supporters were hoping to achieve. By exploring the details of the Emmett Till Murder Trial, the jury’s prioritization of white motherhood over restorative justice will be exposed.

Carolyn Bryant, a plantation manager’s daughter and two-time beauty pageant winner, served as an ideal model for white middle-class motherhood. Despite the fact that the Carolyn family’s socioeconomic position was not far above that of southern sharecroppers, Carolyn’s role as a victim allowed the Bryant family to supersede their status as small-town grocery store owners. In the Southern press, Carolyn was depicted as a compassionate mother and wife, and as an undeserving victim of this alleged harassment. Photos of the murder trial

printed in The Memphis *Press-Scimitar* frequently featured Carolyn Bryant seated with her husband and their two young boys. The September 18th, 1955 publication of The Memphis *Press-Scimitar* featured photographs and details of the Emmett Till Murder Trial. The headline of this day's paper reads: "Highlights as Till Slaying Trial Gets Under Way at Sumner." Because of the title's location and larger print, it was likely to be the first bit of text encountered by the reader. The term "slaying" describes the violence done against Emmett Till and sets up an expectation for some cold-blooded killer as the perpetrator. It is curious that a newspaper whose language alludes to the innocence of Bryant and Milam would employ terms that emphasize the brutality of the crime. Perhaps the Memphis *Press-Scimitar* did not downplay the violence because it is setting up expectations for a particular kind of person who would commit a "slaying." If one were to construct a mental image of the perpetrator may picture, they may imagine a brutish individual who fails to comply with society's standards for *normal*. It is doubtful that one would equate the action of "slaying" with a man who has two children resting in his lap, seated next to his conservatively dressed wife. A disparity is created between the violent and unjust connotations of the term "slaying" and the image of an affectionate family. This may lead a reader to conclude that a member of this affectionate family could not commit such a brutal act. This could explain why The Memphis *Press-Scimitar* paired this sensational title with a photo of the Bryant family.

The use of the following photograph may be seen as a strategy to cast doubt on the assumption that Bryant and Milam were responsible for the murder:



**BRYANT AND FAMILY**—Defendant Roy Bryant is shown with Mrs. Bryant and their two sons, Roy Jr., 3, and Thomas Lemar Bryant, 2.

Figure 4. Photograph of the Bryant Family at the Emmett Till Murder Trial, *The Memphis Press-Scimitar*, September 18th, 1955

This family portrait is located directly below the exciting title with the following caption: “**BRYANT AND FAMILY:** Defendant Roy Bryant is shown with Mrs. Bryant and their two sons, Roy Jr., 3, and Thomas Lemar Bryant, 2.” The primary emphasis of this caption (as



suggested by the slightly larger and capitalized font) is the Bryant family as an inseparable unit, as opposed to Roy or Carolyn Bryant as individuals. This photo seems to suggest, *Roy Bryant is a family man who loves his delicate wife, Carolyn. Roy Bryant is not capable of slaying anyone*. The combination of Carolyn's anxious facial expression and the way in which she clasps her hands in her lap resembles an act of pleading as if she is begging the viewer to pity her situation and to not condemn her husband for this heinous crime. *Newsweek* even described Carolyn Bryant as "an attractive, dark-haired mother of two, whom Emmett was accused of insulting" (1955, 24). The construction of Carolyn Bryant as a charming white mother was essential for the defense of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam and allowed both journalists and attorneys to depict Carolyn as a helpless victim of Till's sexual advances. In this moment, Carolyn Bryant was much more than a store clerk or a wife. Her form embodied all of the sacred attributes of white women that conventional Southerners believed must be protected from the looming threat of African American men.

Sidney Carleton, one of the five defense attorneys hired to represent Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, also used the strategy of constructing Carolyn as the true victim of this encounter. The questions that Carleton selected for his direct examination of Carolyn were motivated by a similar agenda: to depict Carolyn as a pure and compassionate woman. This testimony was initiated by asking how tall Carolyn is, how much she weighs, and a series of questions about her children including gender, name, and age (FBI Transcript of the Emmett Till Murder Trial, 258). By opening with these questions, Carleton established two important details for the construction of Carolyn's vulnerability. Because Carolyn was five feet two inches and one hundred and three pounds, it was inferred that she was too small to defend

herself, and was helpless against her offender. By beginning with simple questions about the Bryant's children, the jury was prompted to imagine this mother with her two young boys, and to maintain this vision throughout the entirety of the trial. The recognition of maternal compassion and innocence was likely to be shared by the all-white jury. This tactic was similar to how the newspaper images illustrate the Bryants as a loving family unit; both mediums frame Carolyn and Roy Bryant in a way that is likely to inspire sympathy for the defense.

