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“THE MOST POISONOUS OF ALL DISEASES OF MIND OR BODY”: COLORPHOBIA
AND THE POLITICS OF REFORM

By

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Thesis

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Abstract

Chairperson: Kyle G. Volk

Focusing on the mid-1830s through 1865, this thesis explores colorphobia—the irrational fear and hatred of black people otherwise known as racial prejudice—as a reform tactic adopted by abolitionists. It argues that colorphobia played a pivotal role in the radical abolitionist reform agenda for promoting anti-slavery, immediate emancipation, equal rights, and black advancement. By framing racial prejudice as a disease, abolitionists believed connotations, stigmas, and fears of illness would elicit more attention to the rapidly increasing racial prejudice in the free North and persuade prejudiced white Americans into changing their ways. Abolitionists used parallels to cholera, cholera phobia (fear of cholera), and hydrophobia (fear of water, a reference to rabies), to legitimate colorphobia during a period of epidemics and immense fear of disease, and played off of nineteenth-century disease understandings to make their argument more persuasive. Burgeoning free black populations added to the heightened sense of terror and paranoia because of stereotypes that claimed African Americans spread diseases. Colorphobia produced two very different reactions—the use of the idea of negrophobia by anti-abolitionists in the U.S. and a transnational abolitionist response. Anti-abolitionists responded with their own disease adapted from the abolitionist agenda. “Negrophobia,” once interchangeably used with colorphobia, became known as “the disease of abolition.” By insinuating that abolitionists were crazed over elevating the black population, anti-abolitionists hoped to maintain the racial status quo and discredit abolitionists. The use of negrophobia also revealed white anxieties over the future of an equal America and provided social commentary on the free black population. By contrast to American anti-abolitionists, British and Canadian abolitionists joined American abolitionists in the battle against colorphobia and turned racial prejudice into a transnational problem. British abolitionists denounced racial prejudice in their writings to support the fight for immediate emancipation and equal rights, while Canada spoke out against colorphobia as it spread into its provinces. This thesis reveals the centrality of colorphobia to the abolitionist reform agenda and its significance to the movement. It shows how disease rhetoric advanced the desires of a small reform group, and allowing colorphobia to play a central role in emancipation and equal rights.

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Introduction

In September of 1844, evening descended in Utica, New York as several travelers boarded a carriage. Under the cloak of nightfall, they passed the time discussing political issues and soon arrived at abolitionism. One passenger named Mr. Brown spoke in such strong favor of abolition that one passenger inserted amalgamation into the conversation. The man asked, “Sir, would you suffer one of your daughters to marry a colored man?”¹ Brown said yes, and in fact, he declared that no other kind of man would marry his daughter. Shocked to silence, the other passengers dropped the topic. Morning came, and the passengers awoke to the sight of Brown’s skin color. They had failed to notice his blackness from the darkness of travel, and all were aghast that he sat alongside them throughout the overnight trip. When the carriage stopped for breakfast, one white passenger refused to eat alongside Brown. A worker offered Brown a separate table, but he refused to move. The other white men—who had been just as dismayed at the truth of Brown’s identity—now insisted that Brown dine with them. They ostracized the prejudiced passenger instead of upholding racial separation.

An abolitionist newspaper, *The New Jersey Freeman*, recounted Brown’s tale as an incident of “colorphobia.” Editor John Grimes claimed that the white men involved suffered an abrupt occurrence of colorphobia upon the revelation of Brown’s racial identity. Grimes mocked the ostracized white northerner, whose morality and sense of equality were corrupt, by calling him *Mr. Southern Chivalry*. Northern whites like *Mr. Southern Chivalry*, Grimes implied, were racially prejudiced and had no more kindness or sense of justice than a slave owner. Yet all was not lost. Brown’s tale suggested antidotes to colorphobia. In Brown’s case, all but one of the white passengers accepted his presence after Brown’s fortitude at the breakfast table. Brown’s resistance proved him a worthy equal and cured, at least momentarily, the others’ colorphobia.

¹ "Colorphobia," *The New Jersey Freeman*, Sep. 1, 1844.

In the decades before the Civil War, stories like these regularly appeared in the pages of abolitionist newspapers and magazines. They revealed the vital second prong of the abolitionist reform agenda—the eradication of racial prejudice. Alongside the mission to end chattel slavery, abolitionists sought to defeat the prejudice that they claimed undergirded slavery and relegated free black Americans to a perpetual status as second-class citizens. This was especially troublesome in the free North following emancipation where the growing black population faced not only segregated accommodations and color-sensitive businesses, but also struggled for equal rights and fair treatment in public space. Some black northerners faced verbal insults while others were physically accosted. Major black abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, William Cooper Nell, and William Wells Brown were chief among those baffled by such treatment. Why were black men, women, and children in the free North, they asked, kept from enjoying the cherished American values of democracy, liberty, and equality?

Abolitionists sought to eradicate prejudice through a variety of means, but essential to their effort was their increasing tendency to describe prejudice as “colorphobia.” But what was colorphobia? To abolitionists, it was the irrational fear of black people that most of white northerners labored under. With the concept of racism yet established in the American lexicon, colorphobia allowed abolitionists to encapsulate all issues surrounding racially prejudiced treatment of black Americans. Whether a white person refused seating to a black person on a railroad car or confronted them in the street, abolitionists classified and indicted such actions as evidence of colorphobia.

But more than just a fear, colorphobia was a disease that corrupted the minds and bodies of white Americans. Whenever a person with colorphobia came in contact with a black individual they suffered uncontrollable outbursts and irrational hate. Public bouts of insanity and

irrationality supplied abolitionists with a justification for presenting white people in reports as inept, unfair, mentally unhinged, and immoral as they suffered from colorphobia's cruelty. Colorphobia also brought forth physical symptoms as well—convulsions, shouting, teeth clenching, and loss of muscle control. By framing racial prejudice as abnormal, abolitionists normalized racial equality as the natural condition by which humanity should operate. Grimes used Brown's experience to show the effect of colorphobia and how it strained relations between the white and black populations. Humans should naturally cooperate and live amongst one another, like when the white men had Brown sit with them, but instead Grimes thought colorphobia upset the natural order of things and complicated social relations. Colorphobia armed abolitionists with a new and compelling argument against prejudice.

This thesis explores abolitionist deployment of colorphobia and its impact on the politics of reform in antebellum America. It argues that abolitionists adopted colorphobia to encourage racial and social reform beginning in the mid-1830s and to promote black equality. It also argues that abolitionists used disease and its variations, such as illness or malady, as a powerful reform tactic, because of rampant fears of disease and popular understandings of disease during the nineteenth-century. Abolitionists used disease and the disease concept of prejudice because it suggested a cure. Just like Americans searched for a preventative and cure for diseases, like cholera and hydrophobia, abolitionists thought colorphobia would elicit the same response and persuade white Americans into changing their prejudiced ways.

