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The Contradictions of Freedom: Depictions of Freedwomen in Illustrated Newspapers, 1865-1867

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Abstract

Between 1865 and 1867, artists working for Northern illustrated newspapers travelled throughout the South to document its transition from slavery to a wage labor society. Perceiving themselves as the rightful reporters of Southern Reconstruction, these illustrators observed communities of newly freed African American men and women defining their vision of freedom. Northern artists often viewed the lives of African Americans through the cultural lens of free labor ideology in their efforts to provide documentary coverage of the South as objective observers. This paper will examine how illustrations of Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper reveal the contradictions between free labor ideology and the realities of Southern black women during early Reconstruction. Freedwomen's efforts to define their emancipation were dually confronted with Southern vigilante violence, discrimination, and oppression as well as Northern pressures to pursue wage labor and construct respectable households. These illustrations only offered narrow glimpses into the lives of African American women as artists sketched narratives Northerners could use to gauge the success of their free labor experiment.

Keywords

Reconstruction, freedwomen, illustrated-newspapers, African-American-women

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ABSTRACT

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I. Introduction: *Near Andersonville*

Between the years 1865 and 1866, artist Winslow Homer completed *Near Andersonville*, the first of many paintings that he devoted to African Americans during their transition from slavery to freedom (Fig. 1). The scene is set during the summer of 1864 in southwest Georgia. Emerging from a shadowed doorway, an enslaved woman mournfully gazes at the passing of imprisoned Union troops on their way to Andersonville. In this moment of sheer ambiguity, the woman contemplates her own liberation from slavery. Freedom, though legalized in the Emancipation Proclamation, hinges on the military victory of Union armies, but she sees Confederates imprisoning men whom she perceives as her liberators. Boarded pathways diverge before the woman, echoing the uncertainty as to whether she will be freed or enslaved; a fate determined by Union infantry in this painting. The unfathomable darkness of the back doorway to a plantation in Homer's painting is likened to bondage, the shadow of the enslaved woman shackles her to the house and, by extension, to the institution of slavery.[1] For this enslaved woman, the doorway—a symbolically transitional space—is the passage between the worlds of enslavement and freedom. Within a year, the war would be over for Homer's subject. Though she is portrayed with a sense of interiority and individuality, her gaze suggests an awareness that her fate lies in the hands of the Union army. Homer conveyed the violence underlying her freedom, and the uncertainty of her future in this moment of deliberation.

When freedom came after Appomattox, ambiguity imbued the lives of African American women in their efforts to exercise their newfound independence. No artist captured the conflicted and precarious situation of freedwomen like Homer. His treatment of the African American figure

[1] Peter H. Wood, *Near Andersonville: Winslow Homer's Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 61-64.

in *Near Andersonville* departed from many wartime images that assumed how enslaved men and women greeted freedom. Other illustrators and political cartoonists such Thomas Nast were at the forefront of an artistic vanguard in the North that visualized a world in which black families were reunited, earned their own wages, owned their own property, and voted in elections.[2] The Emancipation Proclamation that inspired Nast's print *Emancipation* bolstered his confidence in his own Republican politics and the North's evangelical role in the liberation of slaves.[3] These artists who imagined African American emancipation in relation to Union victory during the war set out to document freed black men and women in their journey to freedom following Confederate surrender. Through "documentary journalism," illustrators provided a new visibility of Reconstruction that wholly excluded the contemplations of freedom present in Homer's painting.

Although artists for *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* observed the moments of revolutionary change on the ground in the post-war South, they tended to situate imagery of freed black communities within the Northern ideology of free labor. In theory, education and the hard work of individual citizens would grant them equal access to economic prosperity. Northern entrepreneurs and politicians believed the South's rehabilitation depended on a free labor system, and perceived themselves as the rightful mentors in this conversion. Eager to prove the success of this experiment, editors depicted African Americans as prosperous wage-earners and active agents of the transition to a free labor system. They translated African American realities of Reconstruction into a narrative that appealed to Northern politics and preconceived

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[2] Thomas Nast, *Emancipation*, illustration in *Harper's Weekly* (New York: Harper & Brothers, January 24th, 1863), from the Internet Archive's Lincoln financial Foundation Collection, accessed October 28th, 2020. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv7bonn/page/56/mode/2up.

[3] Fiona Deans Halloran, *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

ideas of free labor, gender, and race. The contradiction in this vision of Northern freedom revealed itself in illustrations of African American women who were portrayed as both domestic caretakers of the home and objects of labor. Artists sketched black women as instruments of a free labor society, overlooking the ways in which freedwomen navigated physical and political systems of oppression. These illustrations were part of a visual culture that influenced the outlook of Northerners toward Reconstruction. Imagery of life under repair for African American women sustained Northern perceptions of the South as a fallen civilization and the North as its moral superior and rightful rehabilitator.[4]

Fig. 1 Winslow Homer. *Near Andersonville*, 1865-1866, oil on canvas, 18 x 23 inches. Newark, The Newark Museum.

[4] Stephen Prince, "The Burnt District," *the Civil War Made*, ed. Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, pp. 106-131 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Freedwomen entered into the public sphere and defined their individuality through labor, family, and political activism, though it was largely invisible or misconstrued in these artistic depictions of the South. Also absent from these illustrations were their efforts to assert their autonomy that was routinely thwarted by white vigilante violence and oppressive governance. Freedwomen quickly realized the watchful eyes the Federal government, name the Freedmen's Bureau could not provide adequate surveillance, giving former slaveholders the power to decide the terms of labor and to determine who would have a political voice. This was seldom evidenced in artists' representations of freedwomen as docile wives and laborers. Instead, these artistic interpretations were used to portray a free labor society which defined black female citizenship through hard work and respectable femininity. When Northern ideas of free labor ideology or respectable womanhood were challenged by Southern violence and politics, artists condemned Southern recalcitrance and stubbornness. They were professionally compelled to preserve the illusion of a South successfully transitioning to a free labor system. Artists eschewed the actualities of Reconstruction that challenged free labor ideology and instead, produced images of freedwomen attaining economic stability and domestic respectability essential to Northern perceptions of their success in reinventing the South.

II. "Our Artists in the South": The Advent of Illustrated Newspapers

One month after the surrender at Appomattox, war correspondent Whitelaw Reid and other members of the Johnson administration organized a tour to observe and record post-war conditions across the South through localized stories. His findings were meant, "to show something of the condition in which the war left the South, the feelings of the late insurgents, the situation and capacities of the liberated slaves, and the openings offered, under the changed condition of affairs,

to capital and industry from without."[5] In 1866, *After the War: A Southern Tour* was published to wide acclaim. Reid's log reflected a simulated moral superiority between the North and South in his "scientific" documentation of Southern landscapes and regional black communities. Other media outlets mimicked Reid's observations of the South, including illustrated newspapers who sent their artists and reporters on similar expeditions.

Illustrated newspapers filled the gap between printed information and the imagination of their audiences. Founded in 1855 and 1857 respectively, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly* enhanced the impact of daily reporting by inviting their readers to engage with their publications in a new format. Successful pictorial reporting required the production of imagery and news items that appealed to the broader interests of the nation. It also required increased circulation to pay for the expense of collecting and producing wood-cut engravings for illustrations.[6] With growing national division and the subsequent Civil War, illustrated newspapers were challenged in finding images appropriate for the interests of both Northern and Southern audiences.

The Civil War presented new opportunities for Northern illustrated newspapers to expand their audience by appealing to the anxieties, excitement, and terrors of bloody conflict. However, the men of pictorial journalism had no prior experience illustrating wars.[7] Their solution was to send "special artists" into the South to produce authentic imagery of wartime events. Artists were to follow Northern armies, sketch major battles as they occurred, and report their observations for print. Among these illustrators were Alfred Waud, Theodore R. Davis, Winslow Homer, and

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[5] Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Southern Tour. May 1, 1865, to May 1, 1866.* (Project Gutenberg, 2017), 9.
[6] W. Fletcher Thompson, Jr., *The Image of War: The Pictorial Reporting of the American Civil War* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 19.
[7]Ibid., 23.

