

**The Abolitionist Argument Against Slavery as Revealed by
The Child's Anti-Slavery Book**

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The Child's Anti-Slavery Book was published in New York and distributed by the Sunday School Union in 1859, one year before the South secedes and two years before the start of the Civil War. The stories within are actual life stories about mistreated slave children meant to appeal to the sympathies of free white children. The stories point out the evils of slavery and argue for the equality of African American children who deserved the same rights as white children. Religion was a very strong reoccurring theme throughout and is used to condemn slavery as evil and sinful. The Child's Anti-Slavery Book demonstrates the ways that both abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates tried to use reason and religion to defend their views and practices in regard to slavery. Abolitionists used the fear of God to persuade people to renounce slavery while pro-slavery advocates found ways to use the Bible to defend slavery. Abolitionists arguments often appealed to a person's sense of pity, using examples of the ways laws were biased toward keeping slaves in captivity and how the slaves suffered from cruel punishments and lacked the same rights to education as whites. The Child's Anti-Slavery Book is, of course, a book directed at children, specifically white children in the North, in an effort to convert them to the abolitionist cause it uses the above arguments to gain their sympathies along with tying these arguments to real life stories of slave children.

The Child's Anti-Slavery book uses several different methods to show the evils of slavery, but none is more prominent or passionate as the argument that slavery is a sin and an affront to God. As shown by the impassioned writings in the Child's Anti-Slavery Book abolitionists used religion and the fear of God as a way to persuade people to their cause. Religious terms are tied to many of the arguments against slavery even when religion and God are not part of the main reasoning. The word sin

reoccurs several times throughout the book to describe slavery and those who practice slavery. He who holds a slave “acts contrary to the will of God and SINS!”¹ The author asks the children directly if this not so, undoubtedly prompting them to nod fervently. Even when using state laws as examples of the “evil” institution of slavery the religious notion of Divine Law is the more stressed issue. It is stated that the “wicked law under which [the slaveholder] acts does not and cannot set aside the divine law, by which [the slave] is free as any child that was ever born.”² Divine Law, in this case, is far more important than the state laws which allow for slaves to be held in bondage and, as the author argues, overrule those laws. Readers are asked to pity the slaves not only for their inability to read, but specifically their inability to read the Bible and therefore their religious ignorance. Even when referring to other acts of cruelty not specifically linked to religion, religious terms, such as “manna from heaven”³ are still used to describe why it is wrong to hold slaves. Throughout the entire text religion is intertwined with every argument making it very clear that the most blatant issue with slavery is that it goes against God's wishes.

It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that people began to think of slavery as unnatural.⁴ Before that the common Christian view was that sin was a kind of slavery, rather than slavery itself being the sin.⁵ The advocates of immediate abolition, however, rejected the detached eighteenth century perspective of gradual emancipation and their new approach recognized the

¹"The Child's Anti-Slavery Book," American Memory from the Library of Congress. [online]; available from [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ody_rbcmisc&fileName=ody/ody0313/ody0313page.db&recNum=14&itemLink=r%3Fammem/AMALL:%40field\(DOCID%2B%40lit\(ody0313\)\)&linkText=0](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ody_rbcmisc&fileName=ody/ody0313/ody0313page.db&recNum=14&itemLink=r%3Fammem/AMALL:%40field(DOCID%2B%40lit(ody0313))&linkText=0); internet; accessed 17 Nov. 2010, 15.

² “The Child's Anti-Slavery Book,” 14.

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ "Welcome to Encyclopædia Britannica's Guide to Black History." Encyclopedia - Britannica Online Encyclopedia [online]; available from <http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-24160>; Internet; accessed October 18, 2010.

