

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

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Embodying the Octoroon: Abolitionist Performance at the London Crystal Palace, 1851

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 15, no. 2 (Summer 2016)

Citation: Lisa Volpe, "Embodying the Octoroon: Abolitionist Performance at the London Crystal Palace, 1851," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2016), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer16/volpe-on-abolitionist-performance-at-the-london-crystal-palace-1851>.

Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

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Abstract:

On July 18, 1851, a pioneering abolitionist performance took place within the American section at The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, commonly known as the Crystal Palace. Gathered in front of *The Greek Slave* by Hiram Powers and *Illustrious Americans*, a series of daguerreotypes by Mathew B. Brady, the demonstrators challenged the works' status as examples of America's democratic ideals and instead recast them as characters in the tale of the "tragic octoroon." In front of an international audience, this radical reinterpretation of exhibited artworks implicated the entire American nation in the crime of slavery and presented the horrors of the slave system as America's most notable product.

Embodying the Octoroon: Abolitionist Performance at the London Crystal Palace, 1851

by Lisa Volpe

On July 18, 1851, the American abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator* published a letter by William Farmer detailing a demonstration that took place in the American section of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, the first international exhibition:

My Dear Sir, An interesting anti-slavery demonstration took place at the Great Exhibition on Saturday last. . . . The same idea appears to have arisen simultaneously in the minds of [several] abolitionists—the propriety of exhibiting . . . some specimens not merely of hams, locks, revolvers and firearms, but of the more peculiar staple produce of America—Slavery.^[1]

As Farmer suggested, the American section in the Crystal Palace displayed a variety of American products but contained no reference to the three million slaves in the United States who helped to produce them. The omission was glaring. By 1840, cotton produced by slave labor accounted for 59 percent of US exports, a fact ignored in the exhibit of cotton and cotton fabrics. Additionally, it was commonly known that at the time of the exhibition the United States was in the midst of the Compromise of 1850, a series of five bills intended to balance the slave and free states. Included in this series was the Fugitive Slave Act, brokered by US senator Henry Clay, which allowed slaveholders to reclaim escaped slaves without legal proof of ownership. To an international audience, the bills branded the United States as a nation defined by slavery. When Farmer suggested that the American exhibition at the Crystal Palace should have displayed, “side by side with the specimens of cotton, sugar and tobacco . . . the human instruments of their production,” he made clear that the international image of the United States was one marked by slavery.^[2] The absence of any acknowledgement of America’s “peculiar institution” inspired the abolitionists to act.

The demonstrators represented a variety of nations and ages. Escaped American slaves William (1824–1900) and Ellen Craft (1826–91) and William Wells Brown (ca. 1814–84) walked arm in arm with white families from Bristol and Dublin. Surgeons and lawyers joined their wives, children, and friends in the demonstration. A total of sixteen people formed the group. Gathered in front of *The Greek Slave* (1844, first version, marble, Raby Castle, Staindrop) by Hiram Powers (1805–73) and *Illustrious Americans*, a series of daguerreotypes by Mathew B. Brady (1822–96), the demonstrators challenged the works’ status as examples of America’s democratic ideals and instead recast them as characters in the tale of the “tragic octoroon.”^[3] The abolitionist performance turned the American exhibition from a proud self-statement of artistry and democracy to a bold critique of America and its slave system.

“Fortunately, we have . . . in the British Metropolis, some specimens of what were once American ‘chattels personal.’”

The demonstration at the Crystal Palace was one of many abolitionist performances staged in England throughout the opening decades of the nineteenth century. The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 had abolished slavery throughout the British Empire, and with the organization of the

British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, abolitionist efforts entered an international phase. Society members believed that Britain could lead the attack on slavery throughout the world, and soon the cause of global abolition became a vital part of national identity.^[4] Audiences eagerly attended abolitionist lectures and performances, and purchased slave narratives. As the chorus of British abolitionist voices grew louder, echoes were heard across the ocean. With the passing into law of the US Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, an increasing number of escaped slaves left free northern states for England. Many of these transatlantic refugees engaged in antislavery activity: lecturing on slavery, writing detailed biographies, and publicly displaying their scarred bodies or instruments of torture.^[5]

William Wells Brown, the leader of the Crystal Palace demonstration, was an escaped slave who first arrived in England in 1849 (fig. 1). Only weeks after his arrival, Brown began a lecture tour, describing his years in chains and his daring escape. By October of 1850, Brown had adapted his lectures to include a twenty-four-scene, moving panorama. Neither the panorama nor images of the scenes are extant; however, Brown published a text describing the performance and its visual component.^[6]

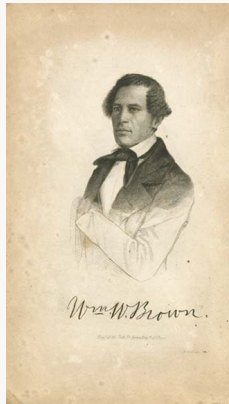


Fig. 1, “Portrait of William Wells Brown,” *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (London: C. Gilpin, 1849): frontispiece. [\[larger image\]](#)

The first scene of the panorama was a view of a Virginia plantation. In many abolitionist texts, Virginia serves as the iconic slave state. North American slavery began in the Virginia Colony in 1619, and by the 1850 census, Virginia held over 470,000 slaves, outnumbering those in the nearest state, South Carolina, by nearly 100,000. Brown’s description enriched the scene: “The man on horseback is a slaveholder . . . observe, the way in which the Slaves before you watch the Slaveholder . . . [in] continual fear of being sold and separated from their nearest and dearest.”^[7] The sale of slave bodies was a profitable venture in antebellum America, estimated at tens of millions of dollars. Yet Brown’s descriptive text implored his audience to acknowledge the personal horrors of the “peculiar institution,” the human cause and cost of slavery. Man to man, he compared the image of the slave to that of the slaveholder.