Thomas Nast—all notably young, impoverished artists with some artistic training to their name.[8] In their efforts to objectively document battles, their messages were often misconstrued in the process of translating their personal observations of battle to print. The difficulty of accurately depicting fleeting moments in a timely manner forced some artists to improvise their drawings, exercising their authority over the composition of their sketches. Northern engravers responsible for translating their sketches into published print often edited or reconfigured some of the drawings either by their lack of skill or by sheer intention.[9] Regardless of an image's authenticity, the finished product served to entice its readers. The illustrations functioned as a visual "synaptic" bridge between the language of documentary reporting and the imaginations of Northern readers, gaining illustrated newspapers serious readership throughout the Civil War.

After the first Confederate surrender at Appomattox, editors believed that a defeated South was a story meant to be detailed and relayed by Northern reporters in the same documentary coverage used during the Civil War. On April 28th, 1866, *Harper's Weekly* announced a series of publications meant to record the conditions of the South in the process of Reconstruction:

> "It is like the rising of a new world from chaos. To us the Slaves States seem now almost like a newly-discovered country. For the first time, we ask earnestly: What are their resources and opportunities? How has the great earthquake left them—with what marks of ruin upon their cities and fields with what changes of a social and political character? We shall leave to our artists the task of answering these absorbing questions so far as it is possible to answer them by means of pictorial representations."[10]

Bolstered by convictions of moral superiority, Northerners perceived themselves as the rightful agents and supervisors of Southern Reconstruction and as such, envisioned themselves as

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[8] Ibid., 74-75.
[9] Ibid., 82-83.
[10] "Our Artists in the South," *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. X, No. 487, April 28th, 1866, (New York: Harper & Brothers), 259. Internet Archives, accessed October 28th, 2020. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv10bonn/page/256/mode/2up?q=it+is+like+the+rising

the rightful reporters of the conditions in the South.[11] Editors of *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's* were confident that their "special artists" were, in fact, the only observers who could accurately portray the conditions of a Reconstruction South. The fall of a recalcitrant slaveholding class, ruinous Southern landscapes, and the emancipation of African Americans were all compelling stories to be featured on the front covers of illustrated newspapers. When the editors of *Harper's Weekly* announced their series of illustrations portraying the South, they reassured readers their artists' "documentary reporting" would produce the most trustworthy depictions of Reconstruction in Southern states.

Illustrators, journalists, and other enterprising Northerners were prompted to venture into the South by prophesies of economic rehabilitation in its conversion to free labor. They especially regarded emancipated African Americans as agents of a new free labor society in which they earned their own wages through the same economic interests and mobility as white Southerners.[12] Carpetbaggers Albert Morgan and his brother were among many who imagined the success of free labor ideology for themselves and African Americans after relocating to the South. Morgan recounted in 1867, "I had come to form a juster estimate of the character and capacity of the African in America...We began to canvass the situation as to the prospect of an application of the means afforded by the 'reconstruction plan' for a restoration to ourselves, and to secure to the freed people the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."[13] In his own travels, Whitelaw Reid applauded freed African American "Sea Islanders" in South Carolina who operated under a free labor society where, "the negroes have bought the titles to their little farms—or 'plantations' as

[11] Stephen Prince, "The Burnt District."
[12] Lawrence Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 3.
[13] Albert Morgan, *Yazoo; Or, On the Picket Line of Freedom in the South* (Washington D.C., 1884), 131-132.

they still ambitiously style them...They have stocked their plantations, paying the highest prices, and often bidding against white men at the auction sales of condemned Government property."[14] Morgan and Reid realized over time that previous slaveholders were not forthcoming in the transition to free labor, but desperately clung to the idea that Northerners and African Americans had the capacity to implement transformation. Concluding *After the War*, Reid observed, "Their order and industry are the only guaranty for the speedy return of the prosperity to the South."[15]

Northerners snubbed the postwar struggles of black communities in the South in their writing and reporting to produce narratives of African American communities that would appeal to shared ideas of freedom.[16] Artists depicted freedpeople as proponents of a free labor society in which blacks prospered economically. Their illustrations situated African Americans amongst flourishing urban marketplaces, individual settlements, and expanding trade and commerce.[17] Interspersed prints of white violence and new socio-political roles for black civilians might have provided insights into the realities of Reconstruction; instead, they contributed to the Northern illusions of free labor ideology. Caught in this contradiction, African American women were pressured to enter into the work force as their own wage-earners and simultaneously care for their own house as a respectable wife and dutiful mother.

III. "The Desolate Home": Freedwomen's Labor

Printed two years following the Civil War, the February 23rd, 1867 issue of *Frank Leslie's* featured an image of the Southern household in ruins, captioned "The Desolate Home—A Picture

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[14] Reid, *After the War*, 198.
[15] Reid, *After the War*, 1, 116.
[16]Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics, 1865-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994), 198-199.
[17] Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 115, 122.

of the Suffering of the South." (Fig. 2) A sullen white woman wearily holds her head in her hand, turning away from her son as he tugs at her skirt for attention. In the middle ground, a black woman tends to the daughter of the white woman. Before her feet, her own child is in the process of disassembling a wooden rocking horse to keep a fire in the fireplace. Chipped cookware, an extinguished candle, tattered clothing and a near-empty pantry, fallen plaster, and the ruins of another building seen through the window are all indicators of destitution. A brief accompanying caption called for the aid, mercy, and magnanimity of Northern audiences: "Those who are suffering now from want are, as a rule, those who were innocent in the matter of rebellion—the women, the children and the negroes...[They] cannot express their sufferings or their wrongs, but are forced to await in patient silence either relief or death."[18] The black woman is contextualized within the destruction of the South as a voiceless victim of the fall of Southern civilization. While this depiction of an African American woman may have accurately reflected some of the lived experiences of freedwomen in the South, it reinforced the perception that black women remained dependent upon white women in the step towards their own freedom. This print led some Northerners to conclude that African American women were not suited to becoming workers in a wage labor system. "The Desolate Home" betrayed free labor ideology that mandated all black women enter a work force outside of the domestic sphere.

The efforts of freedwomen to seek out work and define their freedom through wage labor and economic independence were echoed by the editors of the Northern press. In September of 1865, *Harper's Magazine* read, "The former owners of freedmen must not turn off the children and aged

[18] "The Desolate Home," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Vol. XXIII, No. 595, February 23rd, 1867 (New York), 355. Accessible Archives, accessed October 28th, 2020. https://www.accessible.com/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=builtPage&AAWhere=FRANKLESLIESWEEKLY.FL1867022310.00010&AABeanName=toc3&AANextPage=/printBrowseBuiltPage.jsp

to perish, and the freed men and women are exhorted to make just and fair contracts with their former owners."[19] Northern newspapermen measured freedom by the degree to which African Americans adjusted and prospered in a wage-labor system. Other Northerners recognized that hard work alone could not define the freedom of African American women. Female abolitionists argued that accessible education and legal rights for black women were necessary additions to their employment and by extension, independence .[20] But the illustrations in *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's* revealed the editors' narrow definition of African American freedom, legitimized through labor contracts between previous slave-owners and women.

Figure 2. *The Desolate Home – A Picture of the Suffering at the South*. Engraving. Published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 23rd, 1867. House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College. http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/46330

[19] "Monthly Record of Current Events," *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. XXXI, No. 184, September 1865 (New York), 529. Harper's Magazine, accessed November 1st, 2020. https://harpers.org/archive/1865/09/monthly-record-of-current-events-181/

[20] Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 117.

No matter how freedom was defined, the freedwomen's transition to emancipation would be consistently challenged and thwarted in every regard by white Southerners. Leaving their former owner's plantation did not ensure better conditions at their next job nor did it necessarily guarantee labor for black women. For some, it meant having to leave behind their children and belongings, and the risk of returning was far too high.[21] Others were forced to stay in order to support their family. Against Northern visions of a free labor market, the economic pressures that obligated black women to work for previous slave owners bred its own form of slavery.[22] The complications of freedom for black women would never appear in the prints of illustrated newspapers.

Interiors of plantations that once defined a life of enslavement for black women became economic territory for both black and white women . The liberation of black women in the spring of 1865 strained the social structures of white households once dominated by slave-owners. White illusions of devoted domestic servants were upheaved as black women began to abandon the homes of their previous owners. Cooks, washers, chambermaids, seamstresses, ironers left the grounds of their former enslavement in search of honest wage labor between the spring seasons of 1865 and 1866. Confronted with postwar financial hardship and their own economic limitations, former mistresses were forced to perform the household tasks once delegated to enslaved women. In the antebellum plantation, black women and white women often debated the terms under which slaves worked and mistresses supervised. Freedwomen drew upon this tradition of struggle and negotiation to separate household tasks that once defined their enslavement and value their own

[21] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 148-148.
[22] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 54.

labor by negotiating their own wages. Former mistresses struggled to navigate these compromises in the free labor market, desperate to hire help and simultaneously humiliated by the idea of employing previously enslaved women. The racial ideology that once justified the enslavement of black women was shattered as former mistresses began to hire white domestic servants in addition to freedwomen.[23] By leaving white plantations, negotiating hours and wages, and organizing house labor, freedwomen took their first steps toward Northern prophecies of free labor ideology.