⁵ Ibid.

sinfulness of slavery.⁶ Many well-known and prominent anti-slavery advocates used the argument that slavery was sinful and attempted to use the fear of God's wrath for these sins as a way to persuade people away from slavery. The advocates of immediate abolition directly referred to slavery as sin, saying that they “made a personal commitment to make no compromise with sin.”⁷ These views and beliefs created rifts in many churches between abolitionists and slaveholders. In 1844 the northern section of the Methodist Church adopted an anti-slavery position which forced the departure of southerners.⁸ In 1843 the Wesleyan Methodist Church was created which included abolition and the south responded by creating the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1845.⁹

The view that slavery was an evil sin was held by famous abolitionists such as Elijah P. Lovejoy, who called slavery a “moral evil” and argued that slaves were human beings who possessed natural rights given to them by God¹⁰ and Benjamin Law, a Quaker and passionate abolitionist, who called slavery a “notorious sin.”¹¹ Lovejoy was murdered for these views against slavery in 1837.¹² Harriet Beecher Stowe, an active abolitionist and the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a famous anti-slavery book published in 1852, concluded her novel with a plea to the North and South to repent their slavery related sins and thereby avoid the wrath of God.¹³ Between 1821 and 1834 two hundred abolitionist societies had sprouted up in the North and used moral suasion to mount a massive propaganda campaign against

⁶ Stanley I. Kutler, *Dictionary of American history*, 3rd ed. Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003), 209.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Edward L. Queen, Stephen R. Prothero, and Gardiner H. Shattuck. *Encyclopedia of American religious history*. 3. ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 103.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹¹ "African American Odyssey: Abolition, Anti-Slavery Movements, and the Rise of the Sectional Controversy (Part 1)." *American Memory from the Library of Congress - Home Page*. [online]; available from <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohhtml/exhibit/aopart3.html>; internet; accessed October 8, 2010.

¹² Queen, Prothero, Shattuck, *Encyclopedia of American religious history*, 102.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 103.

slavery.¹⁴

Abolitionists were not the only ones turning to the Bible for justification. Pro-slavery advocates and slaveholders also used the Bible to defend their beliefs and practices regarding slavery. Because The Child's Anti-Slavery Book was written for the abolitionist cause and to try to “excite your sympathy for poor slave children”¹⁵ the views of pro-slavery advocates are not addressed directly. However, the very fact that religion is used so strongly to try to condemn slavery shows that it must have been being used by the other side as well. Religious justification would not be needed if a counter argument was not being made by slaveholders.

Pro-slavery religious leaders claimed that the Bible itself sanctioned slavery and they used this argument to defend the institution of slavery.¹⁶ These leaders even believed that holding slaves would cause God to bless their region with prosperity because they were practicing His will.¹⁷ This caused some slaveholders to believe that holding slaves put them on higher moral ground than non-slaveholders because they were practicing the will of God. One such person was James Furman, a Baptist slaveholder in South Carolina, who wrote a letter to a fellow slaveholder in 1848 reading “we who own slaves honor God's laws in the exercise of our authority.”¹⁸ Even after losing the Civil War Southerners continued to believe that God approved of the keeping of slaves. They saw their defeat as part of God's plan and that they would be a source of religious revival for the North, where theological liberalism, modernism and unbelief were rampant.¹⁹

The evilness of slavery in God's eyes was not the only issue addressed by The Child's Anti-

¹⁴ S. Mintz, "Immediate Abolition ." *Digital History*. [online]; available from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=51; internet; accessed October 18, 2010.

¹⁵ “The Child's Anti-Slavery Book,” 16.

¹⁶ Queen, Prothero, Shattuck, *Encyclopedia of American religious history*, 926.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 799.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 798.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

Slavery Book. The author also uses examples of the unfair laws that were in affect to harness the pity of the children reading the book. There were many laws put into place that protected the institution of slavery which many said went against the very core concept of the country and this was another source of conflict between abolitionists and slaveholders. These laws are referred to as “wicked laws”²⁰ and it is said that “violence has been framed into the law, and the poor slave is trodden beneath the feet of the powerful.”²¹ The Declaration of Independence is also referred to directly and is said to have “made all men to be free and equal”²² and speaks of the laws which deny the slave the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness which is promised by the Declaration of Independence. The argument against these laws is very strong and passionate, showing a deep distaste for the laws that made slavery possible. It is clear from the strong language and the use of words such as “wicked,” “cruel,” and “violence” that there is no exception or excuse for these laws. No argument can be made for the justification of these laws in the eyes of the abolitionist author as shown by the final paragraphs of the introduction to The Child's Anti-Slavery Book which contain a plea to the children to “make a solemn vow before the Saviour [... to] never hold slaves, never apologize to those who do.”²³