In his panorama, Brown presented the slaveholder as an immoral villain and the slave as an innocent soul. Though the image of the slaveholder reappeared in the majority of the scenes, Brown never again verbally pointed out the figure as he did in the first, suggesting that he

appeared in the same recognizable form throughout the panorama. It is likely that Brown used the figure of Brother Jonathan as his representative slaveholder (fig. 2). This character first emerged in the American press in 1776, representing a typical American. But by the 1850s, Jonathan was pictured in the British press as a slave trader with a cat-o'-nine-tails dangling from his back pocket and often a gun tucked into his belt. The image, complete with murderous weapons, was a fitting icon of America in 1850 for, in the English opinion, the whole of the nation was stained by slavery.



Fig. 2, John Leech, *What? You Young Yankee-Noodle, Strike Your Own Father!*, *Punch* 10, March 14, 1846: 119.

[\[larger image\]](#)

In the eighth scene of the panorama, the slaves' fear of being sold was developed within the framework of the "tragic octoroon," one of the most familiar abolitionist tropes. As Brown described it, "The sale before us is a sale of Slaves, although that woman on the auction-stand who is now being sold . . . is perfectly white."^[8] Plots vary slightly in each of the retellings, but the framework of the octoroon's story remains the same. The octoroon is a beautiful young woman, raised and educated as a white lady. At her father's death, it is revealed that her mother was a mixed-race slave. Because he never properly freed the young woman, her father's creditors sell her into slavery to cover his debts. Brown's use of the octoroon is one of many examples from this period (fig. 3).^[9]



Fig. 3, Hammatt Billings, "The Sale," *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853): tailpiece illustration for chapter 30. [\[larger image\]](#)

The prevalence of the octoroon in fiction mirrored her ubiquity in America's slave states. An account from 1839 by Reverend Francis Hawley (1802–84) of Connecticut offered this observation: "It is so common for the female slaves to have white children, that little or nothing is ever said about it. Very few inquiries are made as to who the father is."^[10] Similarly, in 1861, Mary Boykin Chesnut (1823–86), wife of the US senator from South Carolina, wrote: "the slaves one sees . . . exactly resemble the white children—and every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody else's household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds."^[11] In contrast, English accounts describing light-skinned slaves were more direct, blatantly condemning the sexual misconduct of American slave owners. In the 1823 text *An Account of the United States of America*, Isaac Holmes decried the "shameful connection" that frequently occurred and the "gentlemen, that are guilty of this shameful practice."^[12] The account given by Captain Frederick Marryat (1792–1848) in his *Diary in America*, published in 1839, is perhaps the most incriminating. He wrote: "There is a point connected with slavery in America which renders it more odious than in other countries; I refer to the promiscuous intercourse, which has been carried on to such an extent that you very often meet with slaves whose skins are whiter than their master's."^[13] While this brutal genealogy was elided by Americans, British audiences acknowledged the role of the slaveholder in the octoroon's lineage.

In literature and art, the spectacle of the octoroon on the auction block is the critical scene of her tale. Both the facts and moral horrors of the tragic octoroon are suggested in that central act through her comparison to other characters—slaves and slaveholders. As the octoroon stands on the block, she is often surrounded by other slaves awaiting sale. Her proximity to darker-skinned slaves paradigmatically confirms her position within that class. It also breaks down the perceived barrier between the white audience and the depicted slaves, reducing the sense of otherness and questioning the construction of privilege based on normative whiteness. The audience was invited, as Brown implored in the first scene of the panorama, to imagine the horror of slavery from a subjective position.

Another horror, one that implicates the slaveholder, is brought to light by the juxtaposition of the octoroon's white skin with that of her darker-skinned fellow slaves. The difference in their skin tones forces the viewer to confront the origin of the octoroon's paleness and the moral depravity inherent in her tale (fig. 4). The slaveholder who bids high sums to win her service does so for a base purpose, one understood in contrast to the woman's guiltlessness. In the Victorian mind, the octoroon's complexion connoted innocence, virtue, and purity.^[14] As Mary Boykin Chesnut noted in her personal account, she did not blame the light-skinned slave women, who are, "in conduct, the purest women God ever made." Yet for the slaveholders, her "disgust is sometimes boiling over."^[15] As Chesnut suggests, the octoroon's purity was understood in binary opposition to the dark deeds of the slaveholder. The comparison suggests a repeated pattern of guilt, multiple generations of sexual misdeeds perpetuated on slaves by slave owners. The presence of all three character types—octoroon, dark-skinned slaves, and slaveholder—is critical in the auction scene.



Fig. 4, Lefevre James Cranstone, *Slave Auction, Virginia*, ca. 1860. Oil on canvas. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. [\[larger image\]](#)

Brown utilized this paradigm in his panorama performance. While the octoroon was on the auction block, he drew attention to the presence of dark-skinned slaves, then to the slaveholders. As a former slave, Brown fulfilled some of the first role, testifying to the octoroon's position as a slave by declaring, "that woman on the auction-stand . . . is now being sold."^[16] He continued by addressing the slaveholders and their bidding, noting, "For what purpose such high sums were given . . . all those who were acquainted with . . . American Slavery will readily suspect."^[17] Thus, Brown followed the flow of characters and comparisons typical of the auction scene. For Brown, and others who utilized the trope, the octoroon's auction highlighted the deep, often unspoken horrors of the American slave system and stood as an indictment of those who perpetuated it.