African American women's efforts to define their labor and wages were often stymied by white women who tried to reestablish the power they once leveraged over slaves. White female employers desperately searched for black servants who behaved much like their previous slaves, performing household tasks with gratitude. Forced to contemplate their new social status in a post-war South, white employers developed a language for black female employees "emboldened" by their freedom. Black women who openly defied their employers' efforts to reinstall the plantation model of labor were considered "impudent" or "insolent." When they cared for their own children, they were "idle."[24] Black women were likened to "leeches," parasitically feeding off of the resources of the plantation.[25]

White employers relentlessly defrauded and withheld the wages of black female workers, resorting to violence to reinstate their authority when language would not suffice.[26] During the Summer of 1865, freedwoman Minerva Banks was hired by Kentuckian W. H. Martin after having left an abusive employment situation with a lawyer and his wife. Mere days after she started

[23] Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 145-158.
[24] Ibid., 162; 147.
[25] Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 54.
[26] Ibid.

working for Martin, Banks's previous slave owner Edward Sommers sought her whereabouts and violently attacked her. She reported to the Freedmen's Bureau:

"Sommers then took me off from the house about ½ mile into the woods. He then took the bridle rein from his buggy & hung me up by the neck for some time & then took me down & compelled me by force to strip *naked* & then tied my hands to the limb of a tree so that my feet but just touched the ground...I worked for said Martins until about Sept 1st when he informed me he would not pay me any thing as he was obliged to pay my wages to Mr Sommers—"[27]

African American women sought the protection and security of the Freedmen's Bureau against these acts of violence while also turning to the Bureau to help them recover unpaid wages from abusive employers.[28] The constant swindling of wages and violent threats against black female laborers was never conveyed by the artists of Northern press, even in *Frank Leslie's* "The Desolate Home." Whether the African American woman was forced to remain in this household or whether she had bargained the terms of her employment is not clearly defined in this print. The artist, instead, emphasized the woman as a "mammy" figure, a devoted servant to the family, and, ultimately, a failed free labor experiment. Reassuring representations of mammies were rather popular in the post-Civil War imagery, but the archetype dually subordinated black women to whites by means of race and to men by means of gender.[29] The destitute domestic interior, the absence of labor negotiations, and the stereotyped treatment of the "mammy" figure were semiotic

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[27]Affidavit of a Kentucky Freedwoman, and a Tennessee Attorney to the Tennessee and Kentucky Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner in "Kentucky," in *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ed. Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 654-655.

[28] The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) was founded in 1865 by the War Department to provide assistance and relief to newly emancipated slaves. During Reconstruction, the Bureau legally represented freedpeople, provided employment, maintained labor contracts, legalized marriages, investigated racial crimes, in addition to providing financial relief, food, and clothing.

[29] Leslie Furth, "'The Modern Medea' and Race Matters: Thomas Satterwhite Noble's 'Margaret Garner'," *American Art*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 51.

indicators of a strained free labor experiment which the artist used to confront and remind Northerners of their magnanimous role in Reconstruction.

Alfred Waud's "Sunday in New Orleans – The French Market," published in *Harper's Weekly* on August 18th, 1866 reveal the unrealistic expectations of free labor ideology that Northern editors projected upon freedwomen with little regard to the circumstances that forced them to take up unfavorable work. (Fig. 3) Their domestic work or entrepreneurial efforts at marketplaces were overlooked in published illustrations despite Northern pressures take up wage labor. During his tour of the South, Alfred Waud observed African American communities with the particularity of free labor ideology in mind. His engraving "Sunday in New Orleans" portrays the French Market where both black men and women, American Indians, and creoles sell their produce and wares. Waud recorded, "Here all the negroes speak French, and many of them wear sabots, those clumsy feet-coverings for sale at several places in the Market. Will it be put to blind prejudice if the writer states that neither the meat, fish, vegetables, nor fruit are so fine as can be found at the above-named markets...Whites, creoles, and negroes elbow about, unpleasant smells abound, and the sun pours over all the blistering heat."[30] Waud described his encounters in this gritty market scene with condescension, disregarding its value as a source of income for black women who left plantation work.[31] Here was free labor ideology as it was playing out in the South. Yet, Waud openly berated the concept as he distanced himself from this overcrowded, ramshackle part of the city. Whereas "The Desolate Home" neglected the agency freedwomen exercised in their employment, "Sunday

[30] Alfred R. Waud "Pictures of the South," in *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. X, No. 503, August 18th, 1866 (New York), 526. Internet Archives, accessed November 8th, 2020. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv10bonn/page/526/mode/2up
[31] Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 173.

in New Orleans" completely criticized any sort of entrepreneurial efforts of Southern freedwomen that may have perfectly aligned with free labor ideology.

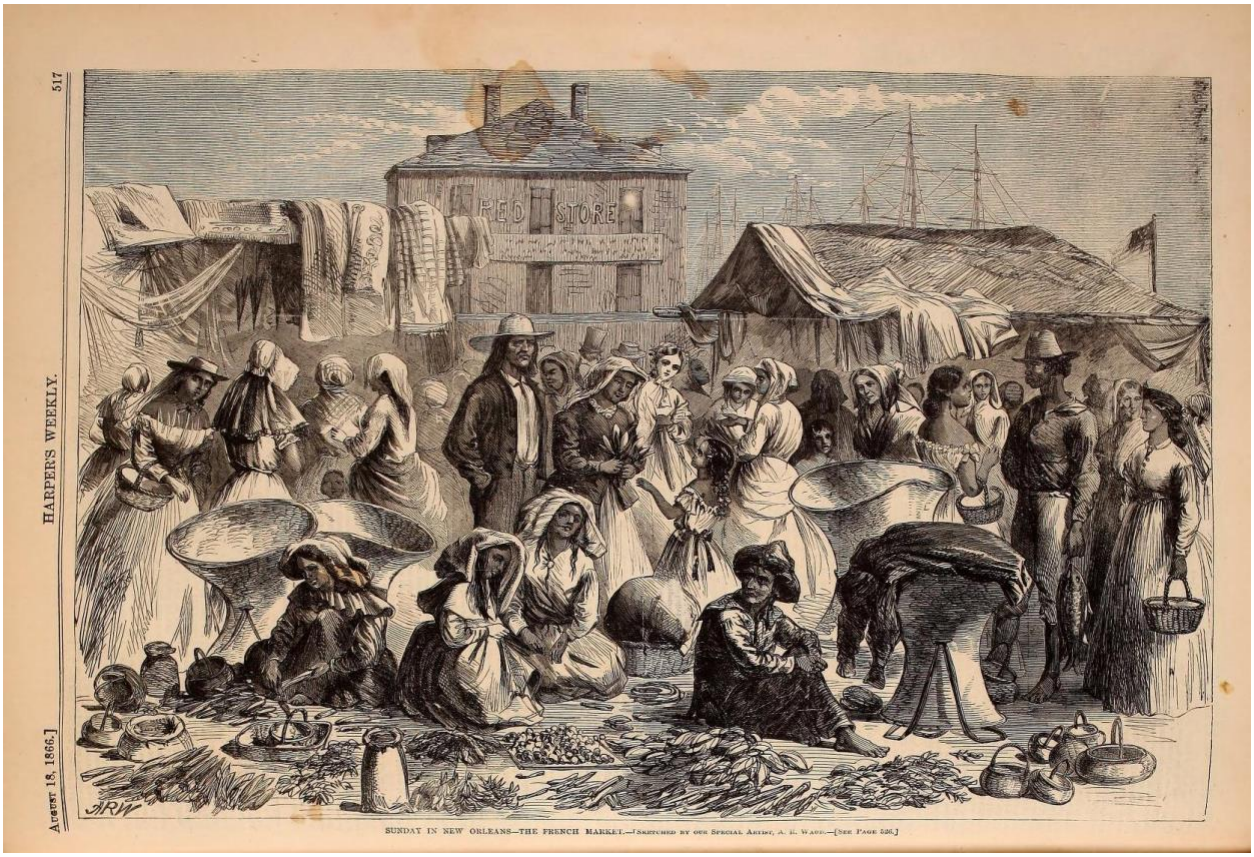

Figure 3. Alfred R. Waud. *Sunday in New Orleans — The French Market*. Engraving. Published in *Harper's Weekly*, August 18th, 1866. Internet Archives, accessed November 10th, 2020.
https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv10bonn/page/516/mode/2up

