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"More Terrible Than the Uncaged Hyena"

The Savage Slave in 1830s Fiction

The debate over slavery in American literature began in earnest with the advent of the organized antislavery movement in the United States during the early 1830s. In addition to the wealth of periodicals they produced in that decade, abolitionists released several full-length narratives in support of their cause. As immediatists in the Northeast began forcefully proclaiming the evils of slavery, defenders of the system in both the North and the South answered these attacks with violent actions and hostile words. As part of these efforts, opponents of abolitionism published a number of fictional texts that denounced the antislavery movement and highlighted the necessity of the slave system.

It was black men, however, who forcefully inserted the concept of the savage black rebel into this literary battle between white men. The emerging conflict between abolitionists and their challengers coincided with the eruption of collective slave violence in Southampton County, Virginia, at the beginning of the 1830s. In August 1831, a small band of enslaved men launched a bloody revolt, murdering a slaveholding family in the dead of night and then moving swiftly from farm to farm, killing all the white people they could find. Thirty-six hours after they began, fifty-five white men, women, and children lay dead as a result of the rebels' efforts.

The uprising that would come to be known as Nat Turner's revolt compelled whites to recognize duplicitous aggression on the part of slaves as an inconvenient yet indisputable reality. In response, writers in the 1830s, regardless of their position on slavery, began to explore the idea that African American men were, or under the right conditions could be, dangerous brutes. Authors of the time suggested that this savagery, carefully

concealed from whites most of the time, could erupt without warning in disturbing episodes of violence.

As Table 2.1 indicates, representations of black male savages were made to serve both proslavery and abolitionist purposes during the 1830s and thus showed up in narratives written from widely divergent perspectives on the slavery question. The image of black men as bloodthirsty insurrectionists corresponded with proslavery ideology, which rested on the idea that people of African descent were fit only for slavery and that any loosening of the bonds of slavery would lead to the wholesale massacre of whites. Anti-abolitionist and proslavery novelists of the mid-1830s implied that slavery kept in check the dangerous tendency toward savagery that was, in their view, an innate characteristic of men of African descent. By providing African Americans with a fixed and dependent place in society, the order and hierarchy of the slave system encouraged in black men what these authors viewed as natural tendencies toward deference and fidelity to social betters who protected them and provided for them.

Abolitionist authors likewise employed the savage black man, but to make the opposite argument. Racial warfare and the slaughter of whites, they believed, would be the unavoidable result if slavery were allowed to continue, not if it came to an end. Abolitionist narratives suggested that men of African descent would behave reasonably and responsibly if left to govern themselves. Forced under the cruel repression of the slave system, however, black men might easily become vicious and take out their frustrations against whites. Abolitionists thus emphasized the brutality of slave violence as a means of pointing out the harrowing dangers that keeping slaves posed to whites. In doing so, they hoped to turn readers against a system without which African Americans would presumably no longer harbor the anger and hostility that put the lives of slaveholders and other whites at risk.[1]

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[1] Historians of abolitionism usually identify the 1850s as the decade when the threatening black rebel burst onto the scene in abolitionist literature. The repeated emergence of the savage slave in abolitionist narratives released during the 1830s, however, complicates the picture historians generally paint of early white immediatists as peaceful evangelizers determined to change the hearts of white Americans by evoking sympathy for the poor, downtrodden slave. Although white abolitionists did employ such tactics throughout the antebellum period, historians' emphasis on "moral suasion" as the primary rhetorical strategy of antislavery activists in the 1830s has led them to miss the equally important use in that decade of scare tactics designed to turn white Americans against the slave system. Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 186–189; James Brewer Stewart, "From Moral

TABLE 2.1. *Slavery-Related Novels and Narratives, 1830s*

Title	Date first Published	Author	Gender	Race	Position on Slavery	Geographic Affiliation	Publisher	Popularity/Sales
"The St. Domingo Orphans"	1830	Lydia Maria Child (1802–1880)	Female	White	Abolitionist	Massachusetts	*Juvenile Miscellany*	In the popular magazine *Juvenile Miscellany*
Authentic and Impartial Narrative	1831	Samuel Warner (?)	Male	White	Antislavery (?)	Unknown	Warner and West	Unknown
Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation	1835	Jerome Holgate (1812–1893)	Male	White	Anti-abolitionist	New York	By the author	Unknown
The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina	1835	William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870)	Male	White	Proslavery	South Carolina	Harper & Brothers	Three printings, nine months c. 7,500 copies
Lafitte: The Pirate of the Gulf	1836	Joseph Holt Ingraham (1809–1860)	Male	White	Conflicted	(b) Maine (r) Mississippi	Harper & Brothers	2,500 copies, three months
Sheppard Lee	1836	Robert Montgomery Bird (1806–1854)	Male	White	Anti-abolitionist	Pennsylvania	Harper & Brothers	Unknown