Slavery in America went through many changes and the definition of slavery changed throughout this time as the needs of the country evolved, which created new laws and new conflicts. The enslavement of Africans dates back to the era of Columbus when the Spanish used African labor to grow crops and dig for gold in the Caribbean Islands.²⁴ Later, colonists in America tried to enslave Native Americans captured in war, but they knew the land too well and most soon escaped bondage which led the colonists to look for other sources of cheap labor. At first the colonies used indentured servants as

²⁰ “The Child's Anti-Slavery Book,” 11.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 14.

²³ Ibid., 16.

²⁴ Thomas Borstelmann, Jacqueline Jones, Tyler May, Vicki L. Ruiz, and Peter H. Wood. *Created Equal: A Social and Political History of the United States*. 3. ed. (New York: Longman, 2008), 107.

their labor source but this created a high turnover of labor and competing farmers once the indentured servants had completed their time. Furthermore, when indentured servants were mistreated they would write back home to other potential workers, influencing where people chose to work. With African slaves however, the brutal treatment of slaves had no repercussions on the flow of workers. By 1750 more than 21% of the colonial population was enslaved and almost all were Africans. The greatest number of these African slaves lived in the Chesapeake area, making up more than a third of the population.²⁵

The laws that kept Africans in bondage differed greatly from those of other slave holding societies. In the Old Testament, for example, it states that Hebrew slaves were to be freed after six years, however in Christian slave societies the idea that the tenure of slaves should be limited was completely ignored.²⁶ Because the English colonies were completely autonomous and England had no slave laws, the colonies had nowhere from which to borrow laws regarding slavery²⁷ which led them to create their own, ones that solely benefited the slaveholder and made it very difficult for any slave to gain his freedom.

The law's definition of slavery changed over time, most often to suit the needs of the country. In 1662 Virginia's General Assembly said that any child born to an enslaved woman would be enslaved from birth²⁸ which meant that slavery was now a hereditary condition. In 1664 Maryland's assembly adopted the colony's first slave code which said that any free woman who married a slave would also serve as a slave.²⁹ Many slaves would try to escape to freedom via the Underground Railroad, but the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 tried to put an end to this by requiring local and federal law enforcement

²⁵ Ibid., 108.

²⁶ "Welcome to Encyclopædia Britannica's Guide to Black History." *Encyclopedia - Britannica Online Encyclopedia*, [online]; available from <http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-24162>; internet; accessed October 17, 2010.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Created Equal*, 110.

²⁹ Ibid.

agents to retrieve runaway slaves even if they took refuge in the free Northern states.³⁰ These laws were put into effect in order to protect the institution of slavery and make it easier to keep African-Americans in bondage. The North responded in its own way to the Fugitive Slave Act by passing “personal liberty laws” that freed local officials from the obligation of hunting runaway slaves who escaped to the north for freedom.³¹ This upset Southerners because the Northerners were not abiding by the Fugitive Slave Act³² which was specifically put into effect to prevent slaves from escaping to freedom in the northern states.

The fact that these laws went against the very principals that were written into the Declaration of Independence was yet another source of disagreement between the abolitionists and slaveholders. After the War of 1812 the Declaration of Independence became a national icon, but also a subject of controversy.³³ Anti-slavery advocates used the Declaration of Independence as another argument against slavery, while the pro-slavery advocates denied that “all men are created equal” and have “inalienable rights.”³⁴ Abolitionists argued that slaves possessed the natural rights granted to all colonists. These rights consisted of the rights to life, liberty, property and the right to support and defend that property to the best of their ability.³⁵ Abolitionists such as Jonathan Edwards, who was a Connecticut theologian, used the natural rights argument to justify the abolition of slavery.³⁶

The author equates the American Revolution to slavery by posing the question: “Why didn't they

³⁰ Ibid., 410-411.

³¹ Gerald Prokopowicz, *The Reform Era and Eastern U.S. Development 1815-1850 (American Eras)*(New York: Gale Cengage 1998), 198.

³² Ibid.