IV. "Marriage of a Colored Soldier": Freedwomen and Family

Alfred Waud's illustration "'Mustered Out' Colored Volunteers at Little Rock, Arkansas," appeared in the May 16th, 1866 H. W issue. (Fig 4) Unlike other prints depicting African American communities, Waud presents a scene of jubilee where a black soldier kisses his wife in an amorous embrace as their presumed child reaches up towards their father. To the right of this couple, a soldier raises his cap and shakes the hand of another woman. At the far left, another gleeful soldier places his hands on the shoulders of two women—perhaps his sisters. Behind them, another

volunteer holds his infant in one arm while the other is wrapped around the waist of his wife. In his description of the sketch, Waud was, "occasioned by the meeting of 'mustered out' colored troops with their wives and friends at Little Rock, Arkansas... [Their wives] rushed into the arms of their husbands with an outburst of uncontrollable affection."[32] The triumphant reunification of black wives and their husbands presented a new visibility of familial reconstruction to Northern audiences, yet one that was still situated within contradictory ideas of free labor and domesticity.

With their power to regulate marriage contracts, white Bureau officials deemed marriage between two slaves illegitimate, contextualizing slavery in promiscuity. Legalized marriage served as the first step away from the licentious relationships between slave women and men and towards citizenship defined by lawful bonds and moral behavior. It was through the military that black men and women first gained access to legal matrimony.[33] Waud's print not only portrayed the happy reunification of black couples in a post-war South, but it also legitimatized marriage between African American men and women.

[32] Alfred R. Waud, "'Mustered Out' Colored Volunteers," *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. X, No. 490, May 19th, 1866 (New York), 318. Internet Archives, accessed November 9th, 2020. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv10bonn/page/318/mode/2up

[33] Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 40-41.

Figure 4. Alfred R. Waud, *'Mustered Out' Colored Volunteers at Little Rock, Arkansas,* April 20th, 1865. Drawing. Published in *Harper's Weekly*, May 19th, 1866. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. //www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.21005

Bureau agents sought to reconstruct the lives of black women through Northern ideologies of gender. They regulated the physical reconstruction of black families through financial relief, rations, labor relations, and apprenticeship offers with the full intention of placing black men at the head of the household and teaching women to be virtuous wives and mothers.[34] White officials believed they could control the sexuality of freedwomen through warranted marriage and wage labor.[35] The sanctification of matrimony would cast black women from the promiscuity of their previous lives as slaves and allowed them to enter into society as respectable women. In their new

[34] Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, & Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010) 34.
[35] Ibid., 44-45.

lives as freed, married civilians, black women were expected to work as full-time laborers and domestic caretakers of the home, fulfilling the prophesies of free labor ideology.

A month after Waud's print of African American families in Little Rock appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, the artist found himself in Vicksburg, witnessing the marriage of an African American couple. His engraving "Marriage of a Colored Soldier at Vicksburg by Chaplain Warren of the Freedmen's Bureau" is the product of this gendered free labor ideology. (Fig. 5) Centered in the print, a seventeen-year-old black soldier and his thirteen-year-old bride-to-be cast their reverent gazes to the ground as the chaplain delivered the wedding rites. A procession of black women, children, and men flank their side, peacefully watching the ceremony. Waud's accompanying caption described the affair: "A lady, looking at the sketch, thought the decent appearance of the party and the taste show in the bride's apparel exaggerated for the sake of appearances...The bridegroom was a musician, a straight well-built young fellow in his best uniform. The bride was a light-colored woman in a dress low enough to meet the requirements of the fashionable society of New York..."[36] His description of the wedding spared no detail in ensuring the decency and respectability of this union. Waud's comments on the decorum of the bride and her attire echo the respectable femininity the Bureau projected onto black women to sanctify black marriage and qualify their emancipation.

[36] Alfred R. Waud, "Pictures of the South: Marriage of a Colored Soldier," *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. X, No. 496, June 30th, 1866 (New York), 411. Internet Archives, accessed November 9th, 2020. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv10bonn/page/410/mode/2up.

Figure 5. Alfred R. Waud. *Marriage of a Colored Soldier at Vicksburg by Chaplain Warren of the Freedmen's Bureau*. Engraving. Published in *Harper's Weekly*, June 30th, 1866. House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College. http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/45472.

Black women asserted their self-determination and self-respect when they reconstructed their families, realizing the promise of freedom in reclaiming their families and rebuilding their households. But the process was not as simple as a marriage ceremony between a man and a woman.[37] In 1866, Harriet Hill, mother of seven, filed a report to the Bureau in Taliaferro County, Georgia to recover three of her working age children from the hostage of her previous owner G. B. Hill. Contracted to work for a year, G. B. Hill refused to release her children after having "not paid them anything for their work but claimed they were indebted to him for clothing furnished them, and also informed [Harriet Hill] the people in that section had declared in concert... that they would kill such of their former slaves who dared to leave their former owners…" This was Hill's second report to the Freedmen's Bureau after the first to the Atlanta agency failed to provide any

[37] Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau*, 149.

relief or assistance.[38] Hill turned to the Bureau in order to free her children from enslavement after being threatened by her previous owner. Without the presence of a husband or father figure, black women such as Harriet Hill sought ways to reconstruct their family, but this was entirely omitted from the illustrations of Northern press.

The depictions of black families in the illustrations of *Harper's Weekly* always portrayed women in the context of domesticity, as a wife, mother, and provider; never as an active agent in building their own family. The familial bonds forged after enslavement was a double-edged sword for black women. In order to fulfill Northern free labor ideology, they were expected to work, yet the Bureau's gendered ideas of womanhood prompted them to take on passive roles as the caretaker of the home, subservient to their husband and devoted to raising their children. Black women could exercise power and control over their own lives and families within the home, but risked being denounced for their "laziness" by Northerners who were eager to declare the free labor experiment a success.[39] Freedwomen were wedged between Northern pressures to work, to uphold roles as honorable wives and dutiful mothers, and the risk of recovering their biological kin from ruthless, dishonest white employers. Waud's illustrations of black families were only able to depict black women in palatable roles of domesticity, neglecting Northern demands of free labor ideology. In this way, Waud underscored the duality of Northern expectations of Southern freedwomen.

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[38] Georgia Freedwoman to the Freedmen's Bureau Acting Assistant Commissioner for Georgia in ""Labor and Family Life," in *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867: Series 3, Volume 2: Land and Labor, 1866-1867*, ed. René Hayden, Kaye Anthony E. Kaye, Kate Masur, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, Leslie S. Rowland, and Stephen A. West (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 576 – 577.

[39] Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 59.

V. "Outrage in North Carolina": Freedwomen and Violence

Among all the illustrations of African American communities produced between 1865 and 1867, few portray the violence inflicted upon black women that physically and symbolically challenged their claims to citizenship. The threat of white paramilitary groups routinely disrupted the lives of black families in their emancipation, but seldom did these frequent acts of terror occur within view of Northern artists. Concealed within the interiors of black homes or in the darkness of woods, the violence enacted upon black female bodies could only be interpreted through written documentation and not through the "documentary reporting" of an artist. When it was published in Northern illustrated press, the visibility of white Southern brutality performed on freedwomen challenged perceptions of Southern black-white relationships during Reconstruction.

One of the first depictions of racial violence following the Civil War appeared on the front cover of *Harper's Weekly* in late 1867. "Whipping a Negro Girl in North Carolina by 'Unconstructed' Johnsonians" imagined white Southerners' inhumane attack on freedwoman Phillis Ruffin that occurred some seven months before its publication. (Fig. 6) Ruffin is forcibly bent over and held in place by a white man who restrains her arms in the center of this print. Two other attackers prepare to strike Ruffin's exposed back with their whips. Onlookers surrounding Ruffin wait their turn to harm her, some perversely grinning at the sight. The crime committed is obscured by the darkness of thick woods. Only by pure chance would someone come across their wrongdoings, and even so would not have dared to intercede. The man crouching with his back towards the viewer detaches the audience from the violence of this illustration. His posture eases the visceral assault of the reader's sensibilities, distanced from the brutality.