Title	Year	Author	Gender	Race	Position	State	Publisher	Circulation
Mellichampe: A Legend of the Santee	1836	William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870)	Male	White	Proslavery	South Carolina	Harper & Brothers	Unknown
The Slave, or the Memoirs of Archy Moore	1836	Richard Hildreth (1807–1865)	Male	White	Abolitionist	Massachusetts	By the author	7,000 copies Seven editions by 1848
Slavery in the United States	1836	Charles Ball (c. 1780–?)	Male	Black	Abolitionist	(b) Maryland (r) Pennsylvania	John W. Shugert	Unknown
The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym at Nantucket	1838	Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)	Male	White	Proslavery	Virginia	Harper & Brothers	Unknown
"Murders in the Rue Morgue"	1841	Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)	Male	White	Proslavery	Virginia	*Graham's Magazine*	*Graham's Magazine* (40,000 copies per month, 1841)

Note: (b) = born; (r) = resided.

It was not guaranteed, of course, that white readers would themselves arrive at the particular interpretation of slave violence that the writers of these narratives intended. Anti-abolitionist and proslavery texts featuring dangerous black rebels may have inadvertently reinforced in white readers' minds the idea that slavery itself was exceedingly unsafe for whites. At the same time, abolitionists' view of sinister black slaves seeking vengeance against whites could have turned northern whites against black men just as easily as it would have turned them against the slave system. Such a vision may, as a result, have encouraged northerners to oppose both emancipation and equal rights for free black men.

The image of the savage slave denied the admirable nature of African American masculinity as fully and as effectively as had the image of the docile slave in earlier children's literature. The figure of the black male savage was meant to evoke for white readers visions of dark-skinned tribes in remote parts of the world that civilization, as Americans understood it, had not effectively reached. On the scale of mental and moral development, whites in the nineteenth century classed these men closer to animals than to humans. A signifier of their supposed bestial nature was these savages' lack of sympathy for other people, a vital humanizing quality in middle-class northern antebellum culture. Related to their inability to feel others' pain, savages also displayed no moral sense, no scruples, and no sense of honor. If they had any spiritual sensibilities at all, savages practiced religions that were sinister and vindictive. Their worldview was decidedly antagonistic to the compassion, mercy, respect for human life, and veneration of sexual purity that antebellum Christianity promoted. Often they killed and raped even the most innocent of victims – in these texts, white women and children – without compunction and often exhibited a sadistic delight in doing so.[2]

To stress the ruthless savagery of slave rebels as dramatically as possible, authors writing in the 1830s focused on the suffering that defenseless white females experienced at the hands of black male insurrectionists. The

Suasion to Political Confrontation: American Abolitionists and the Problem of Resistance, 1831–1861," in David W. Blight, ed., *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 68–71. The work of Stanley Harrold has proved to be an important exception to this tendency. Harrold has suggested that, even in the 1830s, abolitionists admired black rebels and "warned that, unless masters freed their chattels, the slaves would attempt to liberate themselves violently." Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionists* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 75.

[2] For a more lengthy discussion of the qualities of the savage, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 24–28.

crimes of these men seemed more heinous when the blood that was shed was that of the most delicate members of white society. Proponents of slavery suggested that it was even more imperative to keep African American men in check via the slave system when the fair sex might be among the principal victims of these brutes' unrestrained rage. Abolitionists used white females as victims to urge the end of slavery by presenting the most frightful dangers the system could have on whites. The ancillary effect of both strategies was to perpetuate conservative notions of white women as fragile, helpless, and in need of white male protection from the dangerous black men who threatened them at every turn.