In the early 1800s germ theory did not yet exist. The theory would later be widely accepted in the latter part of the century, but before it could, disease comprehension had to advance. In the 1830s when the first uses of colorphobia appeared, epidemics of cholera, tuberculosis, yellow fever, and rabies (also known as hydrophobia) swept American cities.

Disease was thought to be a punishment for immorality dictated by the hands of God. Citizens believed these diseases targeted the poor and immoral, because fewer from the middle and upper classes contracted the illnesses.² With abolitionists viewing racial prejudice as part of moral failing, they depicted it as a disease in their reform agenda.

By the 1840s and 1850s more Americans believed environmental and social surroundings caused disease, and abolitionists viewed colorphobia as something that also originated from a racially structured social environment. Fear of contracting disease from its stigmas regarding morality, lack of wealth, race, and high death rates spurred Americans to search for cures and change how they lived in order to avoid contagion.³ Disease's impact on society and reactions to outbreaks influenced abolitionists into crafting racial prejudice into a disease. Abolitionists believed framing racial prejudice as a disease would bring better attention to immediate emancipation and equal rights. Racial prejudice would be taken much more seriously, and the disease concept as a reform agent would hopefully bring social change.

In order to avoid social and moral demise, abolitionists crafted three tactics for ending colorphobia and its spread. The successful combination of tactics would eradicate it. Adoption of abolition and equal rights by northern whites served as the first tactic. By ending slavery completely, the unusual institution would no longer influence the North with its need for racial hierarchy. Equal rights would guarantee public space free from colorphobic fits. If all people were viewed as equals by society no white person would suffer outbursts of indignation at a black person sitting beside them at the theater. Adopting abolition guaranteed instilled values that combated racially prejudiced thoughts, views, and actions while the establishment of equal rights prevented hostile situations. Black abolitionists especially encouraged the second reform

² Gerald Grob, *The Deadly Truth: A History of Disease in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

³ Ibid.

tactic—black activism. Black activism became crucial for gaining support for immediate emancipation and equal rights. Abolitionists like Douglass believed that the free black population itself was instrumental in ending white racial prejudice. Without black people challenging white authority and segregated public spaces there would be no change. Northern black people must actively clash with the status quo and assert their authority, much like Brown did against *Mr. Southern Chivalry*, and claim rights guaranteed to all those born in America. The third and final tactic dealt with prevention. Abolitionists believed preventative steps taken with children could stop colorphobia from forming in the new generation. Theoretically, education about abolitionism and slavery would instill moral and anti-slavery values into children that would follow them into adulthood. Also by exposing white children to black children in classroom environments from an early age would establish a mindset that black persons were no different than them, and deserved equal treatment and opportunities. Abolition, black activism, and childrearing all were proposed as effective treatments for colorphobia.

While abolitionists used colorphobia for promoting anti-slavery and pro-equality values, anti-abolitionists countered the attack on racial hierarchy and white supremacy with the adoption of the notion of “negrophobia.” Originally, abolitionists used negrophobia as a synonym for colorphobia, but by 1839, many racially prejudiced Americans had turned the term on its head. Even though both terms embodied racial prejudice against the black population, anti-abolitionists seized negrophobia and used it as a defense mechanism. Negrophobia came to be predominantly known as the disease of abolition. Anti-abolitionists thought abolitionists were so obsessed over ending slavery and upsetting the natural hierarchical order that they suffered from “negro on the brain” or “negromania.” Like those infected with hydrophobia, negrophobics were mad; but instead of being infected with rabies they fell victim to anti-slavery and equality views. Anti-

abolitionists feared the spread of negrophobia and the consequences of white society adopting abolitionist values. By framing abolitionists as diseased and mentally imbalanced, anti-abolitionists hoped racial dominancy and separate social spheres in the North would remain. The use of negrophobia in anti-abolitionist writings also revealed white anxieties over the future of a mixed-race and equal America. Anti-abolitionists believed shaping negrophobia to their own needs would counter arguments for emancipation, equality, and black social betterment.

Abolitionist and anti-abolitionist battles over prejudice attracted attention from across the Atlantic Ocean and drew Britain into the fight against colorphobia. British transatlantic travelers noticed colorphobia while in the United States, and viewed the disease as specifically and uniquely American. British abolitionists claimed their country was free from colorphobia, and traveler reports and commentary on racially prejudiced instances given by British abolitionists helped American abolitionists promote anti-slavery, immediate emancipation, and equality in the United States. Canada also joined the battle against racial prejudice as colorphobia appeared in provinces. As runaway slaves and free blacks moved to Canada so did white Americans. With burgeoning black populations and American influence Canadians experienced intense racial prejudice for the first time. Black Canadian newspapers reported on colorphobic incidents and warned citizens about the damaging disease. What is most important about Canadian colorphobia is that it disproves European claims that colorphobia only existed in America, and further strengthens the abolitionist argument about how social and environmental surroundings spurred the development of racial prejudice.

This study of colorphobia contributes to three scholarly conversations: abolitionism and reform politics; nineteenth-century disease; and race and racism. Historians have traced the roots

of abolitionism, its rise in popularity and support amongst specific groups of Americans, the fragmentation of the reform crusade, and the movement's impact on political and social life throughout the United States.⁴ My thesis supplies new insight into the radical abolitionist reform agenda by exposing the creation and politicization of a disease due to the internal split in the American Anti-Slavery Society. Examining colorphobia in abolitionist writing changes the way historians understand abolitionist reform tactics, including how abolitionists used the social climate to bolster their arguments for immediate emancipation and equal rights. Scholars have amply described the tactics of persuasion—moral suasion—that abolitionists used to push for emancipation. Moral suasion was used to try and convince people to be better Christians by not being racially prejudiced. Racial prejudice, abolitionists thought, would keep Americans out of Heaven. Abolitionists argued that colorphobia pervaded churches throughout northern society, and that Christians could cure themselves of it if their congregations altered their views and adopted anti-slavery sentiments. However, colorphobia reveals another side to the moral suasion tactic—fear of disease. Inclusion of colorphobic church instances and reports displays how radical abolitionists revealed the hypocrisy of American Protestantism, while simultaneously arguing for racial equality on the premise of disease instead of just morality.