Brown abandoned his panorama after only a few months, choosing instead to place a real woman in the role of tragic octoroon—Ellen Craft. By early 1851, when William Wells Brown began to lecture with Ellen Craft and her husband, William, the Crafts' story was already internationally known (fig. 5). On an early morning in December of 1848, William and Ellen Craft escaped from slavery. Ellen was so light skinned that during their escape, she was able to pass as a male slaveholder, with William posing as her valet. In this disguise, they made their way from Macon, Georgia, to Boston, where they lived for a short time. However, the Fugitive Slave Act forced them to flee to England. Soon after their arrival, the Crafts joined Brown on a well-attended speaking tour of England. According to the historian R. J. M. Blackett, these lectures followed a distinct order: "Brown spoke against American slavery, William told of their escape, and at the end of his narrative, in a tear-jerking scene, Ellen was invited up on the stage."^[18] Standing silent before the audience, signaling her innocence with downcast eyes and displaying her visibly white skin, Ellen embodied the role of the octoroon.^[19]

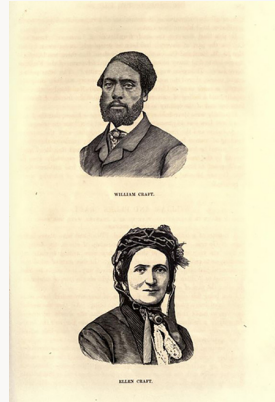


Fig. 5, “William Craft and Ellen Craft,” *The Underground Rail Road* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872): 368.

[\[larger image\]](#)

“Quite contrary to the feeling of ordinary visitors, the American department was our chief attraction.”

Reading the extant reports, it is clear that the American display at the Crystal Palace was a disappointment. Even the *New York Times* conceded, “It was hardly to be expected that so young and simple a people as that of the United States would make a very brilliant debut.”^[20] Similarly, a report released in the *Times* of London shortly before the beginning of the exhibition mocked, “As to our cousins from across the Atlantic, they are busy at work getting their ‘notions’ in order.” It continued, “Their greatness lies in their expansive energies, and in the scale upon which they do everything.”^[21] “Greatness” and “scale” were backhanded descriptions, for in the case of the American display, the scale of the exhibition space far exceeded that of the objects it contained. With unfounded optimism, the United States Commission had requested a forty-thousand-square-foot exhibition area. Yet, at the start of the exhibition, there were only five hundred American exhibits, occupying a mere fraction of the space. Early exhibits from the United States failed to rouse the interest of visitors—a block of zinc from New Jersey, boat oars from Boston, barrels of flour, bars of soap, and a meat biscuit from Texas were among the more notable products. Powers’s *Greek Slave* and Brady’s *Illustrious Americans* were later additions. However, at the start of the exhibition there was one American object remarkable for its “greatness”—a large pasteboard eagle, hung high above the American section with the Stars and Stripes in its talons (fig. 6). The dramatic size of this symbol only emphasized the emptiness of the space below it. This emptiness left room for critique on many fronts, and the topic of American slavery was a common refrain.



Fig. 6, After Joseph Nash, “Plate XXV. America, from the North-West End,” *Dickinson’s Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851* (London: Dickinson Brothers, 1854). Hand-colored chromolithograph.

[\[larger image\]](#)

The critiques are perhaps best exemplified in *The House that Paxton Built* by George Augustus Sala (1828–95). This twenty-three-panel, accordion-style book with hand-colored woodcuts lampooned various exhibits in the Crystal Palace and took every opportunity to connect the exhibited American products to the issue of slavery. One such image, *American Planter’s Arm Chair made of ebony—a very free and easy invention supported on slavery*, utilized the familiar figure of Brother Jonathan to mock American exhibited items as products of the slave system (fig. 7). In *American Planter’s Arm Chair*, Brother Jonathan reclines on three slaves, rather than on a chair. Sala’s simple cartoon reintroduced the issue of slavery into the American exhibition.



Fig. 7, George Augustus Sala, *American Planter’s Arm Chair*, *The House that Paxton Built* (London: Ironbrace, Woodenhead & Co., 1851): n.p. [\[larger image\]](#)

In an effort to bolster the display and the national statement, the United States Commission sought out additional exhibits that they imagined were above reproach. Mathew Brady’s daguerreotypes of famous Americans were chosen as an assertion of national unity articulated through the new, democratic technology of photography. Before the Crystal Palace exhibition, the images had received a positive reception and a wide audience in America when they appeared in the publication *The Gallery of Illustrious Americans*. First announced to the public in 1850, *The Gallery* was a subscription series of lithographs by Francis D’Avignon (1813–61), based

on the daguerreotype portraits by Brady (fig. 8). An advertisement of February 1850 in *Holden's Dollar Magazine* articulated the importance of the photographic source of the images: "Mr. Brady's reputation has been too long established to need any recommendation. . . . His daguerreotypes are in the highest sense the productions of an artist, glowing with the soul of the living countenance."^[22] Each of Brady's daguerreotypes was seen as a direct transcription of both the physiognomy and the internal character of the sitter. Just as the moral characteristic of purity was connoted by the octoroon's white skin, the exterior and interior qualities of Brady's sitters were thought to exist in a reflexive relationship. The fact that the original daguerreotypes did not appear in the printed version of *The Gallery* and instead were represented by lithographs did not deter this reading. The introductory "Salutation" directly references the daguerreotypes, thus lending their "truth value" to D'Avignon's lithographs.^[23] The texts accompanying each image played an equally important role. The strong chins, determined eyes, and broad brows of the men were frequently discussed as signs of honor and patriotism.

