Nation and Miscegenation: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Mauri Skinfill

Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory, Volume 51, Number 2, Summer 1995, pp. 63-79 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.1995.0018

MAURI SKINFILL

Nation and Miscegenation: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

IN FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS OF WIDOWHOOD, Sarah Josepha Hale never once relinquished the black silk dress of a woman in mourning, a customary resolve which she maintained even at her departure from public life at the age of 91. Hale's retirement address, which like her sable suits announced her allegiance to an ideal of womanly devotion, reiterated an enduring singularity of purpose in its hope that "this work of half a century [would] be blessed to the furtherance of [women's] happiness and usefulness in their Divinely appointed sphere."[1] Until her retirement, the work of half a century Hale alluded to had entailed the dissemination of arguably the single most important code of social relations in the nineteenth century. The cult of domesticity, to which she had given vast currency as the prepossessing editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, was in part Hale's attempt to recuperate for women the social ballast that had been shifted by the swift expansion of a market economy, an expansion which began to starkly differentiate spheres of life along gender lines. As Ann Douglas has argued, nineteenth-century middle-class women installed themselves in social positions left vacant by the increasing secularization of American culture, positions which reinforced a gendered cultural divide between sense and sensibility.[2] But if that secularization, as Douglas suggests, was a function of Calvinism's doctrinal decline, it was equally a function of the ascending structures of American capitalism. Excluded from the market as producers, women became relegated to the increasingly static and marginal role of consumers. Yet by sanctifying the home and elevating

Arizona Quarterly Volume 52, Number 2, Summer 1995

ISSN 0004-1610

women to the role of moral caretakers for the nation, Hale carved out a crucial position for women at the ideological center of society.[3]

Thanks largely to Hale's expository efforts, women became the executors of a crucial myth wherein the family took up an iconic role as the stabilizing force of society. But if, as Barbara Welter has argued, women found a sense of identity in these newly available positions of status, they nonetheless functioned within a traditional system of gender constraints rather than in opposition to it.[4] For as nineteenth-century women exerted their influence as moral caretakers, they acceded to their cultural characterization as servile creatures of sensibility, and American patriarchy thus enforced, in the guise of a concession, women's still subordinate social roles. Moreover, if Hale's propagation of a cult of domesticity made a virtue of necessity in response to the nineteenth-century market's ineluctable differentiation of gender roles, her domestic apotheosis served still another conciliatory function, one which directly enabled the development of a market economy in America: for enterprising men born into the constitutional ideal of social parity but confronting the economic stratifications of an expanding industrialism, the myth of a home distinct from the operations of the cash nexus provided a neat reconciliation of egalitarian virtue with the iniquities of capitalist competition. Or it afforded, at least, a putative division of social and economic spheres which reinforced a democratic ideology even as American ideals of social parity began to conflict with the realities of the market. In providing an ideological haven for the aspiring entrepreneur, Hale's genteel compartmentalization of the market from the home ended by abetting the emergence of the very capitalist ideology whose differentiation of gender roles the cult of domesticity was attempting to ameliorate.

The emergence of a domestic ideal out of the exigencies of Northern industrialism is remarkable not least because it revises an enduring popular conception of the South as the preeminent locus of a domestic ideology which deified white womanhood and its habitation. What Hale's unflagging career attests to is the experience of a Northern society specifically destabilized by the flux of a burgeoning economy and seeking a sanctified sphere separate from the operations of the cash nexus. To be sure the South itself participated in an elaborate mythologization of the home. But the varied sectional applications of Hale's domestic ideology are registered in the distinct relation of the economic to the domestic