Historians also have not focused on the role medicalized ideas played in the abolitionist arsenal. Revealing the centrality of colorphobia to the reform agenda will change how historians view the intellectual argument over race, demonstrate how disease theory advanced the desires of a small group of individuals, and illustrate how colorphobia played a central role in emancipation and equal rights. Historians have already figured out what disease was and how it was defined in

⁴ For examples of abolitionist scholarship, see James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

the 1800s. This thesis takes those understandings and explores the logic of colorphobia being presented as a disease by abolitionists through comparisons to other diseases and disease knowledge of the time. Colorphobia adhered to nineteenth-century understandings of disease before the discovery of germ theory. In the dominant view of the era, disease typically occurred because of lifestyle and morality. Like cholera and hydrophobia, colorphobia did not discriminate in whom it manifested contrary to popular disease beliefs. Poor, rich, non-slave holding whites and slave-holding whites alike suffered.⁵ This thesis explores how abolitionists contended that colorphobia originated in immorality, but also came from social and environmental causes like other diseases. Radical abolitionists used the fears and stigmas of disease to advance their reform agenda.

While colorphobia was categorized and used as a disease, it was also a phobia. The term “phobia” means “a persisting fear of an object or of an idea which does not ordinarily justify fear.”⁶ Phobias were accepted as a mental issue in psychiatric literature in the mid-nineteenth century, which made colorphobia more legitimate in the public sphere after it had been in use by abolitionists for a few decades. What really stands out about colorphobia is that unlike doctors

⁵ For examples of disease history, see Gerald Grob, *The Deadly Truth: A History of Disease in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (USA: Free Press, 2011); James Denny Guillory, “The Pro-Slavery Arguments of Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 9, no. 3 (1968): 209-227; Matthew Warner Osborn, *Rum Maniacs: Alcoholic Insanity in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); John G. Robertson, *An Excess of Phobias and Manias: A Compilation of Anxieties, Obsessions, and Compulsions That Push Many over the Edge of Sanity* (Los Angeles: Senior Scribe Publications, 2003); Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1886* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Todd L. Savitt, “The Use of Blacks for Medical Experimentation and Demonstration in the Old South,” *Southern Historical Association* 48, no. 3 (1982): 331-348; Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); John C. Waller, *Health and Wellness in 19th-Century America* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2014); Marli Frances Weiner and Mazie Hough, *Sex, Sickness, and Slavery Illness in the Antebellum South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

⁶ Paul Errera, M.D., “Some Historical Aspects of the Concept, Phobia,” *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, 36, no. 1-4 (1962): 325-336. 325.

and medical board members who looked at containing and preventing disease, radical abolitionists looked at preventing and curing colorphobia through widespread adoption of abolition and early disease prevention in childhood. Radical abolitionists framed colorphobia as a mental disease with physical and emotional symptoms and outbursts. Before germ theory, radical abolitionists claimed to find the cause of a specific “disease,” and how to prevent and cure it. In a sense, abolitionists became doctors of morality.

This thesis also examines colorphobia within race and racism literature. Historians have already looked at how white people and black people viewed one another and general reactions to different races. Free blacks and black abolitionists viewed their relationship to white persons differently and held different views on white people in general than did enslaved blacks.⁷ The addition of colorphobia in race and racism literature exposes a new dimension in racial attitudes, and self-empowerment and advancement through reform. By adding colorphobia to the historiography of race and racism, this thesis pushes past already known notions about race and racial prejudice, and brings in disease as something that actively shaped social standards and notions involving race.

This project consists of an introduction, three chapters, and an epilogue. The first chapter is titled “Adopting Colorphobia,” and explains the logic of framing racial prejudice as a disease by exploring its origins and legitimation. The chapter reveals that two main reasons made the

⁷ For examples of racial and racism histories, see Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America’s Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York City: Harper & Row, 1971); Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

adoption of colorphobia possible. The first reason resided within the abolitionist movement itself and its internal split that led to more radical ways of approaching agenda reform, and the second stemmed from fears and anxieties over disease in a rapidly expanding urban and mixed-race environment. The first section of the chapter deals with abolitionism and the atmosphere of the North. Why did the Anti-Slavery Society split and what did the split mean for reform? Why did the black population boom and what were the consequences? The second section situates colorphobia within the medical ethos of the era. Specifically, mental illness, phobias, and epidemic diseases are explored that showed similarities to colorphobia. Why did people fear disease? Why did colorphobia mirror already established diseases? Following disease will be a third and final section focused on abolitionist thoughts on children and preventing colorphobia in the youth. The first chapter explains the foundations, creation, justification, and general workings of colorphobia.

The second chapter, “Deploying Colorphobia,” explores the politics of colorphobia. How did abolitionists deploy colorphobia? What parts of public space did abolitionists critique? The chapter explores various areas of American life impacted by colorphobia, how abolitionists encouraged reform, and how they hoped to bring about black advancement. “Impact of Colorphobia” serves as the final chapter. It explores the divergent reactions anti-abolitionists and transnational abolitionists had to American abolitionist use of colorphobia. Was there backlash, resistance, opposition, or praise over its use? The first part of the chapter exposes how anti-abolitionists countered colorphobia by adopting negrophobia for justifying racial prejudice and hierarchy. It also explores anti-abolitionist anxieties about the future of America through anti-abolitionist social commentary on the black population. The second part of the chapter looks at

how British abolitionists joined forces with northern abolitionists to cure America and spread racial equality, and also how Canada denounced and feared the appearance of racial prejudice.

Finally, the epilogue addresses the fate of colorphobia during and after the Age of Emancipation. The concept of colorphobia persisted into the 20th century, showing that some Americans clung to the disease model of prejudice. By 1891, *The Christian Recorder* noted that colorphobia was “the most poisonous of all diseases of mind or body, for it reaches the heart said to be sanctified, and changes his love for man and hatred.”⁸ Newspapers and journalists continued using colorphobia and negrophobia leading up to 1940. The epilogue questions what happened to colorphobia once the term disappeared from print and hints at its impact.

⁸ “COLORPHOBIA...,” *The Christian Recorder*, Jun. 18, 1891.