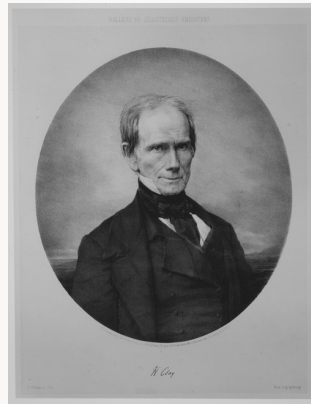


Fig. 8, Francis D'Avignon, *Henry Clay*, 1850, *Gallery of Illustrious Americans* (New York: Brady, D'Avignon, and Co., 1850). Lithograph after daguerreotype by Mathew B. Brady. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, www.metmuseum.org. [\[larger image\]](#)

As the lawyer George Templeton Strong (1820–75) mused in 1854, "We have not, like England and France, centuries of achievements and calamities to look back on; we have no record of Americanism and we feel its want . . . [therefore] we . . . venerate every trivial fact about our first settlers and colonial governors and revolutionary heroes."^[24] Although the *Gallery* images were sent to subscribers at a rate of one personage a month, the overarching intent of the project was to produce a complete volume.^[25] Brady's *Gallery* was thought of as a definitive statement of American unity—individual citizens coming together to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The "Salutation" clearly stated these aims: "There is nothing sectional in the scope of this work, it will be comprehensive in its spirit; and it is hoped that it may . . . bind the Union still more firmly together."^[26] *The Gallery of Illustrious Americans* provided the American audience with visible portraits through which they could imagine an invisible concept, a nation.^[27] Forty-eight of Mathew Brady's daguerreotypes were chosen for the Crystal Palace display as a statement of the uniquely American mix of individual identity and national unity.

The daguerreotypes were displayed together, just behind the space reserved for *The Greek Slave*. As Brady's daguerreotypes were secured for exhibition, N. S. Dodge, United States Commissioner for the American section, wrote to Captain John Grant, owner of a marble version of Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave*. Dodge aimed to secure Grant's permission to display the life-size neoclassical work in the exhibition. The letter reveals that *The Greek Slave* was included as a demonstration of the high level of artistry attained by Americans and as a democratic symbol.^[28]

Yet, during the sculpture's exhibition in England and the United States between 1845 and 1849, two oppositional readings existed for *The Greek Slave*. Whether it was embraced as an artistic statement of democracy or abolition depended on its location. The sculpture was praised during its exhibitions throughout the United States in 1847 and 1849. During its first US national tour, a brochure was given to viewers of *The Greek Slave*. The text highlighted specific details of the work—the cross as a symbol of Christianity, the locket as a reference to the slave's family.^[29] According to the art historian Vivien Green Fryd [points out in her article](#), the emphasis on these virtues was appealing to an American public that valued Christian religion and family sentiment. Perhaps most importantly, the brochure encouraged viewers to consider the broader narrative—the Greek struggle under the Turks—as a triumph of democracy comparable to the American Revolution.^[30]

A different reading, which tied *The Greek Slave* to abolitionist discourse, prevailed during the exhibition of the work in Henry Graves's gallery in London in 1845. When the *London Art Union* first reported on this exhibition of the statue, on June 1, 1845, the author lingered on one detail of the work, "the hands . . . bound in chains."^[31] By June 12, the connection was strengthened in the press. A report in the *Times* of London suggested a "companion" for the work, "a negro, with his hands fastened with a chain" in a "crouching attitude."^[32] As this remark indicated, in England the sculpture was seen in relation to the popular antislavery image and slogan (fig. 9), "Am I not a man and a brother?" Created for the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787, the motif became a famous and popular political statement, reproduced on a wide variety of products. It has since been called the most successful logo of all time.^[33] The ubiquitous image was a natural comparison to *The Greek Slave*, and anchored the statue to an abolitionist message.



Fig. 9, Unknown maker, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?*, 1837. Woodcut. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, LC-USZC4-532. [\[larger image\]](#)

Despite the intentions of the United States Commission to present *The Greek Slave* as a prime example of American artistry and democracy, the exhibition history and contemporary critical reception of the work in England counteracted their efforts. While official reports and handbooks from the Crystal Palace praised the object for its aesthetic beauty, these analyses also labeled the work as “a lesson of shame and scorn to traffickers in the trade.”^[34] Although America is not named directly as a “trafficker,” the relationship is inferred. A famous cartoon by John Tenniel (1820–1914), *The Virginian Slave, Intended as a Companion to Power’s [sic] ‘Greek Slave’*, published in the widely circulated British humor magazine *Punch* in May 1851, made the connection explicit. In the illustration, Tenniel replaced the white figure of *The Greek Slave* with a black one, and Virginia was again presented as the quintessential slavery state (fig. 10). Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, who was visiting the exhibition, enjoyed the illustrative critique provided by *The Virginian Slave*. In his lecture *The Crystal Palace and Its Lessons*, he addressed the illustration noting, “The hit in this instance is certainly a fair one.”^[35]