Figure 6. *Whipping a Negro Girl in North Carolina by "Unreconstructed" Johnsonians*. Engraving. Published in *Harper's Weekly*, September 14th, 1867. House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College. http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/47586

In a weakened state of power, white men resorted to vigilante violence to oppose black claims to citizenship. The home became the only place for white men to exert any semblances of antebellum authority as the patriarch of their family. Within this domestic space, their wives could also perform gendered roles of respectability.[40] In the wake of emancipation, Southern white families equated their political autonomy with the integrity of the home. As historian Hannah Rosen writes, "any appearance of a [black] household economy organized around gendered and generational divisions of labor, or even a physical structure, a house, that might facilitate a private home life independent of white oversight, was forbidden."[41] By permeating into the homes of black

[40] Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 192.
[41] Ibid., 186.

families and violating mothers, wives, and daughters, white paramilitary groups stained the respectability and morality that might have granted black families equal access to political power and citizenship.

According to the report of General Daniel E. Sickles published in the print's accompanying caption, the daughter of a Southern gentleman attempted to beat Phillis Ruffin after being publicly chastised by her. The "reversal of a long-accustomed relation" alarmed white Southerners who passed couriers, "to and fro from farm to farm, flaming the temper of the people, and concerting measures to produce terror among the negroes."[42] White men impotent of power were incited to police and punish black communities through the mere circulation of rumors of black insolence.[43] The exchange between Phillis Ruffin and the unnamed daughter of a white Southerner may have been entirely fabricated and exaggerated in the passing of rumors and gossip.

The complexities of white vigilante violence including its justification through the performance of consent were never detailed in the *Harper's Weekly* illustration.[44] White Southern men justified even the most inhumane acts of violence through forced consent. When Ruffin was brought before aggravated white Southerners, "whom she had accustomed from infancy to call masters...all agreed she must be imprisoned or whipped." Threatened with physical brutality or re-enslavement through incarceration, "the frightened girl exclaimed that she had rather be whipped than go to jail." After drawing up papers that bound Ruffin to a white woman as her apprentice,

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[42] "The Outrage in North Carolina," *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. XI, No. 559 (New York), 577. Internet Archive, accessed November 11th, 2020. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv11bonn/page/576/mode/2up

[43] Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 183.

[44] For information on the performance of consent, refer to Hannah Rosen's *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*. White perpetrators justified their violence through the imagined submission of black women—or, the performance of consent.

her "employer" consented to the flogging.[45] Ruffin was then taken into the thick of the woods where she was stripped and beaten one hundred and twenty-six times. By receiving the "consent" of Ruffin and her employer, Ruffin's attackers justified their punishment for her alleged misconduct.

The forced removal of women from interior spaces to remote countryside as depicted in this *Harper's Weekly* illustration carried additional meaning for Southerners. As black women aligned their respectability with domesticity, their removal from their home before being physically attacked symbolized the forced removal of their respectability. Before being brutally attacked, freedwoman Minerva Banks reported that her former master Edward Sommers, "took [her] off from the house about ½ mile into the woods."[46] Similarly, the 1866 statement of Loucy Jane Boyd of Tennessee read, "Soon after I commenced work I was engaged in gathering corn some distance from home, in company with [my employer] mr Willis his son and others. Willis sent me into a remote part of the field by myself to gather peas. he soon fallowed me caught me in his arms threw me down and had el[i]cit intercourse with me..."[47] Like Banks and Boyd, Ruffin's respectability was stolen as she was forced away from her home before she was ferociously attacked.

While Southern paramilitary groups deprived black women of their propriety, Northern artists tried to salvage their respectability in the way they reported violence enacted on African

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[45] "The Outrage in North Carolina," *Harper's Weekly*, 577

[46] Affidavit of a Kentucky Freedwomen, and a Tennessee Attorney to the Tennessee and Kentucky Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867: Series 1, Vol 1: The Destruction of Slavery*, 654.

[47] Proceedings in a Case between a Tennessee Freedwoman and Her Employer, "Labor on Plantation and Farm," in *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867: Series 3, Volume 2: Land and Labor 1866-1867*, ed. René Hayden, Anthony E. Kaye, Kate Masure, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, Leslie S. Rowland, Stephen A. West, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 426.

Americans. In response to the whipping of Phillis Ruffin, *Harper's Weekly* wrote, "No single act of inhumanity has more clearly indicated the animosity yet existing in Southern hearts against the former slaves; or shown how unwise it would be to trust the government of these people in the hands of their former masters."[48] Unfortunately, Northerners perceived these attacks as Southern recalcitrance and uncivilized behavior, not violations targeted at the respectability of freedwomen.

The tendency for Northerners to fault Southern inhumanity justified in their minds the violent acts of Southern black women who retaliated against whites.[49] In May of 1867, *Harper's Weekly* published an engraved version of Thomas Noble's 1867 painting *The Modern Medea*. (Fig. 7) Based on a true story, Noble's painting interprets the story of Margaret Garner who fled her owner's Kentucky farm to Ohio with her parents-in-law, husband, and four children in tow. Upon their discovery by their former owner, Garner murdered her three-year-old-daughter in an attempt to kill all four children before they could be re-enslaved. Margaret was disarmed before she could harm the others and re-captured by her master.[50]

[48] "The Outrage in North Carolina," *Harper's Weekly*, 577.
[49]Catherine Clinton, "Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality, and Violence during Reconstruction," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Summer 1992), 322.
[50] Furth, "'The Modern Medea' and Race Matters," 38.

Figure 7. Thomas Noble. *The Modern Medea – The Story of Margaret Garner*. Engraving. Published in *Harper's Weekly*, May 18th, 1867. House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College. http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/46499.

Unlike other illustrations that appeared in Northern press, Noble presented a less sanitized portrayal of a black woman. Garner has already spilled the blood of two of her children before she is cornered by a band of white officials. The pointing hand of a white man seeks to demonize Garner while she situates herself as the victim, her hands gesturing down to the bodies of her children. The horrors of slavery have driven her to such desperation and defiance as noted in the accompanying caption.[51] In likening Margaret Garner's account to a classical story, Northerners are able to reason with infanticide as a heroic act of antiquity.[52] With the print's connotation of classical myth and its historical placement in the past, Northerners were able to generate a temporal

[51] "The Modern Medea," *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. XI, No. 542, May 18th, 1867 (New York), 318. Internet Archive, accessed November 10th, 2020. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv11bonn/page/318/mode/2up

[52] In Greek mythology, Medea assists Jason of the Argonauts steal the golden fleece from her father King Aeëtes of Colchis. As told by Euripides, Medea murders the sons she shared with Jason as vengeance after he abandons her in pursuit of the daughter of the King of Corinth.

difference between life in enslavement and emancipation. As Northern audiences understood it, freedom would no longer push black women to such extremes. In a free labor society, black women could live in peace.

Northerners evaluated the success of free labor ideology in their ability to distance life under enslavement from a life of liberty in published news, but with little regard to the circumstances that to pushed black women to retaliate against their white oppressors. When confronted with violence enacted on their own person or their kin, some freedwomen took it upon themselves to act in defense. In 1868, Eliza Hendricks of Halifax County, Virginia attacked her own husband after he wrongfully permitted his brother Jacob Lacy to beat Eliza's daughter Parthenia. Eliza testified in the judicial report:

"I stuck him with the stick I had as hard as god would let me, and Caught his fingers in My Mouth & bit them as hard as I could, and I thought I heard the bones of his fingers Crack. I tried to bite them off. I tore his pantaloons off him, and I did my utmost [to] get hold of his privates and in that way his pants were torn off. I do not know whether I had [hold] or not, but I had My Arm around his Neck and in that way I dragged him a little distance...My conscience checked me and I let him go & run."[53]

How could Northerners comprehend the potential wrath of black women such as Eliza? Such violence would endanger Northern promises of free labor ideology through which black families could peacefully transition to a life of freedom. Instead, to protect Northern moral integrity and superiority, artists had to portray black women as passive victims of Southern brutality and situate any of their violent retaliations within their past of enslavement. If illustrated newspapers had depicted freedwomen challenging their oppressors, they would have conceded any indication of a peaceful transition to a free labor society.