Chapter 1

Adopting Colorphobia

In 1842 a black man named Frederick Douglass, covered in dust and weary of travel, climbed down from the top of a carriage in Pittsfield, New Hampshire. Not allowed to travel inside of carriages, he arrived at his host's home with an unkempt appearance. The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society sent Douglass to Pittsfield for a Sunday meeting. The Society guaranteed him lodging with a Mr. Hilles for his visit, but upon arrival he found himself unwelcomed in both the surrounding area and Hilles' home. White people predominantly populated the neighborhood, and his presence drew immediate attention that reflected poorly on the Hilles Family. Douglass also found the reactions of his hosts worrisome. Mr. Hilles barely spoke a word, and his face contorted into an expression of uncertainty upon receiving him. Mrs. Hilles greeted him formally but kept her distance. The behavior of his hosts drastically differed from usual supporters of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Douglass declared, "When tea-time came, I found that Mr. Hilles had lost his appetite and could not come to the table. I suspected his trouble was colorphobia, and, though I regretted his malady, I knew his case was not necessarily dangerous; and I was not without some confidence in my skill and ability in healing diseases of that type."⁹ Although Douglass claimed he remained unaffected by Mr. Hilles' reaction, he barely ate the desserts presented and mainly kept to himself during his stay. While Douglass remained unscathed by the malady, he still dealt with its ramifications.

More than just anti-slavery and immediate emancipation occupied abolitionist attention in nineteenth-century America. Racial prejudice and equal rights also became central issues as the free black population expanded in the North and racial tensions flared. Prejudice narratives and

⁹ Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Massachusetts: Digital Scanning Inc., 2001), 555.

incident reports circulated orally throughout abolitionist meetings and plastered endless pages of newspapers. Abolitionists continuously discussed and condemned racial prejudice towards the black population and started referring to it as “colorphobia.” The term emerged during the mid-1830s, and its use expanded beginning in the 1840s. The rise of colorphobia in abolitionist vocabulary elicits various questions, some of which are: How did racially prejudiced incidents become referred to as “colorphobia?” What about American society made disease a useful tool for encouraging social reform? This chapter attempts to answer these questions while exploring the roots of colorphobia.

This chapter argues that radical abolitionists adopted colorphobia for two reasons. The first reason stems from the split in the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1840. Arguments over reform tactics contributed to the split amongst abolitionists. Conservative abolitionists that believed in gradual emancipation wanted to continue with moral suasion. The more radical abolitionists that sought immediate emancipation and equal rights wanted to try new reform measures—colorphobia being one of them. The split allowed for radical abolitionists to implement the use of colorphobia on a larger scale. The second reason involves the country’s social and physical environment. Framing racial prejudice as a disease occurred during a time of rapidly expanding black populations in northern cities that challenged white dominance and racial hierarchy. White people worried about the future of northern society because of these challenges. Also, widespread epidemics broke out as populations soared, and brought immense fear of illness and its consequences. The combination of increasing black populations and epidemics presented radical abolitionists with the perfect opportunity to convincingly frame racial prejudice as a white disease that caused irrational fear of black people and encompassed all acts of prejudice. Disagreements amongst abolitionists, social tensions, and fears of illness all

played a part in the adoption of colorphobia. Once racial prejudice was framed as a disease, abolitionists sought to prevent colorphobia from infecting and spreading throughout the youth by teaching students about the dangers of slavery and the wrongs of racial prejudice.

Writing About Racial Prejudice Before Colorphobia

On August 27, 1830, citizens found the body of radical abolitionist David Walker outside his second-hand clothing store in Boston, Massachusetts. One year earlier Walker had published his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. His *Appeal*, a radical pamphlet focused on rebellion and racial prejudice, caused widespread uproar in the United States. Walker's writing became so incendiary that a \$3,000 reward for his death, and a \$10,000 reward for kidnapping and bringing him to the South hung over his head.¹⁰ Debates over the cause of Walker's death quickly followed the discovery of his body, and two plausible options emerged. Some Americans believed Walker died from lung fever like his daughter, while others in the local black community believed someone poisoned him over his radical views. Historians continue to debate Walker's death, and some believe in the possibility of foul play.¹¹ What is clear, however, is that the publication of Walker's *Appeal* sparked arguments over slavery and spread fear of slave revolts throughout the white population.¹²

Walker called for slaves to rebel, even murderously, against their masters and enslavers. Doing so provoked widespread fear throughout the white population. Other than rebellion and violent insurrections, Walker wrote on topics including American Christianity, morality, and black stereotypes. The most important part of his *Appeal* is arguably Walker's views on white racial prejudice, and how to counteract it with black empowerment and pride. According to

¹⁰ Sean Wilentz, "New Introduction," *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), xix.

¹¹ Charles Wiltse, "Introduction," *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965). xi.

¹² *Ibid.*, vii.

Walker, racial prejudice plagued the entirety of nineteenth-century American society, and it stemmed from the allure of power and American Christianity. Walker wrote, “The whites have always been an unjust, jealous, unmerciful, avaricious and blood-thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority.”¹³ As a consequence, Christianity in America transformed into a tool that supported the barbaric treatment and enslavement of black people, and prejudice followed the implementation of white power. Walker continued, “It is a notorious fact that the major part of the white Americans, have, ever since we have been among them, tried to keep us ignorant, and make us believe that God made us and our children to be slaves to them and theirs.”¹⁴ Only by seeking true Christianity and redemption could white Americans end racial prejudice. But why would they if it did not benefit them?

The only true hope for the end of slavery and racial prejudice resided within the black population. Walker encouraged action by instructing slaves to rise up violently against their masters but to also seek an education. He declared, “You have to prove to the Americans and the world, that we are MEN, and not *brutes*, as we have been represented, and by millions treated. Remember, to let the aim of your labours among your brethren, and particularly the youths, be the dissemination of education and religion.”¹⁵ Fighting ignorance through reading, writing, and thinking became tools for black rebuttal against claims of inferiority.

Walker’s encouragement of violent radicalism drew public response and condemnations from other abolitionists. William Lloyd Garrison, arguably the most famous white abolitionist of his time, condemned Walker in the first issue of his newspaper *The Liberator*. Garrison wrote:

Believing, as we do, that men should never do evil that good may come; that a good end does not justify wicked means in the

¹³ David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America* (Boston: Revised and Published by David Walker, 1829), 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

accomplishment of it; and that we ought to suffer, as did our Lord and his apostles, unresistingly -- knowing that vengeance belongs to God, and he will certainly repay it where it is due; -- believing all this, and that the Almighty will deliver the oppressed in a way which they know not, we deprecate the spirit and tendency of this Appeal.¹⁶

Dismayed at the damage Walker may have caused for the abolitionist movement, Garrison quickly assured the American public that Walker held too violent and radical views. He continued, “We do not preach rebellion – no, but submission and peace. Our enemies may accuse us of striving to stir up the slaves to revenge but their accusations are false, and made only to excite the prejudices of the whites, and to destroy our influence.”¹⁷ While Garrison never promoted violence, he eventually became a radical abolitionist in the sense that he denounced the American Colonization Society, and promoted immediate emancipation and equal rights.