Fig. 10, John Tenniel, *The Virginian Slave, Intended as a Companion to Power’s [sic] ‘Greek Slave’*, *Punch* 20, June 7, 1851: 236. [\[larger image\]](#)

These exhibited American objects—daguerreotypes and sculpture—inspired a group of abolitionists eager to use the occasion of the Great Exhibition to make a dramatic statement. The American Henry Clarke Wright (1797–1870), a prolific writer and outspoken member of the Anti-Slavery Society, suggested a variation on the lectures by Brown and the Crafts for the Crystal Palace performance. In an open letter, Wright proposed, “Above all, an American slave-auction block must be there, with William and Ellen Craft on the block, Henry Clay as auctioneer, and the American flag floating above it.”^[36] Wright recycled the elements of the octoroon’s auction scene: the tragic heroine in the body of Ellen Craft; the darker-skinned William acting as her fellow slave; and the slaveholder as Henry Clay, a disfavored southern congressman and author of the Fugitive Slave Act. Clay’s proposed participation was mere symbol, connoting the institutionalized nature of slavery in the United States. Although the actual performance deviated from Wright’s plan, the departure was only slight. The large pasteboard eagle above the exhibition space and two exhibits within it—Hiram Powers’s *Greek Slave* and Mathew Brady’s *Illustrious Americans*, which included Henry Clay—were utilized for the purpose.

“An interesting demonstration took place at the Great Exhibition on Saturday last.”

Upon entering the Crystal Palace on June 21, 1851, the demonstrators moved immediately to the American section and began to recast the exhibited objects as characters in the octoroon’s auction. As the group gathered in front of *The Greek Slave*, William Wells Brown produced the cartoon clipping from *Punch* and held it aloft. He proclaimed loudly to visitors, “As an American fugitive slave, I place this Virginia Slave by the side of the Greek Slave, as its most fitting companion.”^[37] As Fryd suggests, the presence of the illustration unhinged the sculpture from its stoic, classical past and cast it into a contemporary context.^[38] Interpreted as a visibly white, contemporary American slave, the sculpture was recast as a tragic octoroon. Further, the comparison of the octoroon with the darker-skinned slaves—in this case Tenniel’s cartoon—in addition to Brown’s testimony “as an American . . . slave,” fulfilled a critical element in the octoroon’s auction scene, drawing attention to her plight and to the sexual misconduct of the slaveholder. According to Farmer’s letter, “the comparison” was “understood and keenly felt” by the crowd that had begun to gather.^[39]

As in other retellings of the tragic octoroon’s auction, the demonstration proceeded from the identification of the octoroon to the identification and condemnation of the slaveholders nearby. From *The Greek Slave*, the demonstrators moved directly to the display of Mathew Brady’s daguerreotypes. Standing in front of the forty-eight plates of American men, Brown noted, “Here we had an opportunity of commenting upon the conduct and character of the proslavery statesmen, whose portraits disgrace the walls of the World’s Exhibition.”^[40] Yet the demonstrators did more than berate the pictured men; they equated them to the feared and hated slaveholders of the octoroon’s tale. In the next line of Farmer’s text, the demonstrator emphasized the inherent violence in this character through the evocation of the sound and image of a gun—the “Colt’s revolver” and the “clicking of his murderous weapons.” This linkage between disgraceful, proslavery men and murderous weapons cast Brady’s *Illustrious Americans* as Brother Jonathans—the derogatory icon of the whole nation.

In all, how are we to understand the abolitionist performance on June 21, 1851? For the United States Commission, Hiram Powers’s *Greek Slave* was included in the exhibition space in order to provide an example of American artistry and to bring to mind America’s democratic principles. Similarly, Mathew Brady’s *Illustrious Americans* was included not only because of the images’ photographic quality but also because the series connoted both the individuality of American men and the unity of the nation. The demonstration appropriated these exhibited objects, recasting them as characters in the tragic octoroon’s tale. Yet, set as it was in the American section of the Crystal Palace, this enactment of the octoroon’s auction took on a broader meaning. The performance implicated the entire American nation in the crime of slavery in front of an international audience of visitors. By utilizing *The Greek Slave*, the most notable object in the exhibition space, to embody the octoroon, the unseen horrors of slavery were presented to the world as America’s most notable product. As Farmer concluded succinctly in his account, “An artist could not possibly have had better models from which to delineate ‘Guilt’ and ‘Innocence’ than the slave and the slaveholder, as they appeared in the World’s Exhibition.”^[41]

Lisa Volpe is the curator of the Wichita Art Museum. Her research interests include American art of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the intersections of photography and other fine and performing arts, and art and the abolitionist movement. She received her MA in Art History from Case Western Reserve University, where she was awarded the Cleveland Museum of Art Fellowship, and her PhD in Art History from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is currently researching artists' symbolic use of the figure of abolitionist John Brown from the mid-1850s to today.

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Notes

[1] William Farmer, "Fugitive Slaves at the Great Exhibition," *Boston Liberator*, July 18, 1851. The article appeared in the paper almost one month after the demonstration took place on June 21, 1851.

[2] Ibid.

[3] By definition, "octoroon" refers to a person of one-eighth black ancestry. However, the term was applied more broadly in this era. It is used in this essay in reference to the popular character—the "tragic octoroon"—in nineteenth-century literature.