³³ Stanley I. Kutler, *Dictionary of American history* . 3rd ed. Volume 6 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003), 522.

³⁴ Ibid., 523.

³⁵ "Adams." History Department, Hanover College [online]; available from <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/adamss.html>; internet; accessed 19 Oct. 2010.

³⁶ "African American Odyssey.”

fight as our forefathers did when they threw off the yoke of England's laws?"³⁷ The meaning of the ideals of the Revolution was also fought over by the abolitionists and the slaveholders. Because of its emphasis on liberty and individual rights, the Revolution fueled anti-slavery sentiments³⁸ and started an ambiguous yet ferocious debate over the morality of slavery.³⁹ Even before the abolitionist cause began to take hold the South had associated the Revolution with a right to preserve slavery⁴⁰ due to the British having offered freedom to slaves who enlisted in the army to fight against the Americans.⁴¹

One of the main ways that *The Child's Anti-Slavery Book* tries to provoke the sympathies of the children meant to read it is through descriptions of the cruel treatment of slaves. There are many passages dedicated to showing the ways in which the slaves were cruelly treated, from the time of their capture on. *The Child's Anti-Slavery Book* shows the ways in which the slaves were harshly treated from the very beginning of their capture and many during their servitude as well. No regard was paid toward their families and some slaveholders even took advantage of these relationships by breaking up families as punishment for misbehavior. The reason for these events and what followed are described by the author who writes:

When our ancestors settled this country they felt the need of more laborers than they could hire. Then wicked men sailed from England and other parts of Europe to the coast of Africa. Sending their boats ashore filled with armed men, they fell upon the villages of the poor Africans, set fire to their huts, and while they were filled with fright, seized, handcuffed, and dragged them to their boats, and then carried them aboard ship.⁴²

³⁷ "The Child's Anti-Slavery Book," 11.

³⁸ Kutler, *Dictionary of American history*, 208.

³⁹ Richard B. Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History* 7th ed. (London: Collins, 1996), 392.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Free Blacks in the Antebellum Period Part 1." *African American Odyssey*. [online]; available from memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart2b.html; internet; accessed 16 Oct 2010.

⁴² "The Child's Anti-Slavery Book page 12" American Memory from the Library of Congress. [online]; available from [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ody_rbcmisc&fileName=ody/ody0313/ody0313page.db&recNum=11&itemLink=r%3Fammem/AMALL:%40field\(DOCID%2B%40lit\(ody0313\)\)&linkText=0](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ody_rbcmisc&fileName=ody/ody0313/ody0313page.db&recNum=11&itemLink=r%3Fammem/AMALL:%40field(DOCID%2B%40lit(ody0313))&linkText=0); internet; accessed 17 Nov. 2010.

The author writes about the horrible experiences the slaves suffered throughout the voyage from Africa and the way they were “packed like spoons below the deck”⁴³ of the slave ships which transported them to America. These descriptions of the horrors of the slave ships are vividly written to draw on the sympathies of the reader:

I cannot tell you how horribly the poor negroes suffered. Bad air, poor food, close confinement, and cruel treatment killed them off by scores. When they died their bodies were pitched into the sea, without pity or remorse.⁴⁴

Descriptions of the slave ships are followed by the harsh treatment of the “survivors.” It is made clear that once the slaves arrived in America conditions were not made much better. Upon arrival families that manage to survive the voyage together were torn apart and “no regard was paid to their relationship,”⁴⁵ “the child was taken one place, the mother another.”⁴⁶ Because these are stories written for children this is especially emphasized in order to show what it was like for black American children. The author also describes the “whipping, starving, or otherwise ill-treating”⁴⁷ of the slaves.