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[53]Parthenia Hendricks v. Jacob Lacy, 4 June 1868, Report of S.S. Kent in the case of Parthenia Hendricks v. Jacob Lacy for Assault and Battery, June 1868, as quoted in Antoinette G. Van Zelm, "On the Front Lines of Freedom: Black and White Women Shape Emancipation in Virginia 1861-1890," (PhD diss., College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, 1998), 158.

VI. "Glimpses at the Freedmen's Bureau": Freedwomen and Political Activism

The politics of Emancipation were inseparable from the struggles over the control of land and labor. Former slaveholders and ex-Confederates were responsible for issuing the Black Codes in 1865 and 1866 in an effort to the restore control over black labor in a system that was reminiscent of slavery. These laws limited the voice of black men and their ability to sell their labor on their own terms.[54] Northerners believed the hard work of freedmen and women would constitute the nexus of their political freedom. In a published meditation on black male suffrage, *Harper's Magazine* reported, "A concession of the elective franchise to the freedmen, by act of the President of the United States, must have been extended to all colored men...But good faith toward the Freedmen requires their 'security in their liberty and their property, their right to labor, and to claim the just return of their labor...'"[55] According to Northern editors, black suffrage and political mobility were secondary proponents of free labor ideology. If a black man could establish his success as a wage-earner, civil rights would follow suit.

Northern abolitionists and African Americans idealized black emancipation through both free labor and political rights. If blacks were to have equal access to economic opportunities as white Southerners in free labor ideology, they demanded the same political mobility and suffrage. Within the safety of the Bureau's walls, black civilians exercised their earliest forms of political advocacy in labor negotiations. In 1866, James E. Taylor's print, "Glimpses at the Freedmen's Bureau, Richmond, Va. – 'Silence in de Cote'" appeared on the front page of *Frank Leslie's*. (Fig. 8). Inside Richmond's Bureau office, African Americans await their turn to receive federal relief

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[54] Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 49.

[55] "Monthly Record of Current Events," *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. XXXII, No. 159, February, 1866 (New York), 390. Harper's Magazine, accessed November 11th, 2020. https://harpers.org/archive/1866/02/monthly-record-of-current-events-186/.

or issue claims of Southern transgression. To the right, an attorney writes up a report as it is being iterated by a black man who stands before his desk. A bonneted woman and her child stand behind the attorney and gaze at his writing. Other men sit nearby, awaiting their turn to file their reports. At the center of the composition, a white man holds a book—presumably the bible—as a black man before him takes an oath. This subtle exchange divides the print into left and right panels. On the left, a crowd of freedpeople witness the transactions occurring on the right side of the engraving. In the foreground, a black woman standing in profile crosses her hands in front of her as she stares at the seated attorney. The barefoot child at her side impatiently watches the ground. Although women are present in the court, they are portrayed in passive positions while the men are more directly engaged with legal representatives of the Bureau.

The accompanying article in *Frank Leslie's* asserted that Northern intervention was most necessary in providing protection as well as moral guidance to freed African Americans. "The freedmen needed security from injustice on the part of their former masters, many of whom were not disposed to recognize the claims of their old servants, and likewise security from many of their own race, whose ideas of right and wrong were not very clearly defined."[56] Northerners saw themselves as the mediators between African American politics and a South under Reconstruction, especially as the question of suffrage began to appear in printed press. A handful of Northern abolitionists and women took the discussions of suffrage one step further by advocating for the enfranchisement of African American women in addition to black men. These women of the freedmen's aid movement who worked in the Freedmen's Bureau, lobbied in the government, and

[56] "The Freedmen's Bureau," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Vol. XXII, No. 569, August 25, 1866 (New York), 357. Accessible Archives, accessed November 11th, 2020. https://www.accessible.com/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=builtPage&AAWhere=FRANKLESLIESWEEKLY.FL1866082514.00014&AABeanName=toc3&AANextPage=/printBrowseBuiltPage.jsp

found ways to provide relief to freedpeople, urged federal agents to include women and African Americans within the national polity. Unlike their male counterparts, these women maintained that in addition to equal access to the economy, educational reform and universal suffrage were necessary in reconstructing the lives of freedwomen.[57]

Figure 8. James E. Taylor. *Glimpses at the Freedmen's Bureau, Richmond, Va. – "Silence in de Cote."* Engraving. Published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 25th, 1866. House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College. http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/45575

Northern politicians and activists were so determined to sanction their role in reconstructing the South, they completely overlooked white intimidation, oppression, and violence that might have pushed African Americans to act politically on their own behalf. Black men furthermore perceived themselves as active agents in the remaking of the South as well. An address authored by Virginian freedpeople read: "Fellow citizens, the performance of a simple act of justice on your

[57]Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction*, 2.

part will reverse all this; we ask for no expensive aid from military forces, stationed throughout the South, overbearing State action, and rendering our government republican only in name; give us the suffrage, and you may rely upon us to secure justice for ourselves, and all Union men and to keep the State forever in Union."[58] African Americans were eager to exercise their newly-won freedom by situating themselves as political defenders of the American union and justice.

Though it went undetected in Northern illustrated newspapers, black women were just as determined to establish political autonomy despite their legal disenfranchisement. Some groups of African American women, in their early freedom, "displayed conscientious leadership as well as a tightly articulated ideology of self-regulation."[59] For example, the laundry workers of Jackson Mississippi wrote to the mayor to raise the prices of their labor in order to live comfortably. Their organization set off a chain reaction amongst other black female workers throughout the city. They possessed no legal authority in politics, but instead, used their collective voice to establish their own autonomy and self-possession when their labor could not. During this time, black women actively engaged in political gatherings of freedmen. While black men convened at a political meeting in South Carolina, the women were tasked with guarding the guns and ultimately protecting their conference.[60] Southern press might have reported on the absurdity of black women engaging in this sort of political activity, but their involvement in organizing, mobilizing, and assembling politically never appeared on the pages of illustrated newspapers. Free labor ideology

[58] Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, VA., to the People of the United States, June 5th, 1865, *Proceedings of the Black National and State Conventions, 1865-1900*, ed. Philip Foner and George E. Walker, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 85.
[59] Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 75.
[60] Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture*, No. 7, pp. 107-146 (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1994), 122.

could define suffrage and political behavior for black men, but the same connection was never made for women as they were portrayed as passive bystanders in Northern illustrations.

VII. Conclusion: "Patience on a Monument"

When Winslow Homer completed *Near Andersonville* in 1866, he broke from the caricatured treatment of African Americans as ungrateful, silly, and vulnerable ex-slaves in the sketches he produced during the Civil War.[61] In his artistic freedom, he painted his black subjects with a sensitivity toward their internalized thoughts and emotions. The interiority and sense of self present in Homer's painting could not be captured in Northern newspaper's depictions of Southern black women. Whereas the "special artists" of illustrated newspapers situated black women as part of a broader Southern "landscape" under Reconstruction, the woman standing alone in the doorway is the sole focus of Homer's painting. Her gaze at the prisoners, marching off in the distance, captures her deep contemplation of "an uncertain future/future that is unknown." For freedwomen in Northern illustrated newspapers, there is no room for such internalized thought. The events depicted in these prints are intended to transmit a clear and unmitigated reality of Reconstruction. There is no room for reflection or emotions, nor deep longings as freedwomen appear as props on a stage. In the published engravings, the individuality and personhood of black women are secondary if not altogether overlooked. Instead, they are portrayed as either industrious laborers and chaste and obedient wives fulfilling a submissive role in what is seen as a transformation of the Southern landscape. They became visual signifiers of labor and domesticity

[61] Mary Ann Calo, "Winslow Homer's Visits to Virginia during Reconstruction," *The American Art Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Kennedy Galleries, Inc., 1980), 8-9.

with which Northern readers could measure the success of the free labor experiment in a Reconstruction South.

The ambiguities of freedom contemplated in Homer's painting continued to imbue the lives of African American women after the Civil War, but seldom are they represented in the published prints of Northern artists. When Northern artists observed Southern civilizations through a lens of free labor ideology that contradicted the lived experiences of black women. Both men and women were expected to enter into Southern society as honest, hard-working laborers, but their lived realities of Reconstruction complicated this transition, especially for freedwomen. Artists of Northern illustrated newspapers did not convey the ways black women navigated a post-war South, nor did they capture all their efforts to define their freedom through reconstructed households and political advocacy. Illustrations of black women as laborers, respectable wives, and dutiful mothers were a part of a narrative illustrators and editors used to buttress Northern beliefs in their roles as supervisors of Reconstruction.