The discussion of black male aggression in early abolitionist narratives arose as a way for free black authors to express the frustrations and righteous anger they felt in the face of the deplorable conditions African Americans faced in the United States during the 1820s and 1830s.[3] Allusions to slave violence began to appear in these texts even before the revolt in Southampton County. David Walker's fiery pamphlet, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, provides an especially clear example of how such sentiments might translate into advocacy for black violence. Walker, a freeborn African American who resided in Boston, was perhaps the most aggressive spokesperson for black rights in his day. His *Appeal* expressed plainly the anger and resentment of a free black man who during his lifetime had lived among free and enslaved African Americans in the South as well as free blacks in the North.[4] In the pamphlet, Walker railed against the hypocrisy of nominally "enlightened and Christian" Americans who tortured and murdered their slaves, kept them in ignorance, and prevented them from practicing the Christian religion. "God will deliver us from under you," he assured white Americans, "And wo, wo, will be to you if we have to obtain our freedom by fighting."[5]

Like other abolitionists who would follow him in the coming decade, Walker discussed the possibility of black violence as a means of venting

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[3] For details of this discrimination, see James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790–1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (Summer 1998): 181–217

[4] David Walker was born in North Carolina in 1796 and lived in South Carolina and Philadelphia before settling in Boston in the 1820s. His *Appeal* went into three editions between September 1829 and August 1830. Walker died just after the third edition of the pamphlet was released. For more biographical information, see Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

[5] Sean Wilentz, ed., *David Walker's Appeal* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), 3, 73.

his own frustrations with the racial situation in the United States, but also as a deliberate strategy for frightening white Americans into turning against slavery. To instill the greatest amount of fear possible in his white readers, Walker employed the most harrowing image of black men available to him at the time – that of the murderous savage. "The blacks, once you get them started, they glory in death," he forewarned his white readers. "Get the blacks started, and if you do not have a gang of tigers and lions to deal with, I am a deceiver of the blacks and of the whites."[6] Such ominous language was effective in alarming whites, as was evidenced by the number of death threats Walker received after the *Appeal* was published. Walker's pamphlet went into three editions between September 1829 and August 1830 and had a wide impact throughout the eastern United States. Large numbers of the pamphlet were discovered in Augusta and Savannah, Georgia; Richmond, Virginia; Charleston, South Carolina; and eastern North Carolina (where one agent had received 200 copies). They even appeared as far south as New Orleans and were probably disseminated by sailors, white and black, traveling along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.[7] Despite the far-flung notoriety of the *Appeal*, the radical message of Walker's incendiary tract did little to promote the idea that African Americans deserved acceptance within a civilized republic as the trustworthy equals of whites.

It is highly possible that Walker's *Appeal* inspired another resident of Boston, Lydia Maria Child, to write the equally frightful "St. Domingo Orphans" in September 1830. Child published the story in the popular children's magazine she edited, *Juvenile Miscellany*, nearly a year before the Nat Turner insurrection electrified the nation.[8] Though intended for young readers, Child's story had more in common with David Walker's *Appeal* than it did with the juvenile literature that had been published during the previous decade. Set during the Haitian Revolution, "The St. Domingo Orphans" rejected benign portrayals of male slaves and refused to dismiss slave insurrection as an absurd prospect. Instead of depicting the ultimate triumph of a devoted, grateful slave over menacing, vengeful black men, Child put forth a chilling vision of bloodthirsty black insurrectionists who successfully terrorized and tortured whites. The African-descended rebels in "The St. Domingo Orphans" murdered

[6] Ibid., 25.
[7] Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 118, 122, 135, 137–138, 145, 149.
[8] Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 177.

countless white planters and their families and then took control of the colony, ultimately ejecting all whites from the independent nation they established. The terrifying nature of the devastation these black men wrought completely invalidated the notion that men of African descent were inherently docile and naturally loyal to their masters.