which takes shape in the Southern code: where the cult of domesticity ostensibly divided the market from the family in the North, in the South it strategically enabled the conflation of the two spheres. George Fitzhugh's *Sociology of the South*—a remarkable attempt to construct slavery as a virtual welfare state, with slaves as the lucky recipients of socialist generosity—anchored its apology for slavery in the domestic security provided for slaves by a benign master. The plantation home, Fitzhugh argued, was a place where master and slave alike could reconfigure the brute demands placed on the free laborer in a laissez-faire society. In the Southern home, "domestic affection" made the enslaved workforce "part of the family" and worked "to shelter, shield and foster them."[5] Central to the possibility of conflating home and market, Fitzhugh's vision makes clear, was the regional primacy of an ideological as well as an economic paternalism: within the Southern domestic myth, the planter logically occupied the role of metaphorical father to his extended slave family. Southern planter paternalism explicitly incorporated slaves into a domestic logic and thereby afforded a way, through an inversion of the Northern model, of reconciling the values of the market with the values of the home. The South took the North's code of domesticity and transposed it to slave-holding culture, circumventing the Northern tension between home and market through a rhetoric which made them identical.

The image of the Southern plantation then, widely typed in antebellum literature with pristine cotton fields as background, took shape in the popular consciousness as tranquil home to both Southern planter and attendant slaves. Nor did the plantation myth emerge simply as the product of a Southern aristocracy defending the structure of its own social order. Like the domestic ideology which framed it, the plantation myth too evolved—as William Kennedy's *Swallow Barn*, the prototypical novel of plantation mythology written by a Northerner attests—out of a nostalgia for a rural haven occasioned by the encroachments of Northern urban industrialism. If that idealized space defined by Hale in domestic terms took in the minds of Northerners and Southerners alike the particularized form of the plantation, the cultural transmission is ironic not simply because the South's most tenacious social code originated north of the Mason-Dixon line, but because it was fortuitously provided by the very culture whose capitalist expansion and workaday values the South would come, as the sectional crisis grew, to indict.

The preeminent ideological division evident between North and South, then, hinged not on a distinction between market economies—that is, between capitalist and agrarian cultures—but rather on a distinction between the ways in which the rhetoric of domesticity was mobilized to reconcile the values of capitalism to the values of the home.[6] In the South, where paternalism as an ideology and miscegenation as a practice eventually intersected in dangerous ways, the ideal of the family would lose force as a stabilizing cultural myth. Both the myth of a benign planter paternalism and the myth of a home untainted by the operations of a market economy would eventually collapse under the weight of the explicit contradictions of the slave-holding code.[7] But until then, at a time when the republic was confronting its first internal division, domestic tranquillity grew to have more than a merely symbolic relation to national stability.

The equation of nation with home has its rhetorical precursor in American revolutionary discourse precisely at the moment in the preamble to the Constitution which equates the ideal of a "more perfect Union" with the guarantee of common domestic tranquillity.[8] But this congruence between national and domestic cohesion finds perhaps its most important historical expression in Lincoln's 1858 Senate race speech on "The House Divided" which figured the nation, increasingly embattled over the issue of slavery, as a factionalized home. What Lincoln foresaw as the resolution of the sectional crisis remains unclear. And while he did not anticipate the ongoing Congressional struggles to culminate in an event as apocalyptic as the Civil War, Lincoln nonetheless suggested that the nation would not be restored to domestic tranquillity until a national crisis had been reached and passed: "A house divided against itself cannot stand," Lincoln warned.

> I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.[9]

Domestic tranquillity, for Lincoln, was a matter of homogenizing political culture, of the nation becoming "all one thing" and doing away with ideological alterity. Lincoln's metaphorical house, like Hale's, was shaken mainly by the failure of a cohesive national identity. But the reconciliation of disparate political identities on which the nation

seemed to depend became altogether impossible to negotiate at the moment when the rhetoric of homogeneity confronted the category of race. The threat of miscegenation, to Northerners the distasteful and unavoidable upshot of the Southern system, provided Lincoln with a powerful argument for the abolition of slavery. But Lincoln's pro-slavery detractors, voicing an identical anxiety about unstable racial binaries, accused Lincoln of fostering the very disaster he would prevent. By setting free millions of black slaves, the argument went, social amalgamation would eventually progress to the unthinkable point of racial indistinguishability. The extent to which Lincoln himself participated in this racial paranoia is evinced in his only envisioned solution to the sectional conflict: the deportation of all slaves for mass colonization in Liberia to preclude the possibility of amalgamation between the races.[10] Lincoln perhaps didn't foresee or couldn't bear to unpack the incestuous implications of the "undivided house." But because the nation understood race as an essential term, the very possibility of national identity was suddenly jeopardized by the dissolution of slavery: for to become, as Lincoln mandated, "all one thing" *was* to become "all the other." Any trace of "black blood" categorically marked identity as racialized, and national unification would introduce and proliferate these traces. Lincoln's House of State thus called for a political homogeneity which from the outset threatened to collapse into racial homogeneity. Whether the Union emerged from the sectional conflict all slave-states or all free-states, the figure of the black slave already dividing the Union also made the ideal of nation coterminous with miscegenation.