Caught in between conflicting gender and free labor ideologies of the North, freedwomen were depicted in work environments that were criticized and overlooked by Northern artists. They were passive actors in their domestication through legalized marriage, and within the political reconstruction of the South. Only in streets and public ceremonies, did Northern artists portray freedpeople upholding the ideas of free labor through work and domestication. They never pulled back the curtains and looked at life inside of a freedwoman's home, ignoring that private world in which women worked twice as hard to define their emancipation through labor and domesticity. Even in public areas such as the Freedmen's Bureau where they often made their voices heard, women were portrayed as silent spectators. Since the artists could not observe the terrorist acts of

white oppressors in the concealed spaces of forests, fields, and homes, freedwomen were portrayed as the targets of Southern recalcitrance and disobedience, with no suggestion of their own defiance.

Among the group of "special artists" who sketched the South, Thomas Nast's prints represented a dissenting voice that exposed the realities of Reconstruction policies. In October 1868, Thomas Nast's print, "Patience on a Monument" appeared in *Harper's Weekly*. Here, a black man sits atop a monument of injustices, crimes, and discrimination committed during and after the enslavement. Below him, a hostile white Southerner waves a bat in the air and a cloaked figure of the KKK points a gun in his direction. In the background, black bodies hang from a lamppost and the limb of a tree. A colored orphanage and freedman school are burning down at the hands of white rioters. At the base of the monument, a black woman and her two children bleed out on the white marble. Directly above her body, Nast quotes, "We despise the negro," from *N.Y. World*, a Northern newspaper. Nast produces an image of Northern free labor ideology in shambles. Once again, a black woman is portrayed within Northern ideology, but this time, she is its victim. Unlike his contemporaries, Nast conceded that free labor ideology hyper-simplified the realities of the South that complicated the transition from slavery to freedom. In "Patience on the Monument," Nast did not portray the death of a freedwoman and her children, but rather, the false image of a freedwoman, wasted away by the contradictions of free labor ideology. The uncertainty of the future is reflected in Nast's print, but in killing off free labor ideology, there is hope that freedwomen could make a full, unfettered transition to freedom.

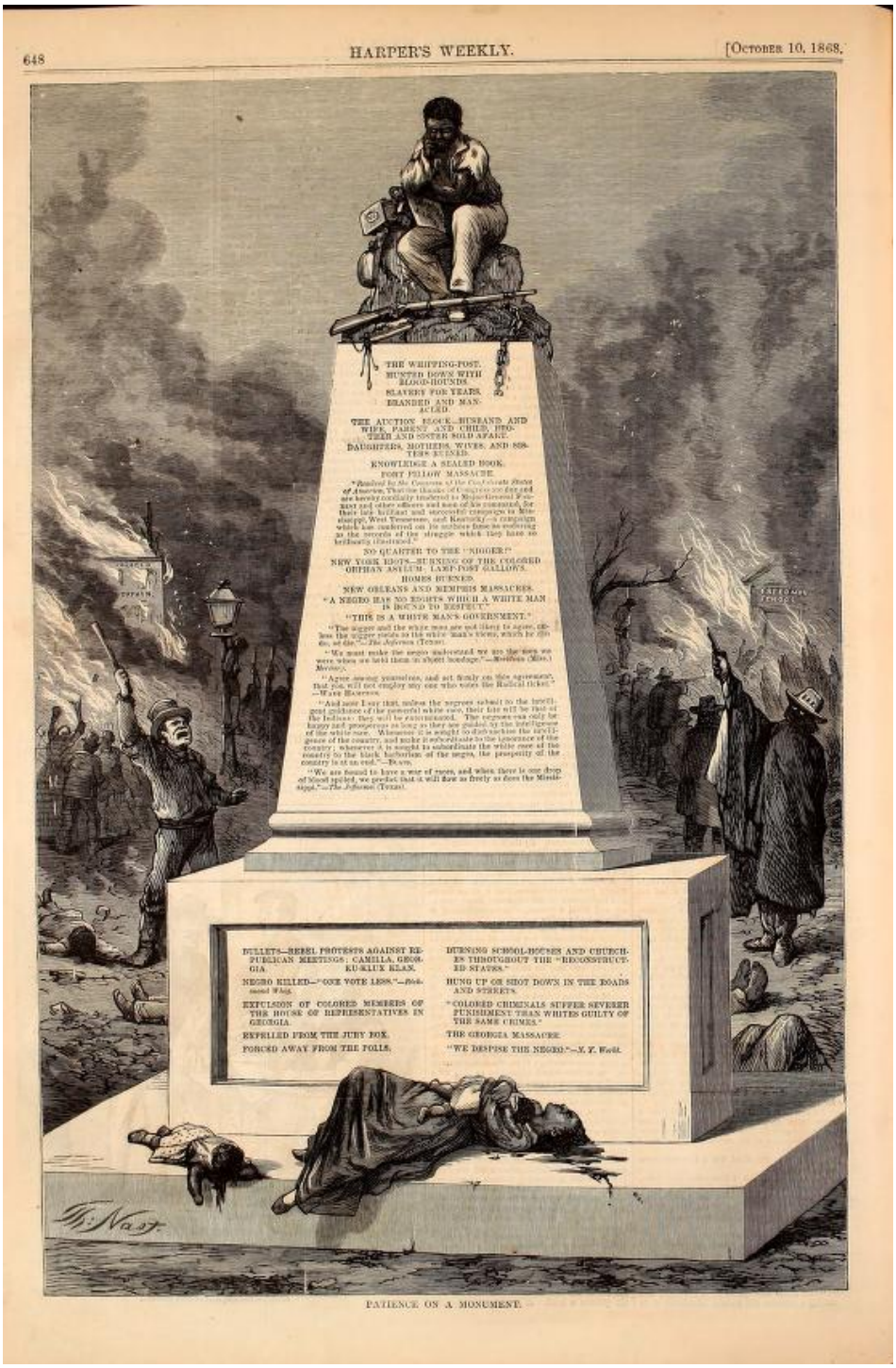

Figure 9. Thomas Nast. *Patience on a Monument*. Engraving. Published in *Harper's Weekly*, October 10th, 1868. Internet Archives. https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv12bonn/page/n645/mode/2up

Historiographical Essay

Exploring the visual culture of the African American women and the post-Civil War South begins with *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. After diligently documenting and publishing illustrations of Civil War battles for roughly four years, these journals portrayed the South as a land ruined by war, but ripe for rehabilitation in becoming a prosperous free labor society. Many prints in *Harper's* and *Frank Leslie's* between 1865 and 1867 ignored the struggles of African American women in creating the impression that Reconstruction happened only to black men. Moreover, black women are ignored as political actors while freedmen are seen as the primary movers and shakers in this revolutionary moment. The artists with Harper's and Leslie's largely ignored the individuality of African American women, but when they traveled to the South, they were often selective about the imagery they produced for Northern journals. The visibility of black women as self-sufficient laborers and motherly caretakers of the home specifically appealed to Northern notions of free labor ideology.

The visual culture produced in illustrated newspapers documenting Northern expeditions into the post-war South reveals the ways in which Northern reporters perceived the South through a screen of free labor ideology. In order to interpret these prints, this study combines information on the nature of Northern reporting during and immediately following the Civil War, Northern free labor ideology, and the lived realities of Southern black women often silenced in these illustrations. These prints and other primary sources fill in the gaps between these distributions of Reconstruction.

A preponderance of research investigates the way the emergence of illustrated newspapers revolutionized the way readers received, consumed, and reacted to information. Publications such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*—founded in 1857 and 1855

respectively—gained significant readership during the Civil War. Illustrations of battles provided a visibility of the reports published in the press that catered to the imaginations of Northern audiences. In his book *The Image of War* (1960), W. Fletcher Thompson remarks that editors struggled to capture the early stages of war in pictorial reporting on account of a reluctance to publish images that would offend Southern subscribers and a scarcity of trained artists.[62] As battle imagery became popularized in illustrated newspapers, "special artists" such as Alfred Waud, Thomas Nast, and Winslow Homer were commissioned to document battles around the South. Thompson believes that Civil War artists were aghast by the changes that engravers made to their original sketches, opting to serve the political agendas of their journals.[63] While these "special artists" might have captured the Civil War with a sort of documentary realism, the editors and team of engravers often contorted the truth into messages that assuaged any Northern anxieties of war.