Mamie Till also describes the same scene that is depicted in the photograph of the Memphis Press-Scimitar in her biography. She recalls,

Their wives were constantly at their sides; sometimes even their mother was there. Mostly, though, I found myself watching their children. The way they played with their daddies. I watched those four little boys. I could see those babies playing on their daddies' laps, pulling on their noses and their ears and doing all kinds of things that they might well have been doing at home. [...] And then I thought about those little boys across the way from me, the Bryant boys and the Milam boys, and how I could take each of those boys and raise them as my own, and love them in the process. (256)

This recollection is inverted and uncomfortable, as the intimate relationship between child and parent is showcased at a very precarious moment. Mamie sat alone in the courtroom watching Bryant and Milam, who were accompanied by their own mothers and wives who "were constantly at their sides." These very men, who were capable of kidnapping, beating, and shooting a fourteen-year-old boy, sat playing with their own children. It is strange to view these killers as "daddies," who have children that are "pulling on their noses and their ears." This sentimental moment occurs in the midst of a murder trial and feels out of place. The public display of affection may have been an attempt to generate sympathy from the court, or it could have been a way for Bryant and Milam to taunt Mamie. In either case, it feels very inappropriate for the circumstance. It is even more remarkable that Mamie expresses

compassion for the Bryant and Milam children. Mamie seems to feel sorry for the young boys, and this sympathy makes her want to “raise them” as her own. Even though these are the children of the men who took her only son, Mamie still feels a maternal yearning to “love them.” It is evident from this passage that Mamie’s identity as a mother does not disappear with the loss of her son, for she continues to long for the affection of children.

As Mamie Till stepped up to the witness stand, she viewed the courtroom through a more somber lens than that of Carolyn Bryant. Unlike Carolyn, Mamie was unable to look towards the reassuring faces of family members seated in the front row. Although relatives accompanied Mamie to the trial, they had to sit in the back of the courthouse with the rest of the African Americans, out of Mamie’s view. The Till family unit did not resemble the structure of the Bryant’s. Mamie no longer existed as a part of a complete family, made up of a father, a mother, and their immediate children. She stood alone, incomplete without a son or a husband. Her former husband, Louis Till, was a soldier during World War II and was hanged in 1945 by the U.S. Army under the accusation of rape and murder. When Mamie describes the day Emmett was born in her biography, she writes, “my mother had brought me to the hospital on Wednesday. And the fact that it was my mother and not my husband who took me to the hospital to have a baby probably tells you just about everything you need to know about Louis Till” (20). Emmett never met his father, and his mother and grandmother raised him. Since the day of Emmett’s birth, Louis had been entirely absent from Emmett’s life.

There are multiple moments and details of this trial that resemble themes that are developed in slave narratives and novels. Mamie’s fragmented family, comprised of an absent husband and a lost child, mirrors the structure typical of a slave family. In *My Bondage and*

*My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass notes, “Slavery does away with fathers, as it does away with families. Slavery has no use for either fathers or families, and its laws do not recognize either existence in the social arrangements of the plantation” (Douglass 1855, 151). The ideal structure of two parents and their immediate children is a luxury that is only available to families that have not been separated by the violent hand of slavery. Because the slave child’s father was usually a current or former master, he was never willing to complete the family unit. The slave mother was an instrument used to yield chattel and is then denied the right to parent the children she was forced to introduce into the wretched practice. As a result, a stable family structure was simply not available to slaves. Although Emmett’s parents were obviously not enslaved, the pressure that was applied to the vulnerable structure of the African American family is similar in both cases.

Mamie’s only child was violently ripped from her grasp, just as the slave mother “sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning” (Jacobs, 18). The female slave is denied the right to identify her children as her own, which subjects them to the dangers and cruelties of the slave trade. Mamie Till was similarly refused the agency to identify the body of her son in open court. During his direct examination, Gerald Chatham, the lead prosecutor in the case, showed Mamie a photograph of the body after it had been removed from the Tallahatchie River. He asked Mamie if she could positively identify the body in the photograph as Emmett Till. She nodded yes, adding, “That’s my son, my son, Emmett Till” (Crowe, 91). But the embalmer who helped prepare the body for shipment to Chicago claimed that the body was “bloated beyond recognition” (Crowe, 98). Despite Mamie’s absolute certainty, the defense argued that Mamie was not

credible enough to confirm the identity of the body. Therefore, Mamie's claims were deemed invalid. The predicaments of the slave mother and Mamie Till Bradley, although separated by a century, are not all that different. Both women are explicitly denied the right to claim their children as their own. In the case of Jacobs, she is unable to challenge the authority that white slaveholders and traders have over the bodies of her children. She cannot influence whom her children will be sold to or to what degree of violence they will be subjected. Mamie Till was deprived of the right to confirm the identity of Emmett's body and was unable to assume the authority that a mother should have over the body of her deceased son.