This is the contorted ideological and psychological topography of nineteenth-century nationhood which Harriet Jacobs confronts in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs' account of her life in slavery and subsequent emancipation in the North.[11] Published in 1861, Jacobs' exposition of slavery is addressed to an audience of Northern white women in an effort to gain political sympathy for the abolitionist movement. The narrative, which charts Jacobs' flight from the relentless sexual threats of Dr. Flint, her white master, stages a conflict between moral convention and practical survival. Counseled throughout by a pious and indefatigable grandmother about the imperative of feminine chastity, Jacobs is caught between defending her life by acceding to Flint's advances, and falling from virtuous grace. The conflict inter-

nally staged in Jacobs' narrative, moreover, is externally recapitulated in a conflict the autobiography itself faces between political representation and literary convention, for if the nineteenth-century's cult of domesticity determined the bounds of womanly sentiment which Jacobs' story of oppression would speak to, it just as strictly dictated the bounds of decorum in literary discourse. As Carolyn Karcher has noted, anti-slavery narratives, if they hoped to be at all influential, faced an unavoidable compromise with "a code of gentility that barred 'vulgar' language, sordid details, and frank treatment of sexuality."[12] Jacobs' autobiography, whose political efficacy was thus bound up with her identification with womanly decorum, was left to negotiate a position between pressing fact and genteel representation.

Jacobs' autobiography then, insofar as it attempts to accommodate the narration of sexual threat in a publicly viable literary form, illuminates gender in its self-conscious relation to genre. Yet Jacobs' narrative identity is finally fully coherent only in the context of a slave-holding system which determines the legal and sexual status of the black female body as property, and I want to call attention to gender as a function of social relations governed by market capital.[13] The sexual history which subtends Jacobs' narrative emerges out of a resistance to a legalized sexual oppression defined by property relations: reducing the slave woman to property, the slave code legally sanctioned rape, or, put another way, rape had no discursive significance within the terms of property rights. Thus Jacobs' identity as a black female slave at once appealing to and contending with the cult of domesticity must be understood in the more fundamental terms of the slave woman's relation to a Southern market economy: it is the problem of an identity controlled both directly by the principles of the market, and answering to a genteel ideology of gender itself responding to the market, that the autobiography articulates. Ultimately, as we shall see, the difficult position of the black female slave in relation to a regional and national discourse of domesticity bespeaks the interdependence of domestic and market values between which both Southern paternalism and Northern domestic ideology pretended to distinguish.

Hazel Carby argues that Jacobs addresses herself to an audience whose ideology, despite its abolitionist investments, absolutely excludes her.[14] Jacobs' genteel audience, comprised of Northern women steeped in Sarah Hale's cult of domesticity, conflated devotion to the Union

with devotion to the family and feminine virtue.[15] Sex and sexuality remained largely meaningless categories to the cult of domesticity, forbidden outside the bounds of marriage, unspoken and utilitarian within it. But what Jacobs first attempts to relate to her Northern audience in *Incidents* is the absence of female sexual autonomy under the slave system. The terms of Jacobs' personal and political grievance are thus posed awkwardly in relation to a domestic discourse wherein chastity is registered less through its positive articulation—in Jacobs' case, for instance, in the form of a protest against its jeopardy—than negatively through the assumed absence of sexuality as a constitutive part of identity. Hence within the conventions of feminine and domestic propriety, what threatens to undermine Jacobs' narrative credibility is less her status as a black woman or even as a slave than the more particular issue of her sexual history.[16] What animates Jacobs' autobiographical narrative—the sexual autonomy of the female slave legally precluded by the slave-holding system—is precisely what must remain all but elliptically articulated to her Northern audience. Whatever justifications Jacobs offers for her sexual history in *Incidents*, the narrative already thematically disrupts the requisite attributes of propriety established by the cult of domesticity necessary to legitimize an appeal for political sympathy.