Northern editors and their "special artists" maintained post-war readership built on the trust of their "documentary reporting." Mark Wahlgren Summers's *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics, 1865-1878* (1994) dissects their flawed and complicated relationship between objective reporting and the truth. He holds the press accountable for public misinformation and promoting oversimplified solutions to some of the most complex questions of Reconstruction. As reporters ventured into the South following the war, they relayed their findings through a lens of free labor, race, class, and gender in Southern society. Correspondents only had to add local color to their reports, with their stories already written. According to Summers, their "objective" reporting betrayed southern freedmen and women, and perpetuated false perceptions of the South and

[62] W. Fletcher Thompson, *The Image of War: The Pictorial Reporting of the American Civil War* (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1960).
[63] Ibid.

harmful misinformation on Reconstruction.[64] The artists of *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's* sketched Southern civilization with the same ideas of race and free labor in mind, ultimately producing imagery in line with the interests and perceptions of their Northern audiences.

Historians such as Lawrence Powell have published pioneering studies on the free labor ideology that firmly shaped Northern consciousness and perceptions of Reconstruction. His book *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (1998) argues that enterprising Northerners perceived themselves as an example for Southerners to follow in the transition to a free labor society. They believed that both the old planting class and emancipated blacks depended on the emigration of Northerners to economically stimulate the South. But, as Powell argues, Northerners projected ideals of a free labor society onto the South with little knowledge of their economic realities.[65] Carol Faulkner argues in her book *Women's Radical Reconstruction* (2003) that many Northern female reformers realized fee labor could not earn black citizens absolute freedom and advocated for the universal education and the enfranchisement of black women in addition to their economic independency.[66] Both Powell and Faulkner's work maintains that the Northerners' perceived role as the overseers of Southern Reconstruction functioned as cultural blinders. The idea that the South could only be rehabilitated and reinvented by the guidance of the North was continually reaffirmed in the sketches of the artists who followed Northern emigrants into southern societies.

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[64] Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics, 1865-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994).
[65] Lawrence Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998).
[66] Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedman's Aid Movement*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

Northern editors perceived destitute towns, desperate families of the old planter class, and liberated African American communities as invaluable imagery in shaping Northern perceptions of Reconstruction. Early images of a post-war South showed recalcitrant white Southerners in need of policing and communities of freedmen and women in need of guidance from Northerners. The treatment of black women, specifically, in illustrated newspapers added gendered meaning and motivation to Northern intentions to reinvent the South through free labor. And yet, these illustrations often situated black women in the contradictions of wage labor and domesticity and largely ignored their quest for autonomy.

Recent scholarship has examined the ways in which black women navigated the transition to this wage-labor society. Thavolia Glymph's book *Out of the House of Bondage* (2008) examines how Southerners and freedwomen confronted a new labor relationship based on salaries as well as violence and coercion. The strains of the Civil War and emancipation dramatically challenged the power relationships of plantations once controlled by white women. Glymph emphasizes the loss of control of white southerners in determining the conditions of their laborers. They also, for the first time, had to bargain with freedpeople over wages. According to Glymph, freedwomen navigated these compromises with more savviness than the white women who had to enter into the marketplace as employers. Black women found ways to systemize and regulate these wage standards in delineating tasks that were once considered routine housework.[67]

Despite gaining *some* freedoms with the destruction of slavery, former slave owners possessed tremendous power over land and labor issues, even though the Freedmen's Bureau tried to advocate for former slaves. While Glymph provides case studies of freedwomen successfully

[67]Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

navigating new markets of employment, the largest category of grievances vocalized by black women to the Freedmen's Bureau concerned the nonpayment of wages as white employers routinely defrauded small amounts of their earnings. Without some support of a husband, freedwomen with children were often forced to remain on plantations to make ends meet according to Jacqueline Jones's book *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (2009).[68] Once regarded as important, "reproducers of the enslaved workforce, black women with children were now reviled as parasites, a drain on the resources of the postbellum plantation."[69] Black mothers who found themselves at the mercy of their white employers walked a fine line between being able to provide for their family financially and being denounced for "leech-like" behavior when in reality, proper wages were being fraudulently withheld by their employers. Illustrated newspapers more readily situated black women and their children within the interiors of barren Southern plantations or within gritty marketplaces of southern cities, instead of producing imagery of wage-earning female workers.

Freedwomen defined emancipation through the reconstruction of the household and newly solidified familial bonds. According to Jones, family units allowed black women to exercise the power they maintained over their households and by extension, bring order to their own lives and the physical world around them. The household became a way for black families to assert their claims to political autonomy according to the scholarship in Hannah Rosen's *Terror in the Heart of Freedom* (2009).[70] Only respectable households defined by a protective male patriarch and an honorable wife and mother granted black families admittance into Southern society. These

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[68] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).
[69] Ibid., 54.
[70] Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

gendered domestic divisions closely tied black women's femininity and sexuality to their households. However, as Catherine Clinton argues in her essay "Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality, and Violence during Reconstruction" (1992), Southern whites were not willing to extend their prewar definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity" to freedpeople.[71] Moreover, the protection and privacy that a house could offer were privileges maintained and leveraged by Southern white families. The divide between the violence and terror of the exterior world and the safety and comfort of interior spaces might as well have been paper thin for black families. As Rosen examines, paramilitary groups including the Ku Klux Klan often intruded upon and penetrated the domestic spaces of black families. She argues that white Southern aggressors could disguise rape and physical violation as adultery and immoral licentiousness of black women through performances of consent, challenging the sanctity and respectability of their homes as well as their claims to citizenship.[72] Reports issued to the Freedmen's Bureau reveal that the terror and violence enacted on black female bodies was common throughout South, but seldom is this portrayed in illustrated newspapers. It was not until 1867 that *Harper's Weekly* published the print "Whipping a negro girl in North Carolina by 'Unreconstructed' Johnsonians," on its front cover on September 14th. Printed seven months after the whipping occurred, this illustration was among the first to offer Northerners a violent visibility of an "un-Reconstructed" South.

Historians have recently examined the role of black women in the political reconstruction of the South, contrary to their prolonged disenfranchisement. Elsa Barkely Brown argues in her essay "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," (1994) that the collective mentality surrounding black female suffrage set the "foundation for much of African American women's

[71] Catherine Clinton, "Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality, and Violence during Reconstruction," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Summer 1992), 321.
[72] Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 179-221.

political activities in the post-Civil War era."[73] Throughout the late 1860s, women participated in large political gatherings, attended speeches and rallies, and organized political societies as emphasized in Brown's essay. Even though the Bureau provided some black women political voices, they found other ways to insert themselves directly into political spheres.

In the last chapter of her book *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, Rosen examines how black women asserted their political voice through their reports on acts of violence from white vigilante groups. Black female testimonials submitted to the Freedmen's Bureau legitimized federal power over Southern states. In return, the agency became a space in which freedwomen proclaimed their political autonomy.[74] Though the Bureau facilitated the transition to freedom for black women, the gendered dimension of its policies relegated black women to passive caretakers of their homes as Mary Farmer-Kaiser maintains in her book *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau* (2010). The idea of respectable femininity put forth by this federal agency, however, did not account for the reality of economic resources and racial hostilities in the South. Even though the Bureau extended protection to freedwomen to safeguard their femininity, it often disregarded their domestic complaints as trivial matters in comparison to those of black men. Nonetheless, Farmer-Kaiser treats black women as independent agents, fighting to reclaim their families and their bodies from slavery.[75] Only one illustration from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* depicts black women present at the Freedmen's Bureau: James E. Taylor's "Glimpses at the Freedmen's Bureau, Richmond, Va. – 'Silence in de Cote'," published on August 25th, 1866. The general absence of

[73] Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture*, No. 7, pp. 107-146 (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1994), 125.
[74] Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 222-241.
[75] Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

freedwomen's politics in illustrated newspapers reveal gendered definitions of political autonomy for African American women.

Previous scholarship on freedwomen during Reconstruction and the Northern press provide an important foundation for interpreting the complex role of black female representations in Northern journals. Illustrations published in *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's* between 1865 and 1867 only offered glimpses into the lives of freedwomen, and some were fictive. Contextualizing these images in Northern free labor ideology illuminates another way in which the North perceived its function in the remaking of the South. This paper joins these different areas of scholarship to break new ground in understanding the visual culture of Reconstruction and its function in building a Northern consciousness of itself in relation to a postwar South.

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