On the verge of embracing abolitionism, Child likely wrote this story to try to turn her readers against the slave system.[9] But to convince her audience of young people and their mothers that slavery must be ended because it endangered the lives of whites, Child relied on images of black men that undercut their claims to the type of respectable manhood afforded to white men. "The St. Domingo Orphans" did not present the slave rebels as manly revolutionaries striking for their freedom in an honorable way. Rather, Child chose to endow the black soldiers that appeared in her narrative with the qualities of the savage slave. She presented them as "blood-thirsty" and "unfeeling wretches" who "seemed to take real pleasure" in murdering whites indiscriminately. Child probably intended her young readers to renounce the system that had given rise to the horrific acts these men of African descent committed. But they were as likely to conclude instead that if black men were capable of such barbarity, they could never be trusted to be safe, reliable members of American society and should thus remain enslaved.[10]

Though intended for young readers, "The St. Domingo Orphans" was filled with frightening black men engaging in graphic violence against innocent women and children. Child's narrative followed the fortunes of two white sisters, ages six and ten, whose parents were killed during the Haitian Revolution. Child provided vivid descriptions of the carnage the Jameson girls witnessed. "During the third night they could not sleep," she related, "for the shrieks and groans of those who were butchered by these

[9] Lydia Maria Child met abolitionist crusader William Lloyd Garrison for the first time in June 1830, a mere three months before "St. Domingo Orphans" appeared in *Juvenile Miscellany*. Though Child did not immediately acknowledge her adherence to abolitionist principles after that meeting, Carolyn Karcher points out that nearly every issue of Child's magazine beginning in September 1830 included at least one piece on the topic of racial prejudice or injustice. Child went public as an abolitionist when she published an antislavery tract titled *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* in August 1833. The name of the tract may have been an homage to David Walker's earlier pamphlet. When Child's *Appeal* came out, readers of the *Juvenile Miscellany* began canceling their subscriptions to such an extent that Child had to suspend publication of the magazine. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic*, 136, 99–100.

[10] Lydia Maria Child, "The St. Domingo Orphans," *Juvenile Miscellany* 5 (September 1830): 89, 81–82.

unfeeling wretches." The rebels killed the girls' father and then captured his widow and the two children. While Mrs. Jameson was pleading for the lives of her daughters, Child related that "a ferocious soldier came behind her, and cut the head from her body so suddenly, that her blood flew all over her unfortunate daughters."[11]

On one level, Child's description of both Mrs. Jameson and the rebels in this scene was part of a calculated strategy to make the slave revolt appear as terrifying as possible to young white readers. By juxtaposing a heartless black executioner with a defenseless white female victim, Child sought to maximize her readers' sense of the cruelty of slave rebels as well as their feeling of the utter helplessness of whites caught up in the slaughter of an insurrection. The effect of such a tactic, however, was not only to negate the manliness of black men but also to uphold contemporary ideas about the inherent frailty of women. Child presented Mrs. Jameson, for instance, in a position of utter subjugation – "on her knees before the officer," pleading for his pity. Her brutal murder while in this supplicating pose confirmed this desperate woman's utter helplessness in contrast to the all-powerful stance of her ruthless black male captors.[12]

Throughout "The St. Domingo Orphans," Child also stressed the frailty of the Jameson sisters, referring to them repeatedly as "poor little children" or "poor girls" and emphasizing how alone they were after the death of their parents. "What was to become of them," Child lamented, "without relations, and without protectors!" The girls clearly could not survive on their own, particularly when they faced "the blood-thirsty tyrant Dessalines," the black general at whose approach they "trembled from head to foot with terror; every moment expecting to be discovered and killed." The world through which they tried to navigate was populated by terrifying black men, and the only responses to black male aggression available to these "poor little sufferers" consisted of "sobs and shrieks" or the same kind of ineffectual pleading with "ferocious" black men that their mother had engaged in. Finally, Child noted, "the orphans had become so worn down with trouble, so discouraged and frightened" that they agreed to pretend they were mulattoes and live as slaves in the United States. Rather than seize the small amount of power that might be afforded to them by virtue of their race, the girls assumed the race

[11] Ibid., 82, 85–86.
[12] Ibid., 85.

and status of those that society considered beneath them in the social hierarchy. In doing so, the sisters emphatically surrendered any authority and will of their own that they might have possessed.[13]