To make this point more poignant the author emphasized the white children's fortune at having loving homes and parents by writing: “kind parents watch over you with loving eyes; patient teachers instruct you from the beautiful pages of the printed book.”⁴⁸ The author went on to call this a “precious gift.”⁴⁹ Once again the author used the plight of slave children to evoke the reader's sympathy, writing that the slave children “must submit to [the slaveholder]” and that they “shall whip them, sell them and do what else [they] please with them [and the slave children] shall obey [them] in all things as long as

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “The Child's Anti-Slavery Book,” 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

they live.”⁵⁰

The ill treatment of the captured Africans began immediately and some slaves had to endure a wait of up to as long as a year in the dungeons of the slave factories along the West African coast after having already made the journey from Africa's interior which killed many.⁵¹ Once on the slave ships conditions worsened. In order to bring as many workers back to the New World as possible slave traders would regularly over-pack the slave ships. The ships were designed to hold an average of 350 slaves, but this number was often doubled such as on the slaver the *Brookes* which is known to have carried as many as 609 slaves in a single voyage.⁵² On the *Hannibal* seven hundred human beings could be forced into the hold and, the fit was so tight that the captured Africans on the slave deck could not even sit up for the entire voyage.⁵³ The conditions on the ships were terrible and many slaves died from small pox and dehydration as a result.⁵⁴ Even those who survived suffered from severe psychological trauma from the brutality of whites and being chained to people who had died.⁵⁵ Everything and anything was done in order to attain as much profit from the cargo as possible. Children who became ill were sometimes thrown overboard in the hopes that their illness would not spread to other slaves on the ship and no matter their age or size children who cried or refused to eat on slave ships were harshly punished.⁵⁶ Many Africans died during the voyage from Africa to the New World and some tried to commit suicide rather than face the unknown horrors of what awaited them, however because they were valuable to the

⁵⁰ “The Child's Anti-Slavery Book,” 10.

⁵¹ "Africans in America/Part 1/The Middle Passage." *PBS: Public Broadcasting Service*. [online]; available from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p277.html>; internet; accessed October 16, 2010.

⁵² Richard B. Morris, *Encyclopedia of American History*, 7th ed. (London: Collins, 1996), 388.

⁵³ *Ibid* 382.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ Colleen A. Vasconcellos, "Children and Youth in History | Children in the Slave Trade." *Center for History and New Media* [online]; available from <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/teaching-modules/141>; internet; accessed October 13, 2010.

captain, slaves who tried to starve themselves in an attempt to commit suicide were force fed.⁵⁷

If a slave survived the transatlantic voyage their life did not usually take a turn for the better. Slaves were very harshly treated by masters and female slaves and servants were often the victims of aggressive male masters.⁵⁸ Slave owners punished their slaves in many different ways, physically beating them with whips and cat o' nine tails or withholding food, restricting travel or selling off relatives.⁵⁹ Slaves were usually beaten for working too slowly, stealing, running away and disobeying owners or overseers.⁶⁰ It was very rare for there to be any repercussions or consequences for a slaveholder who punished his slaves in this severe manner, even if it resulted in the death of the slave. The Louisiana Black Code of 1806 made cruel punishment of a slave a crime and there were ten codes in the South which made it illegal to maltreat a slave, however very few slave owners were actually punished for these offenses.⁶¹ The two cases where slave owners were forced to face repercussions for beating their slaves to death were considered sensational, these were State vs. Hoover which took place in North Carolina in the year 1839 and State vs. Jones which took place in Alabama in the year 1843.⁶² In State vs. Hoover the death sentence of Hoover, who beat his slave to death, was upheld by the North Carolina Supreme Court⁶³ something that was considered sensational for the time, even though there were laws against murdering a slave.

⁵⁷ "Africans in America/Part 1/The Middle Passage."

⁵⁸ "Life in the Plantation South." *ushistory.org*. [online]; available from <http://www.ushistory.org/us/5e.asp>; internet; accessed October 14, 2010.

⁵⁹ Kieth Hébert, "Encyclopedia of Alabama: Slavery." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. [online]; available from <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2369>; internet; accessed October 13, 2010.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Welcome to Encyclopædia Britannica's Guide to Black History." *Encyclopedia - Britannica Online Encyclopedia*. [online]; available from <http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-24164>; internet; accessed October 14, 2010.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "Slavery, Law Of - Southern Slave Law in the Nineteenth Century, Northern Law, Slavery and National Law, partus sequitur ventrem," Law Library - American Law and Legal Information, [online]; available from <http://law.jrank.org/pages/19059/Slavery-Law.html>; internet; accessed 9 December 2010.