Three years after Walker’s *Appeal*, Garrison’s views on the American Colonization Society and understanding of white racial prejudice appeared in a pamphlet entitled *Thoughts on African Colonization*. The American Colonization Society privately raised funds for sending freedmen back to Africa in the newly founded Liberia. Garrison thought the Society promoted slavery and racial prejudice with its goal of black resettlement. According to Garrison, “the Society is artfully based upon and defended by popular prejudice: it takes advantage of wicked and preposterous opinions, and hence its success.”¹⁸ While the Society started on a moral

¹⁶ William Lloyd Garrison, “Editorial Regarding ‘Walker's Appeal’,” *The Liberator*, Jan. 8, 1831.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization: Or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 1.

mission, it turned anti-Christian and anti-republican. As a consequence it fostered further enslavement and promoted racial prejudice.¹⁹

The Society adopted gradualism—or the practice of slowly ending slavery. But by sending freedmen to Liberia, Garrison believed the value of those enslaved in America increased. Colonization “is agreeable to slaveholders, because it is striving to remove a class of person who they fear may stir up their slaves to rebellion; all who avow undying hostility to the people of color are in favor of it; all who shrink from acknowledging them as brethren and friends, or who make them a distinct and inferior caste, or who deny the possibility of elevating them in the scale of improvement here, most heartily embrace it.”²⁰ In Garrison’s opinion, prejudice stemmed from the institution of slavery and a society where anti-Christian and anti-Republican individuals and groups ensured racial hierarchy.

One year after Garrison published his pamphlet, Lydia Maria Child denounced slavery and rebuked racial prejudice in *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*. Like Garrison, Child condemned the American Colonization Society. Child wrote, “I object to the Colonization Society, because it tends to put public opinion asleep, on a subject where it needs to be wide awake.”²¹ Instead of the Society having ruthlessly condemned slavery and racial prejudice, it carefully avoided offending pro-slavery individuals and their way of life by ensuring the existence of slavery by removing only the free black population. Colonizationists, in Child’s opinion, thought racial prejudice to be a natural phenomenon and unalterable.²² Child believed instead that racial prejudice could be refuted through countering common black stereotypes.

¹⁹ Ibid., 20-21.

²⁰ Ibid., 21.

²¹ Lydia Maria Child, *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* (Boston: Allen & Ticknor, 1833), 126.

²² Ibid., 133.

Child believed the stereotype of the “intellectually inferior Negro” provided an excuse for white prejudice.²³ Educating the black population would make them great additions to society, and through self-advancement they would defeat stereotypes and racial prejudice.²⁴ In Child’s opinion, racial prejudice stemmed from slavery itself, the belief that racial prejudice occurred naturally, and black stereotypes. The only cure for racial prejudice originated in black education and advancement.

The three writings of Walker, Garrison, and Child were only the beginning of abolitionists making sense of white racial prejudice and searching for its cure in the North. As a consequence of growing prejudice against black persons, the question of what prompted white racial prejudice and how to successfully abolish it from society plagued abolitionists for decades. Beginning in the mid-1830s, abolitionists adopted colorphobia as a new reform tactic for encouraging white northern society into ending racial prejudice, while simultaneously bringing about immediate emancipation, equal rights, and advancement for the black population.

Abolitionism & Abolitionists

Abolitionists like Walker, Garrison, and Child drove conversations on white racial prejudice in the early 1830s, but who were abolitionists? Abolitionists found slavery immoral and sought its end, and black and white men and women joined anti-slavery movements. The origins of abolitionism in the United States stemmed from the Second Great Awakening and the rise of white evangelicals in the nineteenth-century.²⁵ According to evangelical values and

²³ Ibid., 148.

²⁴ Ibid., 131.

²⁵ For more information on the rise of the abolitionist movement, see James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007); Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and The Politics of Antislavery* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991);

outlooks, the continual increase of the market economy created distasteful standards of living and morals amongst northerners as they partook in self-indulgence.²⁶ These white evangelicals viewed the state of their country with disdain, and sought social reform over moral imperfections like slavery. Religious young men and women partook in new opportunities for engaging in social activism and combating moral degradation, which attracted many who would eventually become some of the leading figures of abolitionism. Historian Aileen S. Kraditor dates the beginning of abolitionism in America as January 1, 1831 with the first issue of William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *The Liberator*. Two years later Garrison and Arthur Tappan founded the American Anti-Slavery Society that fueled the movement's growth.²⁷

Still a minority group in the North by the late 1830s, abolitionists faced criticism and violent attacks by northerners, or anti-abolitionists, looking to keep racial hierarchy. These outside pressures forced a reevaluation of their primary use of moral suasion as a reform tactic, and some abolitionists thought challenging northern white racial prejudice seemed important while others disagreed. By 1840, the Anti-Slavery Society had indefinitely split over arguments involving politics and reform. Facing irreconcilable differences, the abolitionist movement fractured into gradualists and radicals. Conservative or gradualist abolitionists sought gradual emancipation and financial compensation for slave owners, and believed the return of moral northern values would occur once slavery ended. Immediatists or radical abolitionists sought immediate emancipation and equal rights for black persons without compensation for slaveholders. Radicals also thought immorality plagued the North and that it needed massive

Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

²⁶ James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 35.

²⁷ Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-150* (Lanham: Ivan R. Dee; Reprint edition, 1989). 3, viii.

reform.²⁸ The split allowed for conservatives and radicals to combat slavery however they saw fit. Radicals moved past focusing on just slavery, and launched an attack on northern racial prejudice by increasing the use of colorphobia in their reform agenda. Without the split, colorphobia would not have become such a popular reform tool or appeared as often as it did in the abolitionist press.

Northern Social Climate: Urbanization and Racial Issues

The northern social climate demanded immediate attention from abolitionists. Full abolition across northern states remained a slow process, but complete northern emancipation occurred by 1830. With the North finally established as firmly anti-slavery, free blacks settled throughout states like New York and Massachusetts. As a consequence the free black population soared. In 1790, the free black population in the North stood at 27,000. By 1830, however, the population grew to 130,000.²⁹ This growth brought legal and social consequences, such as “Black Laws” that restricted black settlement and freedom of movement, as the white population interacted with black men, women, and children more frequently in public space.³⁰ Northern whites even promoted excluding black people from public accommodations and tried limiting interaction between races.

They were either excluded from railway cars, omnibuses, stagecoaches, and steamboats or assigned to special ‘Jim Crow’ sections; they sat, when permitted, in secluded and remote corners of theaters and lecture halls; they could not enter most hotels,

²⁸ Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-150*, 8.