This formula recurred frequently in narratives published over the ensuing decade both by abolitionists and by authors espousing a proslavery or an anti-abolitionist point of view. Child proved the lone woman in this group; all the texts published after "The St. Domingo Orphans" that followed her model in terms of racial imagery were written by men, white and black. There are several likely reasons that white male authors imagined black men as savages so often in the narratives they produced during the 1830s. The impact of Nat Turner's revolt on the imaginations of white Americans certainly played a role. Author Robert Montgomery Bird, an anti-abolitionist who wrote of slave insurrection in his 1836 novel *Sheppard Lee*, had confided his trepidation to his diary in the midst of the Southampton uprising. "Some day we shall have it," Bird prophesied darkly, "and future generations will perhaps remember the horrors of Haiti as a farce compared with the tragedies of our own happy land!"[14] Elizabeth Young writes that Edgar Allan Poe, whose fiction in the late 1830s and early 1840s obliquely delved into the quagmire of slave revolt, was "haunted by the story of his fellow Virginian, Nat Turner."[15] Crafting scenes of racial violence in their fiction thus became a way for authors like Bird and Poe to work through personal fears that arose in the wake of Nat Turner's revolt, as well as to comfort other whites troubled by the bloodiest slave revolt in U.S. history.

Contemporary gender issues for white men, however, proved even more critical in explaining the popularity of the savage slave in the 1830s. The figure of the savage slave seems to have helped reconcile middle-class white men to new cultural demands on those of their sex, race, and socioeconomic group that had begun to arise in the early 1800s. As the economy of the Northeast became increasingly caught up in industrializing and urbanizing forces in the 1820s and 1830s, middle-class men were expected to adopt a more individualistic ethos in order to compete effectively in a capitalist society. At the same time, aggressive competitiveness

[13] Ibid., 89, 86, 88, 90, 81, 91.

[14] Robert Montgomery Bird diary, August 27, 1831, quoted in Richard Harris, "A Young Dramatist's Diary: *The Secret Records* of R. M. Bird," *University of Pennsylvania Library Chronicle* 25 (Winter 1959): 16, 17.

[15] Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 21.

had to be tempered with heightened self-control, as those who spear-headed movements for social reform were beginning to suggest. Certainly, men were assumed to be naturally more ambitious and hard-driving than women. But some middle-class white northerners believed that *true* men should be able to contain their natural drives and instincts so that their obsession with self-interested gain did not rend the fabric of the fledgling republican society.[16]

Invoking the savage slave allowed white male writers and readers to experience vicariously the abandonment of restraint their culture denied them, as they witnessed fictional black men gleefully destroying some of the most revered symbols of civilization and of morality, including, sig-nificantly, white women. Yet displacing these desires on black men also allowed white men to distance themselves from such unacceptable behav-ior, assigning to black men the inability to check their impulses toward anger, lust, or cruelty. Just as working-class white men in this period used blackface minstrelsy as a means of expressing their longing for a prein-dustrial past while officially ridiculing those who did so, middle-class white men used black male characters to indulge fictively in acts that terrified but also intrigued them.[17]

Perhaps partly for this reason, many of the narratives that promoted the image of the savage black man were among the most popular of their day. Most of them fell into the category of adventure novels, a particu-larly popular genre among early-nineteenth-century Americans. A major-ity of these texts were released by publishing giant Harper & Brothers of New York City, one of the two top publishing firms in the United States (see Table 2.1) The first edition of William Gilmore Simms's *The Yemassee* sold out in hours, and three printings of the novel were issued within nine months of its initial publication in the spring of 1835. The first 2,500 copies of Joseph Holt Ingraham's novel *Lafitte*, published a year later, in June 1836, sold out by September and the book ultimately

[16] E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 4. For another discussion of the contradictions and complications involved in definitions of manhood in the early nineteenth century, see David Greven, *Men Beyond Desire: Manhood, Sex, and Violation in American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Greven introduces the "inviolate man" – "the sexually and emotionally unavailable male, resolutely ungrasp-able, elusive, a hermetically sealed vessel of chastity and purity" – as another ideal of manliness in the antebellum period (1).