In order to manipulate the narrative constraints imposed by the discourse of domestic propriety, Jacobs appropriates the conventions of chastity thematically suitable to her genteel audience, a strategy which has earned her critically unfavorable inclusion in the genre of sentimental fiction. Aware, for instance, of the threat she poses to the stability of the Southern family, Jacobs' attempt to relate her subjection to the sexual authority of the white master reads like a conventionally euphemistic address to a nineteenth-century gentle reader:

> To what disappointments are [the wives of Southern planters] 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 unto him of his own household. Jealousy and hatred enter the flowery home, and it is ravaged of its loveliness. (56–57)

The passage culminates in Jacobs' representation of a defiled home, a calculated disruption of the ideal of sanctified domesticity. Yet in an

effort to attenuate the clearly sexual tenor of the passage, Jacobs shrewdly displaces the literal defilement of the marriage bed into the more abstract ravaging of domestic beauty. If her elliptical logic of narrative convention here registers an authoritative strategy, that same elliptical logic marks the precarious balance between shock value and affront Jacobs must constantly negotiate in order to remain credible.

In an attempt to protect that credibility, Jacobs' slave narrative strategically undergoes a generic translation from autobiographical register to sentimental fiction, a formal shift that tempers and hence accommodates a discourse of sexuality precluded by the literary and cultural conventions of the white Northern audience. Under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, Jacobs spins a demure narrative that self-consciously hesitates at the revelatory moments of sexual threat. Jacobs transforms her own experience into the genre of the sentimental novel. In its circumlocution of the pervasive threat of rape, it thus emerges as an inevitable and uncomfortable, formal and ideological compromise: for as long as the sexual autonomy that propels Jacobs' quest for freedom remains categorically outside the bounds of acceptable discourse, her narrative of sexual oppression preempts her claim to the rights of "true womanhood" and abrogates rather than elicits the abolitionist women's sympathies she would seek.

The conflicts between black female chastity and black female freedom are further problematized in *Incidents* by Jacobs' explication that the only way for her to escape legally sanctioned rape is to "choose" illicit sexual relations with a white man other than the Southern slaveholder, Dr. Flint. In an attempt to confound Flint's increasingly violent threats, Jacobs take a socially prominent white man as her lover and subsequently bears his two children: "It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion," Jacobs explains. "There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment" (85). But at the moment Jacobs claims sexual autonomy against subjection to the white master, she again faces a narrative crisis, for the mainstay against rape which she articulates inevitably entails a reinscription into the role of the black woman as calculated seductress. Even as an appeal for help in the form of a rape narrative, the emergence of a sexual discourse forecloses crucial ideological sympathies with the very women who would be the executors of her emancipation.

The difficult position of the black slave woman in relation to nineteenth-century sexual conventions begins to illuminate the vexed possibilities for a cohesive ideology of emancipation and national unification, for as Jacobs' autobiography makes clear, incorporation into the national body politic—the body of white Northern women to whom Jacobs appeals for her freedom—depended both at the level of nation and narration on an effacement of the body with a sexual history. Indeed, Jacobs' problems of narrative representation in *Incidents* make explicit the intersection between nineteenth-century formal and ideological conventions: the cult of domesticity, and the sentimental genre which articulated it, were similarly disrupted by the intrusion of the sexualized female body.[17] Perhaps not surprisingly, a literal effacement of that body takes place in *Incidents*, for when Jacobs' final defiant gesture of conspicuously taking a white lover fails to dissuade Flint's advances, Jacobs resolves to begin her life as a fugitive slave and disappears into an attic crawl space above her grandmother's house. She spends a remarkable seven years hidden in the cramped loft, battling malnutrition and physical atrophy, until she finally secures a safe passage to the free North. There is an acute symmetry here between Jacobs' constricted existence in an attic for seven years and the narrative contortions she undergoes to accommodate herself to the literary conventions of the time. That symmetry reveals the extent to which the ideological antagonisms and contradictions stabilizing nationhood were quite literally played out on the body of the black woman slave as well as registered in the narrative history of that body.