²⁹ Alton Hornsby, Jr. and Susan Cianci Salvatore, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2004), 6; Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 46-49; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Free Negro in the United States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 14.

³⁰ Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 104.

restaurants, and resorts, except as servants; they prayed in “Negro pews” in the white churches. . . . Moreover, they were often educated in segregated schools, punished in segregated prisons, nursed in segregated hospitals, and buried in segregated cemeteries.³¹

In this racially charged atmosphere abolitionists questioned why white people treated the free black population so poorly. Radical abolitionists witnessed white reactions towards black individuals in public space on a daily basis, and decided that the white population suffered from racial prejudice. But what was prejudice in the 1800s? *The Atheneum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines*, a monthly magazine published in Boston that supplied commentary on all things regarding literature and science, gave an explanation for prejudice. “Prejudice, in its ordinary and literal sense, is *prejudging* any question without having sufficiently examining it, and adhering to our opinion upon it through ignorance, malice, or perversity, in spite of every evidence to the contrary.”³² According to the magazine, individuals turn stubborn and remain closed-off through personal assumptions that create bias and prejudice. Based on the definition of prejudice, abolitionists viewed racial prejudice as the irrational and close-minded response to the black population based on skin color and preconceived notions of race.

Typically, prejudice and racial prejudice appeared interchangeably in newspapers throughout the 1830s and beyond. Even once the use of colorphobia became popular, abolitionists used prejudice or racial prejudice in articles dealing with the disease. Opinions and definitions of racial prejudice filled pages, and sometimes prejudice narratives followed the author’s opening statements on the phenomenon. For example, Rev. Cyrus P. Grosvenor, the editor of a Baptist newspaper called *The Christian Reflector*, viewed prejudice as an irrational part of mankind and questioned:

³¹Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Free Negro in the United States, 1790-1860*, 97.

³²“AN ANALYSIS OF PREJUDICE,” *The Atheneum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines* (Boston: John Cotton, Jun. 1830).

Is not a prejudice a feeling for which we cannot give a satisfactory reason, or for which we are ashamed to give any reason? Are not prejudices unphilosophical, and should a rational mind indulge them? Are not prejudices unchristian, and should not a Christian perseveringly overcome them as marks of peculiar delicacy and refinement?³³

Grosvenor's prejudice narrative that followed focused on a black married couple that boarded a steamboat in New York. Although the husband happened to be a well-educated clergyman, not one white person on the steamboat acknowledged their presence. According to Grosvenor, the only crime he committed that day stemmed from having a "'skin not colored like our own,' and he shrunk from those around him because he felt that he was considered a nuisance, and they regarded him with cold and supercilious pride, or with bitter and sneering contempt."³⁴ Daylight soon faded into darkness, and white travelers hurried inside as a thunderous storm swept in. The husband sought the captain's approval for his wife obtaining passage in the women's cabin for the duration of the storm, where women could enjoy one another's company without the presence of the opposite sex or their vices, but only laughter and the cruel reality that "the ladies want no negroes in there" were given as a response.³⁵ After spending the night in the storm the couple had taken ill. The husband recovered but his wife perished. "And among the many sad and bitter thoughts which crowded upon his mind, as he recalled his blighted hopes, his disappointed expectations, not one was more agonizing than this, to use his own expression, —that it was *prejudice which murdered his wife*."³⁶

Defining racial prejudice and displaying examples such as Grosvenor's in abolitionist writings continued well past the 1830s. However, more than just the expanding free black population influenced the concentration on racial prejudice. The first black newspaper

³³ Rev. Cyrus P. Grosvenor, "PREJUDICE," *The Christian Reflector*, Jan. 25, 1839.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

established in New York in 1827 became a vocal source for immediate emancipation, equal rights, and black advancement. *Freedom's Journal*, founded by Rev. Peter Williams, Jr. and other free black men, set the stage “in the development of black consciousness and organization.”³⁷ The rallying cry of free blacks for immediate emancipation and equal rights convinced some gradualists into adopting immediatism. Garrison, for example, “left Baltimore a changed man” after interacting with the free black community while on a visit and adopted radicalized abolitionism.³⁸ After seeing black passion for anti-slavery and equality, Garrison and other white abolitionists fought for immediate emancipation and equal rights.

Why Adopt Disease?

While northern society became more racially contested from the growing free population and the segregation policies that followed, and abolitionists sought racial prejudice reform, the unhealthy environment of the urban North served as the perfect atmosphere for the spread of disease and devastating epidemics. Due to the new market economy and increasing foreign trade, the North became overpopulated and industrialized. People lived in close quarters in urban communities, used the same public transportation and water wells, and found similar employment along class and racial lines. As cities continued growing throughout the 1800s with foreign immigration and a burgeoning black population disease ran rampant. Even though some cities adopted regulations for dealing with public health concerns before the 1800s, disease containment remained difficult.³⁹ The higher the population, the harder supplying safe water sources and removing wastes became. These problems challenged city governments. Even when cities constructed sewers the systems “paradoxically increased mortality from some water-born

³⁷ Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁹ Gerald Grob, *The Deadly Truth: A History of Disease in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005). 97.

disease,” like typhoid fever.⁴⁰ Yet most cities remained inactive regarding health concerns until epidemics arrived and reeked havoc on citizens.

The first reason abolitionists used disease as a reform tool stemmed from 1800s medical knowledge and ideas. New York City serves as a great example for depicting nineteenth-century disease understandings. In 1832, public concern over cholera entering New York ports forced a response from the NYC Board of Health. The board put quarantines into effect for the summer; but with the Board wielding little to no actual power, nothing more got accomplished.⁴¹ Like other urban areas, New York City fostered the perfect environment for an epidemic. Streets stayed cramped and filthy, and cleaning them remained impossible. Water quality and quantity became such a problem that the wealthy imported water from the country.⁴² Class conflict erupted as the poor used city water pumps and struggled through filth, while the upper classes supplied themselves with clean water, and kept away from poorer districts where immigrants, freedmen, and disease more likely resided.

While lack of adequate water and general sanitation remained a large problem for those living in the city, germ theory did not yet exist as of 1832. Instead, God punished moral failings through illness and epidemics. Because of this, cholera became viewed as divine punishment. God infected the impious and immoral through cholera as a way to “promote the cause of righteousness, by sweeping away the obdurate and the incorrigible, and to drain off the filth and scum which contaminate and defile human society.”⁴³ Yet immorality and sin did not remain the only reasons people contracted cholera—poverty also caused infection. Immigrants, the intemperate, and idle brought disease upon themselves. Race also played a crucial role. White

⁴⁰ Ibid., 187.