[17] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

earned for Ingraham the impressive sum of $1,350.[18] Although Richard Hildreth initially had to publish his abolitionist novel *The Slave, or the Memoirs of Archy Moore* at his own expense, the book ultimately sold some 7,000 copies and went into seven editions before 1848.[19]

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to discern precisely who the readership for these works was. But the fact that their plots centered on topics like Indian wars, pirate adventures, and the American Revolution suggests that the target audience for these books was more likely male than female. At the time, the most widely read American novels included James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods*. The domestic sentimental novel, a genre that was considered the province of women, would not make a large impact on American culture until the 1850s. In the 1830s, the reading and writing of fiction were gendered much more strongly as a male enterprise than they would be in coming decades, even though women did clearly consume adventure novels and other types of narratives alongside men in the 1830s.[20] Lydia Maria Child's comment on Richard Hildreth's novel *Archy Moore* when it appeared in 1836 illustrates both of these realities. An accomplished author in her own right by 1836, Child remarked to William Lloyd Garrison, "If I were a man, I would rather be the author of that work, than of anything ever published in America."[21] It is clear that Child, though a woman, had read Hildreth's book but also that social conventions defined this adventure

[18] See Eugene Exman, *The Brothers Harper: A Unique Publishing Partnership and Its Impact upon the Cultural Life of America from 1817 to 1853* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina*, John Ridgely, ed. (New York: Twayne, 1964; originally published in 1835 by Harper & Brothers), 16; Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, T. C. Duncan Eaves eds., *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1954), III, 222–223. Cathy Davidson states that by 1825 it was "not unheard of" for an American novel to sell 10,000 copies. Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 17. In 1855, however, the secretary of the Association of New York Publishers, George Palmer Putnam, asserted that "20 years ago who *imagined* editions of 100,000 or 75,000, or 30,000, or even the now common number of 10,000?" Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

[19] Evan Brandstadter, "Uncle Tom and Archy Moore: The Antislavery Novel as Ideological Symbol," *American Quarterly* 26 (May 1974): 167; Charles Nichols, "The Origins of Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Phylon Quarterly* 19 (1958): 330.

[20] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture:* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998; orig. pub. 1977), 8.

[21] Child quoted in Richard Hildreth, *Archy Moore, The White Slave; or, Memoirs of a Fugitive* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856), xiv.

novel, with its male protagonist, as literature that was better suited to the male than the female cultural realm.

A few weeks after the Southampton insurrection, a pamphlet was published in New York City by an obscure author named Samuel Warner.[22] The lengthy title of his work began *Authentic and Impartial Narrative of the Tragical Scene Which Was Witnessed in Southampton County (Virginia)*, but, despite its name, this narrative proved anything but impartial.[23] A close reading reveals that Warner wrote clearly against the slave system and in favor of equal rights for African Americans. In the conclusion to his pamphlet, he explained that "to remove this stain [slavery] from the American people the energies of justice, the life of virtue, and the sacred obligations of principle must be brought into operation." Rather than advocating the colonization of freed slaves abroad, as many white Americans did in the early 1830s, Warner argued that full rights should be given to emancipated African Americans on American soil. Black men were "literally and in fact included in our bill or [*sic*] rights," Warner insisted, and the United States could not "be exonerated from the charge of tyranny until by our solemn act we place them in full possession of those rights which are claimed for ourselves, and which are consistent with the principles of our excellent government."[24]

As Child had in "St. Domingo Orphans," Warner highlighted the barbarity of the slaves that had risen up against their masters, this time in Virginia, to move horrified white readers to repudiate the system of

[22] Virtually nothing seems to be known about Samuel Warner. Kenneth Greenberg identifies him in passing as "a white Virginian." Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 143.

[23] Historians have generally taken Warner at his word and dismissed the pamphlet as merely a compilation of newspaper articles offering details on the Southampton rebellion. Other scholars have offered conflicting opinions about the political slant of Warner's pamphlet. Charles M. Christian calls *Authentic and Impartial Narrative* an "antiabolitionist tract," while William Tynes Cowa refers to it as "an abolitionist tract." Charles M. Christian, *Black Saga: The African American Experience, A Chronology* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1998), 109; William Tynes Cowa, *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 49. It seems clear, though, that Warner used his rendering of the revolt to forward an abolitionist agenda. This is surprising, given the few white Americans who embraced the antislavery cause, let alone published narratives on its behalf, at this early date, only months after the first issue of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* was printed and a full two years before Garrison and Arthur Tappan founded the American Anti-Slavery Society.

[24] Samuel Warner, *Authentic and Impartial Narrative of the Tragical Scene That Was Witnessed in Southampton County (Virginia)…* (New York: Warner & West, 1831), reprinted in Henry Tragle, ed., *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971), 299–300.