If the Northern conventions of literary gentility shaped the construction of the black woman in anti-slavery narratives, they also redounded materially on the propertied status and function of the black woman's body. In the South, where women were either insulated as symbols or disposed of as property, the conventions of the cult of domesticity exacerbated the conditions under which black women would by default become the locus of sexual promiscuity. Disembodied in their functions as representatives of pure sensibility, white women were excluded from economies of desire.[18] That exclusion, necessary to preserve the logic of the domestic angel, left sexual expression for white men safely available only with women who would not threaten the established logic—most conveniently with slave women whose propertied status precluded their protection by a code of gentility. The more

the sexual capacity of the white woman's body was effaced in her symbolic function, the more the physical function of the black woman's body was literalized and insisted upon. That is, if the cult of domesticity produced white women as symbols, it also contributed to the construction of black women as mere bodies. Yet even as black and white women alike were subjected to the structures of masculine authority, the conventions of narrative representation in the North continued to preclude the possibility of narrating those events.[19]

Lest the sexuality which proves inimical to an ideology of domesticity be fixed as an abstract category in opposition to white womanhood, the disruptive significance of the black slave woman must finally be accounted for in terms of its specific relation to historical national tensions. The attention Jacobs calls to the "ravaged home" provides an important clue to that destabilizing potential in its resonance with Lincoln's famous dictum for sectional unity. Each time Jacobs articulates the threat of rape by the white master, as she does in this scene, she exhumes the problem at the center of the national debate over slavery—the double-bind of miscegenation either as a function of slavery or as the imagined logical conclusion of social amalgamation. In Jacobs' allusion to the "ravaged home," the crisis of the nation is represented in microcosm: the slave-holding system dividing Lincoln's metaphorical national house becomes in the literal home the possibility for a dangerous lack of division between slaveholder and slave, an incestuous contiguity manifested in the "children of every shade of complexion" proliferating in and around the plantation. The tension in Jacobs' autobiography—between the particular need to emancipate the black female body and the impossibility of fully articulating that need—here becomes the formal recapitulation of the racial contradictions adumbrated in Lincoln's political discourse of domestic unification structuring the American national ideal. What placed Jacobs in a disruptive relation to the cult of domesticity was not only the boundaries of gender and genre defined in genteel terms, but the fact that the nineteenth-century nation-state was performing an already unsteady ideological balancing act which Jacobs' narrative, in its elliptical articulation of the threat of miscegenation, made increasingly precarious and more difficult to confront.

What is finally most significant about the sexualized body which problematizes narrative cohesion for Jacobs in *Incidents* is the way it

materially extends its problematic contours to the familial cohesion of the South. The descendant of a South Carolina planter, Jacobs already occupies the anomalous space of the "white Negro" that hovered menacingly in the minds of Northerners and Southerners alike. Indeed, genealogy is a formal puzzle from the outset of Jacobs' narrative: "My mother's mistress was the daughter of my grandmother's mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother," Jacobs ostensibly explains (14). But even this brief history of family relations requires concerted effort to disentangle, and the deliberate ambiguity of a "foster sister" here intimates an uneasy familial contiguity between mistress and slave. It is precisely this contiguity which exposes the irremediable contradiction embedded in the plantation ideal, and which focuses gender clearly in the terms of a Southern capital economy. In the routine moment of childbirth, a moment which regularly punctuates Jacobs' narrative, the black slave woman perpetuates the capital base of slavery. Children legally followed the "condition" of the slave mother, a practice which at once conveniently effaced white paternal responsibility while preserving the slaveholder's property rights over the newborn slave. Moreover, while the planter "produced" his capital base from the body of the black woman, the white mistress gave birth to the siblings, and also the heirs of that capital base. The very literalization of plantation paternalism enabled and reinforced the capital-based economy of slavery. But at the same time that paternalism rendered the plantation family ideologically and practically untenable. At the moment when the black slave woman gave birth to the sons of the Southern planter which were in turn disposed of as property, the values of the family confronted and gave way to the primacy of the market.[20]