⁴¹ Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1886* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 19.

⁴² Ibid., 17-18.

⁴³ Ibid., 43.

people believed black persons spread disease wherever they resided, because the character of the black population, “lazy, careless in personal habits, ignorant temperament,” doomed them to disease and mortality.⁴⁴ The susceptibility of the black population to cholera appeared as proof of “the deformity and gross stupidity of the Old Dominion’s labor system.”⁴⁵

Cholera victimized black people. African Americans were doomed to a labor system where they did not profit, move up in society, or experience much religious guidance. The white population believed freedmen brought plagues to the North through a specific contagion; even when medical experts concluded the cause of cholera lay in the atmosphere itself and that cholera did not spread from person-to-person.⁴⁶ When another cholera epidemic hit the city in 1849, not much had been done for improving sanitation, and neither had there been further research on disease comprehension. Yet the belief that something specific caused cholera began gathering more support even amongst the medical community.



Image 1: Map of the 1832 cholera epidemic in New York City created by Sonia Shah, Dan McCarey, and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting at the New York Academy of Medicine.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 75.

Seventeen years later when the final epidemic hit the city, “there were few physicians who doubted that cholera was portable and transmissible.”⁴⁷ In the years leading up to the epidemic of 1866, the NYC Board of Health responded better to sanitation needs and funded more medical research. Because of these preventative measures, cholera in 1866 proved less disastrous. Although society grew closer to the acceptance of germ theory, many doctors still struggled with the concept of contagion. Germ theory is the belief that specific diseases are caused by microorganisms that attack a living organism, such as humans.⁴⁸ The idea of the “micro-organism” remained in its infant stage by 1866 but doctors agreed that cholera seemed dictated by environment.⁴⁹ Abolitionists framed colorphobia as being both immorally and environmentally caused based off of evolving nineteenth-century medical knowledge.

The second reason abolitionists framed racial prejudice as an illness, is because epidemics created immense fear of disease, or “nosemaphobia;” and fears swept American society during and after outbreaks of deadly diseases.⁵⁰ “When ‘abnormal epidemics appear at irregular intervals and result in mortality spikes, public fears often reach a fever pitch. Under these circumstances community life is disrupted, and often a search for explanation leads to the stigmatization of socially marginal groups as the cause of the disease.’”⁵¹ White people came in contact with black people, a socially marginalized group, every day. As a result, disease stigmas attached to freedmen made public space even more racially contested as epidemics flared. White people feared contracting disease from not only the uncertainty of survival but also because of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 195, 197.

⁴⁸ For more information on germ theory, see Louis Pasteur’s *Germ Theory and its Applications to Medicine & on the Antiseptic Principle of the Practice of Surgery*. Germ theory was hard to refute as early as 1877, but was widely accepted in the medical realm by the 1880s.

⁴⁹ Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1886*, 198.

⁵⁰ John G. Robertson, *An Excess of Phobias and Manias: A Compilation of Anxieties, Obsessions, and Compulsions That Push Many over the Edge of Sanity* (Los Angeles: Senior Scribe Publications, 2003), 217.

⁵¹ Gerald Grob, *The Deadly Truth: A History of Disease in America*, 70.

the connotations. Disease comprehension slowly advanced beginning in the 1840s, but without germ theory until the later decades of the 1800s the white North stayed fearful and distrusting of the disease ridden black population. Freedmen were seen as natural disease carriers through stigmatization and stereotypes, and new knowledge circulating over how disease spread became part of why white people grew more obstinate and irrational towards freedmen in public space.

Even the name “colorphobia” itself held disease connotations. When abolitionists first termed colorphobia, phobics were diagnosed as suffering from a medical condition. Doctors define “phobia” as “a persisting fear of an object or of an idea which does not ordinarily justify fear.”⁵² This meant that colorphobia was the irrational fear of (and even hatred towards) the black population. The fear of black people induced irrational reactions towards all ages and genders of freedmen. These reactions were accompanied by physical symptoms, such as shouting, shaking, loss of muscle control, and public outbursts. A cure for colorphobia with it continuously appearing throughout the North as a consequence of the growing free population would help mitigate racial tensions. Frederick Douglass constantly wrote about northern colorphobia and viewed it as a “perceptual disease which he described as ‘malignant,’ an ‘epidemic,’ and a ‘strange plague.’”⁵³

Medicalized phobias were accepted as mental disorders in psychiatric literature in the mid-nineteenth century, and colorphobia’s symptoms fit within the realm of mental disorders. Mental illness originally only attracted medical attention if the afflicted displayed sudden or offensive symptoms that were deemed dangerous.⁵⁴ Bizarre or eccentric behaviors did not qualify as mental illness—but if a person displayed disease symptoms, or seemed like a threat to

⁵² Paul Errera, M.D., “Some Historical Aspects of the Concept, Phobia,” *The Psychiatric Quarterly* 36, no. 1-4 (1962): 325-336. 325.

⁵³ Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America’s Literature of Race and Freedom* (Oxford University Press, Mar. 24, 2010), 32.

⁵⁴ Paul Errera, M.D., “Some Historical Aspects of the Concept, Phobia,” 326.

themselves or those around them, a doctor cared for them immediately. Like those with mental illnesses, colorphobics displayed shameless outbursts and uncontrollable actions that mimicked real diseases, such as cholera and rabies. While Americans feared physical disease and its connotations, mental illness brought its own stigmas of safety concerns and immorality. Mental health care dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the United States. Over the course of two centuries, family members cared for the mentally ill in small agrarian communities with good supervision. Communities and families worried that mentally unstable individuals would hurt themselves or others around them and would never successfully financially support themselves.⁵⁵ In the following century as northern society changed, mental illness turned into a moral problem that the state addressed.

Agrarian styles of supervision and social awareness regarding mental illness unraveled with northern industrialization. In a society already plagued by threats of industrial accidents or deaths, and diseases like cholera, the mentally ill in overcrowded cities suddenly posed a very real threat. The mentally deranged in large urban areas increased as populations grew, and escaped from their homes and caretakers.⁵⁶ Communal awareness in cities became practically impossible as individuals and families moved for jobs and neighborhood populations continuously fluxed. Caring for the mentally ill also became more complicated from shifting family structures in urban settings. Family life turned privatized and separated from the public sphere.⁵⁷ The public threat of the mentally ill and shifting familial patterns spurred the creation of non-familial care options run by states or private institutions.

⁵⁵ Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (USA: Free Press, 2011), 5-6.

⁵⁶ Ellen Holtzman, "A Home Away From Home," *American Psychological Association* 43, no.3 (2012), 24.