[4] For a detailed analysis, see Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[5] Black abolitionists active in England include William Wells Brown, Josiah Henson, Charles Lenox Remond, Henry "Box" Brown, John Anderson, William and Ellen Craft, Frederick Douglass, and Sarah Parker Remond. See Audrey Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representation of Slavery in England and America 1780–1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Robert Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

[6] William Wells Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views of the Scenes in the Life of an American Slave* (Boston, MA: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849).

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Ibid., 15.

[9] Other examples include R. Hildreth, *The Slave* (1836); Joseph Holt Ingraham, *Quadroone; or, St. Michael's Day* (1840); Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Quadroon Girl* (1842); Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, *Retribution* (1840); Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852); Emily Clemens Pearson, *Cousin Franck's Household; or, Scenes in the Old Dominion* (1853); William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or, the President's Daughter* (1853); Mary Langdon, *Ida May* (1855); Samuel Smucker, *The Planter's Victim* (1855); J. T. Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood* (1856); Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1856); Mayne Reid, *The Quadroon* (1856); James S. Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans* (1856); Van Buren Denslow, *Owned and Disowned* (1857); Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon* (1859); Hezekiah L. Hosmer, *Adela the Octoroon* (1860); and Mella Victoria Fuller Victor, *Maum Guinea, and her Plantation Children* (1861).

[10] Theodore Weld, ed., *American Slavery, As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 94.

[11] Quoted in Marli Frances Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830–80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 97.

[12] Isaac Holmes, *An Account of the United States of America: Derived from Actual Observation, During a Residence of Four Years in That Republic: Including Original Communications* (London: Printed at the Caxton press, by H. Fisher, 1823), 327–28.

[13] Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America: With Remarks on Its Institutions* (New York: W. H. Colyer, 1839), 191.

- [14] Jules Zanger, "The 'Tragic Octoroon' in Pre-Civil War Fiction," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (April 1, 1966): 58. See also Teresa Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004); and Werner Sollers, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- [15] Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 97.
- [16] *Ibid.*, 15.
- [17] Brown, *Description*, 17.
- [18] Quoted in R. J. M. Blackett, "Fugitive Slaves in Britain: The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft," *Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 16, 2009): 41.
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- [20] W. C. Rives, "The Great Exhibition—The American Department," *New York Times*, October 31, 1851, accessed September 16, 2012, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F00E4DC1431E13BBC4950DFB667838A649FDE>.
- [21] "The Great Exhibition," *Times* (London), March 17, 1851.
- [22] "A Gallery of National Work. The Gallery of Illustrious Americans," *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, February 1850, 128.
- [23] Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images As History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (1989; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 49.
- [24] George Templeton Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 196–97.
- [25] A year's subscription, which included twenty-four prints and biographies, cost twenty dollars. Single prints were sold for a dollar. See *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, February 1850, for additional subscription information.
- [26] Reproduced in Mary Panzer, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 1997), 69.
- [27] Benedict Anderson argues that the shaping of a nation requires the formation of a mass collective identity, strengthened through the imagination and fueled by print culture. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
- [28] Letter reprinted in Edward Riddle, N. S. Dodge, and John Grant, "Industrial Exhibition," *Times* (London), April 29, 1851.
- [29] Brochure reproduced in Julia Shedd, *Famous Sculptors and Sculpture Illustrated* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1881), 285.
- [30] Vivien M. Green [Fryd], "Hiram Powers's 'Greek Slave': Emblem of Freedom," *American Art Journal* 14, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 34.
- [31] "'The Greek Slave,' by Powers," *London Art Union*, June 1, 1845.
- [32] "A Study from Nature," *Times* (London), June 12, 1845.
- [33] See Nicholas Krisof, "Social Media and Activism," *New York Times Blog*, October 6, 2009, accessed September 16, 2012, <http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/06/social-media-and-activism/>.
- [34] "Greek Slave," in *The Illustrated Exhibitor: A Tribute to the World's Industrial Jubilee, Comprising Sketches by Pen and Pencil of the Principal Objects in the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, 1851* (London: J. Cassell, 1851), 37.
- [35] Horace Greeley, *The Crystal Palace and Its Lessons: A Lecture* (London: Dewitt and Davenport, 1851), 10.
- [36] Reproduced in Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, 48.
- [37] Farmer, "Fugitive Slaves at the Great Exhibition."
- [38] Green [Fryd], "Hiram Powers's 'Greek Slave.'"
- [39] Farmer, "Fugitive Slaves at the Great Exhibition."
- [40] *Ibid.*
- [41] *Ibid.*