The problem conspicuously silenced in the omissions of Jacobs' narrative is the same problem that haunted the American polity in the context of the Civil War. Kinship—both figuratively between Northerners and Southerners, and literally between Southerners and their slaves—at once determined the contours of national cohesion and ultimately devastated the ideal. A unique type of paternalism which evolved from metaphor to social practice exposed the contradiction at the center of the plantation myth it was meant to conceal. Miscegenation retrospectively projected an ironic meaning onto Lincoln's ideal of a unified house, for under slavery miscegenation radicalized the benign metaphorical kinship Lincoln imagined. Because it remained unspeak-

able within the conventions of nineteenth-century literary and domestic propriety, the issue of miscegenation problematizes the formal cohesion of Jacobs' slave narrative. But more important, it literalizes, and in that literalization explodes, the paternalist myth under which the slave-based economy was mystified and perpetuated.

It remains unclear, ultimately, to what degree the racially typed female body is emancipated at the conclusion of *Incidents*, for Jacobs encounters discrete new problems once she resettles in the North. Racial identity is less resolved as a question in the North than it is subsumed into a problem of class position. Jacobs begins to work within the literal and not simply literary constraints of domesticity. Rather than achieving autonomy in her extrication from the sexualized power relations of the slave-holding system, the sexuality which proved a dangerous liability to Jacobs under slavery is suddenly effaced. Jacobs becomes a matron, working diligently toward the singular goal of purchasing her children out of slavery. Having spent several years in the North as a fugitive, her own freedom is finally purchased by Mrs. Bruce, a presumably benign employer: "I and my children are now free!" Jacobs writes. "We are as free from the power of slaveholders as are the white people of the north." But, she adds,

> . . . *that*, according to my ideas, is not saying a great deal, [though] it is a vast improvement in *my* condition. The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. . . . But God so orders circumstances as to keep me with my friend Mrs. Bruce. Love, duty, gratitude, also bind me to her side. (302–3)

Notwithstanding Jacobs' conciliatory rhetoric of divine circumstance, her mild complaint makes clear that if the bonds of slavery have been dissolved, they are yet apparently reconstituted in an irresolute "duty" that still binds Jacobs to a domestic space not her own. A new white mistress rises up in place of the old one. Jacobs remains in the position of a servant, a position no longer dictated by a Southern caste system, but enforced by the unspoken assumption that she now owes an amount of labor in exchange for her purchased freedom. Jacobs thus remains an indentured servant, now not explicitly constrained by the marks of race or gender, but by the more subtle operations of a Northern class system. The dream of domesticity remains unrealized, a failure

which recapitulates the vexed unification of North and South Lincoln aspired to. Indeed, the resolution Jacobs envisions precisely contradicts the domestic metaphor Lincoln enlisted in his attempt to stabilize the sectional crisis: it is a home of her own, separate from the white mistress, that Jacobs still longs for, a longing which would install her squarely in the divided house Lincoln so eloquently pleaded against.

If domesticity, the promise of a house united, describes the ideal both Jacobs as fugitive slave and Lincoln as political patriarch envisioned, the sense of homelessness registered in Jacobs' final remarks bespeaks the enduring rupture of American racial kinship, but it also heralds another more elusive order—the emerging fractures of American social class. The way Jacobs' racial position becomes a function of class structures at the conclusion of *Incidents* is made clear at the moment her former master dies, leaving his family in financial straits, and forcing Jacobs again into itineracy. When Flint's daughter and son-in-law arrive in Boston in an attempt to reclaim Jacobs and preserve their position in "what was called the first society," Jacobs notes their newly-jeopardized social status: "It was a third-rate hotel [they stayed at], and that circumstance convinced me of the truth of what I had heard, that they were short of funds and had need of my value as they valued me; and that was by dollars and cents" (295). Jacobs' suddenly reiterated racial position long after she has removed to the North, and the Flint family's claim on her as property at their moment of social crisis, begins to disclose the relation of racial categories to American class structures. Indeed, the particular way Jacobs' existence remains problematic in the North suggests the degree to which the Southern economy and its attendant ideologies were not singularly Southern but were embedded, rather, in a more general national character. This character is already evinced in the contradictory egalitarianism of an industrializing America, and again in the distaste for racial coexistence disclosed in Lincoln's public ambivalence, if not toward slavery, clearly toward slaves. Although uniquely mobilized in the Southern economy, the ideological ground of slavery was still fundamentally bound up with the political and economic evolution of the American nation-state, already bound up, that is, with the political and ideological evolution of capital. The uneasy conclusion of Jacobs' slave narrative, the ambiguity of Jacobs' economic relation to her new white mistress, and the danger posed by the downwardly-mobile Flint family, remind us, finally, that the war