Even though the laws to protect slaves from violent masters were not usually followed, slaveholders still had other, non-physical, ways to punish their slaves. Some slaveholders would exploit slaves' relationships with loved ones by selling off family members as a way to punish disobedient slaves⁶⁴ and because marriages between slaves were not considered legally binding owners were free to split up families through sale.⁶⁵ It is estimated that ten to twenty percent of slave marriages were broken up by sale and the sale of children from parents was even more common.⁶⁶ Over a third of all slave children grew up with one or both parents absent as a result of sale or death.⁶⁷

The Child's Anti-Slavery book is directed at educated white children and even within the narrative, when speaking directly to the reader the author clearly expects this, referring to one of their reader as “a bright-eyed lad who has just risen from the reading of a history of our revolution.”⁶⁸ Expecting this, the author makes especially clear that most slaves were denied the right to learn how to read, write or go to school. Even in the North where free blacks had some access to education, the schools available, however, were inferior to those for white children. The author uses the examples of slaves not being allowed to learn how to read or go to school to show the cruelty of slaveholders. In the slaveholders’ voice, the author writes “They shall not be taught to read or write; they shall never go to school.”⁶⁹ This speaks especially well to the expected audience as they have these very simple rights won by the revolution which are denied to the slave.

It was common for slaveholders to deny their slaves the right to learn how to read or write. This

⁶⁴ Kieth Hébert, "Encyclopedia of Alabama: Slavery."

⁶⁵ "Slave Life and Slave Codes," *ushistory.org*. [online]; available from www.ushistory.org/us/27b.asp; internet; accessed October 16, 2010.

⁶⁶ "Slave Family Life." *Digital History*. [online]; available from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=76; internet; accessed October 15, 2010.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ "Child's Anti-Slavery Book," 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

was in an effort to control the slave population⁷⁰ as many owners believed that teaching their slaves to read would give them access to ideas of freedom and equal rights that would threaten the institution of slavery.⁷¹ In most southern states, anyone caught teaching a slave to read would be fined, imprisoned, or whipped while the slaves usually suffered a much more severe punishment which ranged from savage beatings to the amputation of fingers and toes.⁷² Although some masters did teach their slaves to read as a way to Christianize them, most slave owners believed that teaching such skills was useless, if not dangerous.⁷³

Even in the anti-slavery North, African Americans had little access to education, even when there were no laws that prevented them from attending schools. In fact, at the beginning of the nineteenth century there was no law that excluded free black children from the schools in Massachusetts; however the hostile reception of most black students and harsh economic conditions kept the attendance of black children low.⁷⁴ It was, in fact, free African Americans who lobbied for the segregation of schools, believing that their children would be safer and even African American leaders agreed that black children would be better protected in an all-black school.⁷⁵ The segregation of schools, however, led to the black schools being inferior to those available for white children in the North, while in the South, from the 1830's onward, restrictions were passed preventing even free blacks from attending school.⁷⁶ It was not until 1855 that Massachusetts desegregated their public schools with a law that stated: "no distinction shall be made on account of the race, color, or religious opinions, of the applicant or

⁷⁰ *Created Equal*, 123.

⁷¹ Prokopowicz: *The Reform Era and Eastern U.S. Development 1815-1850 (American Eras)* 146.

⁷² "I will be heard!" Abolitionism in America." *Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections*. [online]; available from <http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/abolitionism/narratives.htm>; internet; accessed 19 Oct. 2010.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Prokopowicz: *The Reform Era and Eastern U.S. Development 1815-1850 (American Eras)*: 146.

⁷⁵ *The Reform Era and Eastern U.S. Development 1815-1850*, 146.