Illustrations

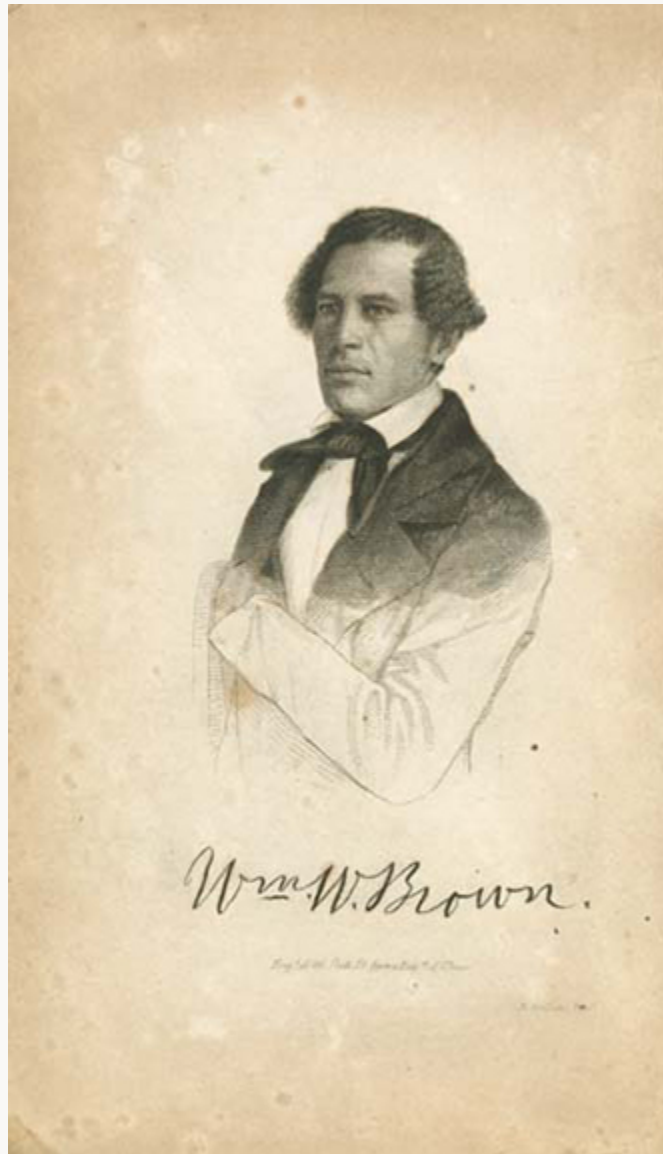


Fig. 1, "Portrait of William Wells Brown," *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (London: C. Gilpin, 1849): frontispiece. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, John Leech, *What? You Young Yankee-Noodle, Strike Your Own Father!*, *Punch* 10, March 14, 1846: 119.

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Fig. 3, Hammatt Billings, "The Sale," *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853): tailpiece illustration for chapter 30. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Lefevre James Cranstone, *Slave Auction, Virginia*, ca. 1860. Oil on canvas. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. [\[return to text\]](#)