between the states was a struggle not between a Northern bourgeois industrial society and a pre-bourgeois agrarian aristocracy. It was a conflict rather between two capitalist cultures differing only on the meaning of capital.

University of California, Berkeley

NOTES

A version of this essay was originally delivered as a talk at the Western Humanities Conference on Nationalism at UCLA in 1991.

1. Isabelle Webb Entrikin, *Sarah Josepha Hale and Godey's Ladies' Book* (Philadelphia, 1946) 132. For a brief but indispensable account of Hale's relation to northern whiggery see also William O. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 115–141.

2. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977). Douglas argues that the nineteenth-century dilution of theological and intellectual values into a cult of sensibility—a "sentimental heresy" which relinquished the best traditions of American Calvinism without providing substantive replacements—determined the anti-intellectual and gender stratified practices of mass-culture that would come to characterize post-Victorian life.

3. Hale's domestic ideology was widely referred to in the nineteenth century as the cult of True Womanhood, though as Barbara Welter has noted, those who used the term never felt it necessary to justify or delineate it: "they simply assumed—with some justification—that readers would intuitively understand exactly what they meant." For Welter's examination of the nineteenth century's uncritical use of the term see "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820–1860" in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976). I use "domesticity" in place of "True Womanhood" in this essay in part to give more specific content to the term but also because the political rhetorics of the nineteenth century, as both Southern planter paternalism and Lincoln's famous House Divided speech attest, seemed to turn increasingly on the trope of the domestic space.

4. Welter has argued that nineteenth-century women found a "sense of privilege" in foreign missionary service even though that service was initially the result of men's diminishing interest in religious practice "when other alternatives offered greater rewards of money or status." See "She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women's Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America," in *American Quarterly* 30.5 (1978): 625–38. Welter suggests "it is possible" that women's new cultural status "represented less a victory than a strategic retreat by the opposition" (625). This point is an important one and I think Welter underestimates the significance of her own insight, for the positions of moral caretakers offered to women both in the Protestant missionary movement and more generally at home were

clearly an attempt to mitigate the trajectory of women's rights agitation. Installing women firmly within the realm of moral sensibility functioned strategically, and transparently, to keep women in a subordinate social position under the constraints of a naturalized and internalized gender code. Women remained economically and politically marginal even as patriarchy pretended to elevate them culturally, and their symbolic enfranchisement meant precisely their practical subordination.

5. George Fitzhugh, *Sociology of the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond: Morris, 1854) 46. All references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the body of the text.

6. Taylor has demonstrated the ideological affinity between Northern Yankee and Southern Cavalier in his exposition of the plantation legend as a creation of the Northern whig, a creation which appealed to the values of the home, and which both North and South appropriated at a time when "a fear that America had become the scene of a wild scramble for riches and material comforts was widely felt" (146). See also Carolyn Porter who summarizes the forms in which the Cavalier and Yankee respectively appropriated a domestic ideology as follows: "The Northerner had to compartmentalize his society into home and marketplace, walking a tightrope between the contradictory claims of familial ties and business interests. . . . But the Southern planter could and did incorporate the values of the home and hearth within his social vision, by assuming the role of patriarch over an extended family in whose interests and in whose midst he was always, in principle, working." *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1981) 230–31.