⁷⁶ Thomas Brown, *American Eras Civil War & Reconstruction 1850-1877*. (Detroit: Gale, 1997), 150.

scholar.”⁷⁷

These laws and discrimination did not stop everyone from trying to achieve equality, however, and people continued to fight for the education of African American children. One such person was Prudence Crandall who, in 1832, invited young African American girls to attend her all white boarding school, however, the parents of the other girls protested.⁷⁸ With the help of abolitionist newspaperman William Lloyd, Crandall decided to transform her school into one exclusively for young African American girls.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, despite Crandall's many efforts a law was passed on May 24th, 1834 by the Connecticut legislature prohibiting schools for “colored persons who were not inhabitants of the state” which subsequently caused Crandall to have to close her school, as many of her students came from out of state to attend her school.⁸⁰

All of the stories from *The Child's Anti-Slavery Book* were written in an effort to gain the sympathies of the white children who read them and many abolitionists used children's stories in order to foster anti-slavery sentiments among the free, white children in the north. This is not a goal that is at all disguised by the author and in fact it is stated directly that the stories were written “to excite [the children's] sympathy for poor slave children.”⁸¹ The author begins the stories by writing about how lucky the readers, in this case the children, are for being “free and happy.”⁸² The author directs the passage to the children, writing:

Kind parents watch over you with loving eyes; patient teachers instruct you from the beautiful pages of the printed book; benign laws protect you from violence.⁸³

This passage is in contrast to the way the slave children were treated and the author goes on to write that

⁷⁷ *The Reform Era and Eastern U.S. Development 1815-1850*, 147.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ “*The Child's Anti-Slavery Book*,” 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

“Hundreds of thousands of American children are slaves.”⁸⁴ By referring to the slave children as “American children” the author further draws a connection between the children reading the story at the slave children in the South. These are not just negro children or colored children or slave children, these are American children just like any other American child and therefore do not deserve to be kept in slavery.

The author also writes about the children's “purpose.” This purpose is said to be that they would “rather beg [their] bread than live by the unpaid toil of the slave”⁸⁵ and that the stories within the book are meant to help them with that purpose. The author also compares this purpose to great acts in the Bible writing that the children should “shrink from this sin as the Jews did from the fiery serpents.”⁸⁶ and that they should “vow eternal enmity to slavery at the altar of the true and living Jehova”⁸⁷ just as “little Hannibal vowed eternal hatred to Rome at the altar of a false god.”⁸⁸ By comparing the children to these biblical heroes and using the word “purpose” the author created the idea that being against slavery is a heroic act that God will approve of. The arguments presented in the book were also meant to appeal to the child's sympathies and therefore focused more on the ways that slave children were affected rather than slavery as a whole allowing the white children to more easily empathize with the characters in the stories and see slavery on a more personal level.

In the 1820's anti-slavery abolitionist literature began to appear and these included publications for children.⁸⁹ Though the main goal was to persuade more people to dedicate themselves to the emancipation of slavery these stories and pamphlets written for children also encouraged them to collect

⁸⁴ “The Child's Anti-Slavery Book,” 10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ “The African-American Mosaic,” *The Library of Congress*, [online]; available from www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam005.html; internet; accessed 16 Oct. 2010.

money for the abolitionist cause.⁹⁰ Lydia Marie Child who lived from 1802 to 1880, was an anti-slavery writer and activist who also edited an anti-slavery children's magazine⁹¹ another such story was The Slave's Friend which also encouraged children to raise money for the abolitionist movement.⁹²

The reading of the Child's Anti-Slavery book can teach us that there are always at least two sides to an argument and that, though both sides may provide convincing evidence, it is important to look at the issue as a whole. Looking back now it is hard to imagine how we, Americans, could enslave an entire people simply because it was more convenient and cheaper than other methods. The abolitionists arguments seem rational now, but once upon a time this was not so. If we can look back and understand the reasons behind this dark part of our history maybe we can better understand the issues of race, gender, class and religion that face us today. How will our great grandchildren see the discrimination of today? A major source of debate in our society today are the rights of homosexuals and whether or not they are allowed the same rights as heterosexuals. Will our grandchildren look back at history and ask themselves how people could have stood by and let those of a different sexual orientation be discriminated against? Will they look back, as we do, and wonder how anyone could stand by and let such cruelty happen? If we can attempt to view our own society as we view that of Slave Era America, maybe we'll see the world through different eyes and ideally this will enable us to find new solutions to the issues of discrimination that face our society today.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Other Abolitionists," *Africans in America*. [online]; available from www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p4439.html; internet; accessed 18 Oct. 2010.

⁹² The African-American Mosaic.