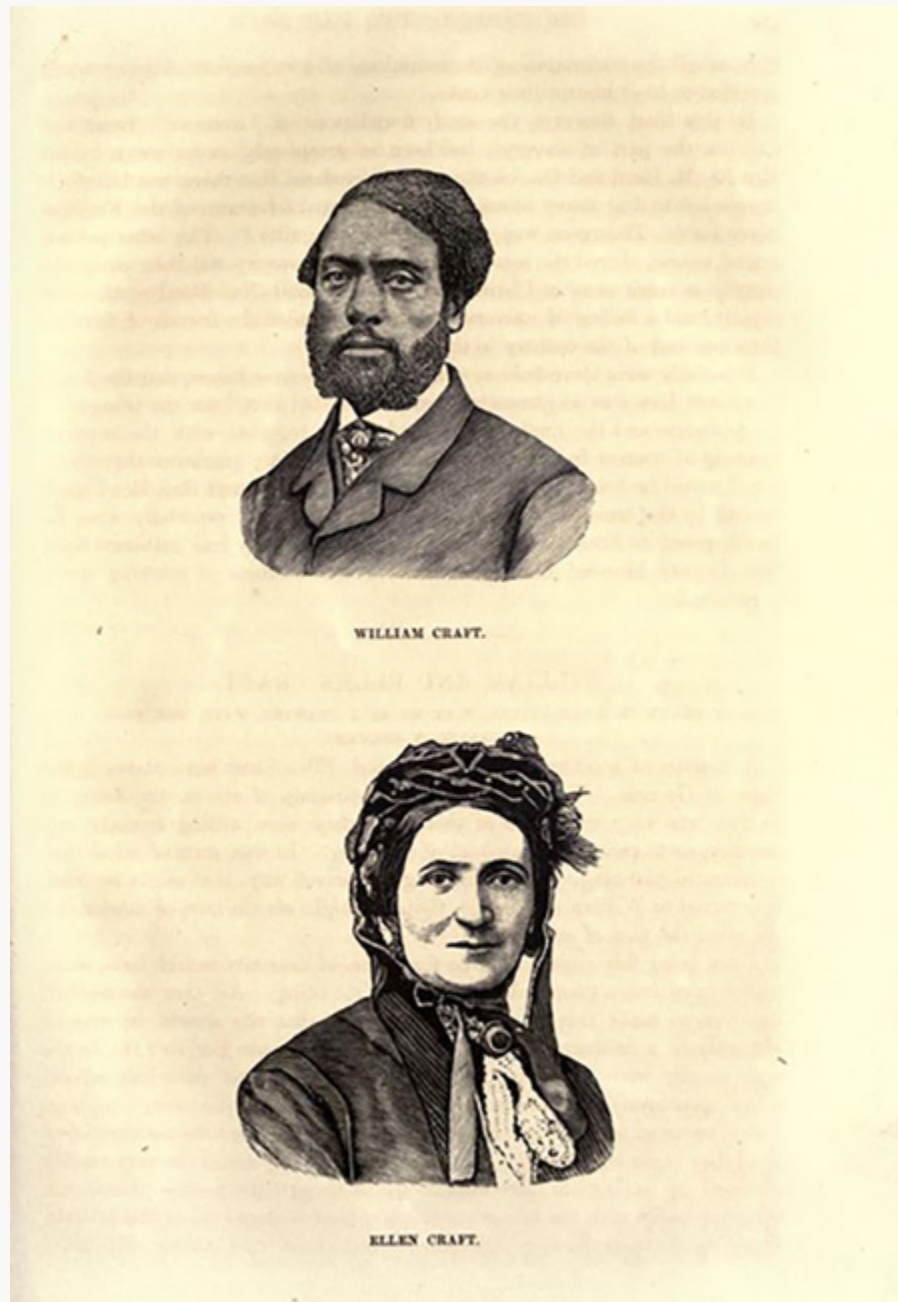


Fig. 5, "William Craft and Ellen Craft," *The Underground Rail Road* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872):
368. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, After Joseph Nash, "Plate XXV. America, from the North-West End," *Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851* (London: Dickinson Brothers, 1854). Hand-colored chromolithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, George Augustus Sala, *American Planter's Arm Chair*, *The House that Paxton Built* (London: Ironbrace, Woodenhead & Co., 1851): n.p. [\[return to text\]](#)

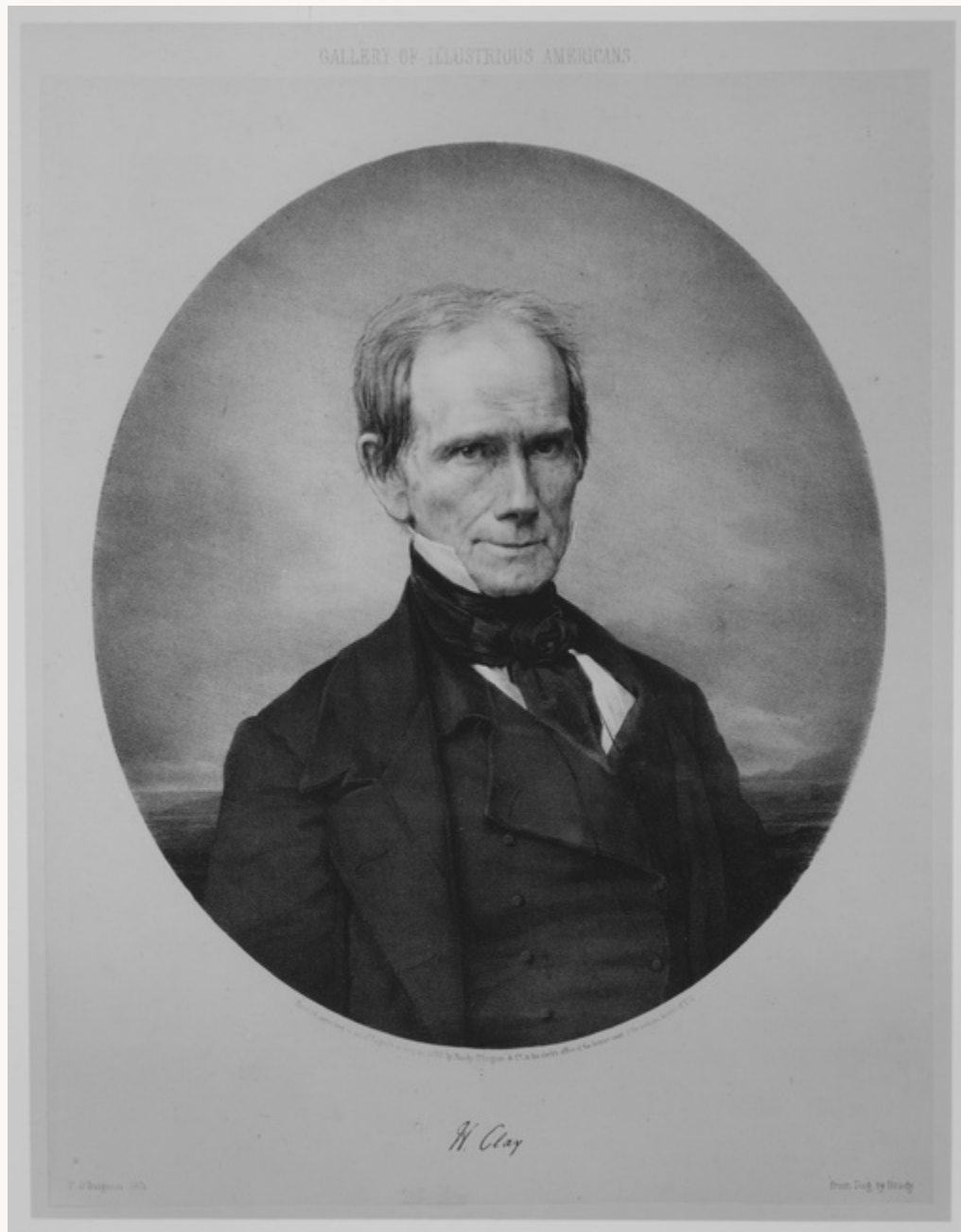


Fig. 8, Francis D'Avignon, *Henry Clay*, 1850, *Gallery of Illustrious Americans* (New York: Brady, D'Avignon, and Co., 1850). Lithograph after daguerreotype by Mathew B. Brady. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, www.metmuseum.org. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 9, Unknown maker, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?*, 1837. Woodcut. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, LC-USZC4-532. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 10, John Tenniel, *The Virginian Slave*, *Intended as a Companion to Power's* [sic] 'Greek Slave', *Punch* 20, June 7, 1851: 236. [\[return to text\]](#)