7. The nineteenth century's most popular attempt to dismantle the myth of benign planter paternalism of course arrived in the form of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though Leslie Fiedler remarks that Stowe missed the heart of the matter in leaving the issue of miscegenation peripheral to her critique. See *The Inadvertent Epic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). Lately, the powerful wave of revisionary Southern historical studies, most notably by C. Vann Woodward, W. J. Cash, and Eugene Genovese, has come at once to represent and reiterate the collapse of that plantation myth through the exposition of the problem of miscegenation.

8. Edward Conrad Smith and Harold J. Spaeth, eds., *The Constitution of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 41.

9. Phillip Van Doren Stern, *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Random House, 1930) 429.

10. Stern 349.

11. Jacobs' autobiography is written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent. For the sake of continuity, I use "Jacobs" when referring to the character Linda. All references are to the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth Century Women Writers edition of Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and will be given parenthetically in the body of the text.

12. Carolyn Karcher, "Rape, Murder and Revenge in 'Slavery's Pleasant Homes': Lydia Maria Child's Anti-Slavery Fiction and the Limits of Genre," in *Women's Studies International Forum* 9.4 (1986): 323.

13. Hazel Carby has stressed the need for feminist critical models which take into account hierarchies of race and gender in their historical specificity. This appeal seems especially apt in the case of Jacobs' autobiography which both thematically and in its mode of representation calls for an account of racial and gendered identity in its complex relation to a nineteenth-century ideology of capital. See Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

14. Carby 49.

15. Ruth E. Finley, *The Lady of Godey's: Sarah Josepha Hale* (New York: Arno Press, 1974) 174–94.

16. Carby posits an ideological link between sexuality and race when she notes that the "hierarchical relationship [between black women and white women] was determined through a racial, not gendered, categorization. The ideology of true womanhood was as racialized a concept in relation to white women as it was in its exclusion of black womanhood" (55).

17. It was a disruption that domestic ideology would not hesitate to punish. Karcher has made clear, for example, the costs of such narrative disruptions in her work on Lydia Maria Child which documents Child's spectacular fall from popular esteem after she published an abolitionist tract—*An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* (1833)—which incurred the disfavor of her genteel Boston patrons.

18. As Barbara Welter notes, the imperative of feminine purity "set up a dilemma which was hard to resolve. Woman must preserve her virtue until marriage and marriage was necessary for her happiness. Yet marriage was, literally, an end to innocence. She was told not to question the dilemma, but simply to accept it" (27). Accepting it, however, proved increasingly trying, especially when a woman's husband continued to hold her to the strict code of purity once they were married. Southern women's frustration with that code is registered in their often brutal treatment of slave women whom they suspected their husbands of sexually exploiting. Carolyn Karcher remarks that the punishments inflicted on slave women "strongly hint at [the mistress'] jealousy of their sexuality" (326). Fanny Kemble tells of one Southern woman who, upon discovering that two of her slaves had been raped by her husband, ordered them to be flogged every day for a week. J. A. Scott, ed., *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839* (New York: NAL, 1975) 269.

19. Two types of "feminization" of the female body take place in Jacobs' autobiography—one which makes the body inviolable by effacing its sexuality, and one which conversely subjects that body to the threat of violation by declaring it property. The first is accorded by the cult of white womanhood, the second reserved for the slave woman, identified either as property or typed as Jezebel. Insofar as the distinction between the two hinges on race, it suggests the degree to which gender is determined by racial categories. This type of determination of gender, it's worth noting, holds true for the male slave as well, only the structure is inverted. In the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, for example, the black slave is feminized in several ways—legally, he is emasculated in the codified denial of black paternity

wherein children follow the condition of the mother. The common practice of addressing the grown slave as "boy" also, of course, entails a psychological emasculation. See *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1987). That both black male and female bodies get feminized by varying white discourses illuminates the ways in which race is used to reiterate gender.

20. My account of the confrontation between the values of the Southern plantation home and the values of the market is indebted to Carolyn Porter's reading of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* in *Seeing and Being*. Her essay, which makes explicit the contradictions embedded in planter paternalism, develops the following argument: "The fusion of family and marketplace values was fostered, ironically, by the same presence which ultimately exploded it—the black slave, whose imputed status as a member of the family was in conflict with his economic functions as part of a labor force" (231).