Skeptics have argued that Mamie was taking advantage of Emmett's death for financial gain. This accusation implies that Mamie cannot be *truly* affected by the loss of her son, and was instead concerned with the money she received from the life insurance settlement. J.J. Berland, an additional attorney representing Bryant and Milam, chose to bring up this argument in his line of questioning. Initially he asks, "By the way, did you have any insurance on Emmett Till?" (FBI Transcript of the Emmett Till Murder Trial, 190). After Mamie confirms that she had about four hundred dollars in life insurance, Berland continues to apply pressure to this subject. He asks, "How long had you had these policies out on him," "Who was the beneficiary in those policies," "Have you collected on those policies," and "Have you tried to collect them?" The fact that Mamie does not collect these life insurance policies before the time of the trial was of little importance to Berland. These questions seem to have been asked with the intention of reducing the relationship between Mamie and Emmett to some form of a monetary exchange, rather than a fully developed emotional relationship between a mother and her son. By doing so, he simultaneously equated Emmett to a four

hundred dollar sum, rather than a fourteen-year-old boy who had just been lynched. It should also be considered that the all-white jury was made up of nine farmers, two carpenters, and one insurance agent (Till, 235). To a majority of these men, four hundred dollars was quite a large sum of money for a single African American mother to receive, regardless of why Bradley was entitled to this amount. This cross-examination depicted Mamie as a woman seeking financial compensation, rather than a grieving mother who is coming to terms with the death of her son.

Although Mamie's only child has been violently taken from her, her identity as a mother is not revoked with Emmett's death. She is continuously plagued by a mother's suffering but is deprived of the comfort that comes from a child's loving affection. Mamie's affliction as a mother without a child resembles the distinct burden endured by female slaves who have been separated from their children. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass describes the agonizing experience of his own grandmother, who is forced to spend the rest of her life in an isolated cabin away from her family:

The children, the unconscious children, who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. [...] at this time, the most needful time, the time for the exercise of that tenderness and affection which children only can exercise towards a declining parent - my poor old grandmother, the devoted mother of twelve children, is left all alone, in yonder little hut, before a few dim embers. (52)

Douglass's grandmother may have been removed from her children and grandchildren, but her identity as a mother and grandmother does not dissipate. What makes this moment so painful is the absence of those who are capable of instilling moments of joy in an overwhelmingly dreadful situation. She is left "in the darkness of old age" without the light from the children "who once sang and danced in her presence." Death lingers around this woman, and she is

forced to endure “the most needful time” of suffering in solitude. Douglass suggests that this anguish could have been alleviated by “that tenderness and affection which children only can exercise towards a declining parent.” This passage emphasizes the unique ability shared by children to heal the pain of a suffering parent. When considering the position of Mamie Till, this parental misery becomes even more distressing. Like Douglass’s grandmother, Mamie must continue a life of grief in solitude. But what makes Mamie’s isolation distinct is the fact that it is not limited by physical proximity. Douglass’s grandmother may be able to at least receive a degree of comfort from the thought that her child is *somewhere*. But Mamie must wake up each day with the knowledge that her son is *nowhere*, and that this absence is a result of a horrifically violent death.

As demonstrated by the previous chapter, female slaves were rarely allowed to act as maternal figures for their children. It was in the slave owner’s best interest to sever the bond between mother and child at an early age to prevent the formation of a strong emotional relationship. Even though it is clear from numerous slave narratives that these women maintain a profoundly strong connection with their kin, the practice of immediate separation is then justified by claiming that black mothers could not possibly feel the same maternal affection as white mothers. Is there a difference between these assumptions and the claims made about Mamie Till’s feelings towards her deceased son? Sure, there are circumstantial differences; Mamie and Emmett are not slaves, and Emmett was allowed to develop an emotional connection with his mother before being torn away from her. But in some ways, this seems worse than the fate of the slave mother. Mamie and Emmett were given fourteen years to cultivate a meaningful relationship, as opposed to the slave who “can be spared long

enough from the field to endure all the bitterness of a mother's anguish [...] but *not* long enough to receive the joyous reward afforded by the intelligent smiles of her child" (Douglass, 152). Both choices are accompanied by a unique set of disadvantages, but neither is ideal for the woman. The slave mother knew not of what happened to her child after it was torn from the action block, but she likely spent each day imagining the brutality that her young one must be subjected to without her protection. Mamie Till will never know the exact details of the encounter between Emmett and his two executioners, but she will not be able to avoid recreating the scene his death in her mind. If Harriet Beecher Stowe or Harriet Jacobs were to examine this discrepancy they may ask the reader, "Would you rather have your child violently ripped from your grasp at birth, or after fourteen years of meaningful time spent together?" There is no optimal choice between the two, and this dilemma makes it clear that social framework of slavery did not disappear with abolition. Although the specific details of these moments are varied, their oppressive force on the African American mother remains the same.



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