⁵⁷ Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill*, 24.

Growing demand for public safety combined with a growing sense of governmental obligation for citizen care facilitated state-run public psychiatric asylums. Towards the end of the nineteenth-century, doctors employed in asylums treated patients with mostly hydrotherapy and rest, and “most physicians held a somatic view of mental illness and assumed that a defect in the nervous system lay behind mental health problems.”⁵⁸ Before doctors believed in the nervous system defect, the popular belief of moral failings fueling mental health issues dominated public discourse. To cure immorality that caused mental illness the implementation of “moral management” quickly arose. Immorality sprang from environmental influences, just like racial prejudice, and through placing an individual into asylum care morality might be reinstated. By using physical disease and mental illness together, abolitionists encouraged fear of racial prejudice and finding a cure.

Abolitionists actively critiqued and denounced racial prejudice during an era of urbanization, racial tension, and epidemics. Radical abolitionists used the North’s racialized atmosphere and diseased environment as the foundation for arguing for immediate emancipation, equal rights, and black advancement. In a society plagued by nosophobia and mental illness, disease seemed like the perfect tool for encouraging reform and alleviating racial issues. If abolitionists asserted that the white population suffered from racial prejudice in the context of disease, white society would theoretically fear contracting or already having it. Fear would even spur an active search for a cure. Medicalizing racial prejudice turned the social norm problematic for those who held racially prejudiced views, and produced conversations on emancipation and northern reform.

Legitimizing Colorphobia Through Other Diseases & Phobias: Cholera & Choleraophobia

⁵⁸ Ibid., 24.

Cholera paralleled colorphobia in various ways and helped legitimize colorphobia in the public realm from the similarities. Not only did cholera spread across the country like colorphobia where other diseases like yellow fever were absent, “the abrupt onset and fearful symptoms of cholera made Americans apprehensive and reflective...”⁵⁹ Just like colorphobia, the appearance of cholera typically happened without warning, or with little to no previous symptoms. However, symptoms differed from colorphobia, except sometimes a “colored or pinched face.”⁶⁰ With parallels between cholera and colorphobia in its depth and sudden onset, real concern grew over the reach and consequences of colorphobia.

In 1850, Douglass published an article regarding cholera in Rochester, New York. Just a year prior a new cholera epidemic broke out in New York City but Rochester miraculously remained untouched. However lucky Rochester was for escaping the “ravages of *cholera*,” inhabitants could not honestly claim full health with America’s “peculiarly national epidemic, viz: ‘madness at color.’”⁶¹ Within the article Douglass used one of colorphobia’s alternative names, “Black-phobia.” Douglass wanted to help readers of the *North Star* recognize those with colorphobia by revealing three reasons for its difficult diagnosis:

First, then, the fact that a white man or woman is willing to be waited upon at the dining table by a person of sable hue, does not necessarily prove that the white man or white woman is free from the loathsome disease denominated above as "black-*phobia*." By some inexplicable relation subsisting between the two, the horrid virus seems soothed rather than excited by the presence of black persons in the act of serving white persons with food. So far from objecting to being served by colored servants, our white fellow-citizens admit them to be among the most kind obliging and attentive waiters in the world. In proof of this, we need only to point to the fact that this class of persons may be found in the vocations of servants and waiters on board of the most popular

⁵⁹ Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1886*, 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶¹ Frederick Douglass, “The Black-*phobia* in Rochester,” *The North Star*, Oct. 3, 1850.

steamers and in the most fashionable hotels of the United States. -
This, therefore, is no test of the presence of the vile plague.⁶²

Douglass' second point about those with "black-phobia" tackled black servitude. White people enjoyed being served by the black population, as it reassured them of their place in the racial hierarchy. Black people serving and waiting on white people proved to "act as opiates, and lull the black madness into serene repose, so that the disease is scarcely to be perceived by the most experienced practitioners."⁶³ The third point tackled black hygiene and beautification services. If a white man allowed a black barber to cut his hair and give him a shave, it did not mean he lacked "black-phobia." Instead, it merely meant white people enjoyed being "subserviced by men, no matter how black soever they be."⁶⁴ The only real way to test a man for "black-phobia" stemmed from witnessing how he acts with a black person outside of the service industry or positions of subservience. Can he act kindly towards a black man and treat him equally? If not, then he "has the seeds of the disease within him, and will only require a negro-hating atmosphere about him to make him 'a case' at once."⁶⁵ Whereas those with cholera are easy to spot and diagnose, individuals with colorphobia are difficult to find, because their disease lurks beneath the surface, and only appears when provoked by specific situations and conditions regarding racial confrontation and attempts at equality. The difficulty of spotting the disease made colorphobia just as terrifying as cholera, if not more.

During the cholera epidemic of the 1830s an American tourist attended a sermon given at a European church. The preacher delivered a lively sermon in which he announced cholera as the disease sinners brought upon society and dictated by God Almighty. The American's thoughts

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

reveal a critical view on the preacher's understanding of disease, as well as views that deviated from typical nineteenth-century opinions. He pondered:

The rich man might murder, rob, and ruin all around him—he was perfectly safe from cholera. The poor man might be the most virtuous, religious, industrious of his race—but poverty was the sin that rendered him the sure victim of the epidemic! Such is the species of justice with which MAN has dared to invest his CREATOR! If cholera was sent by a supernatural power on earth, as a scourge, and independent of natural causes—that power would seem to have been EVIL, rather than GOOD; for imagination can hardly conceive a visitation more partial and unjust, than the pestilence in question.⁶⁶

How could these contradictions exist in a society plagued by divine disease? The only plausible explanation for cholera became that it originated in the worldly environment. Unlike the American tourist in the 1830s, most people feared God's cholera, and “the injudicious orations from some of the pulpits gave an additional power of destructiveness to the epidemic.”⁶⁷ Whether abroad or in the United States, terror and unadulterated fear plagued communities waiting for the first signs of cholera. As a consequence of their nosemaphobia, another disease emerged in communities just as deadly as cholera—“choleraphobia.”

Out of all diseases spreading that facilitated fear, cholera seemed one of the most worrisome. Cholera spread throughout both the North and South, but with such a dense northern population its catastrophic effects stuck out in urban communities. The first cholera epidemic in 1832 in New York City brought the deaths of fifty-two in one week, as reported by the Office of the City Inspector.⁶⁸ While some cities in New York were more ravaged than others, the city of Troy miraculously remained unscathed. Elisha Cushman, editor of *The Christian Secretary*,

⁶⁶ “CHOLERA-PHOEBIA AND CHOLERA ECCLESIASTES,” *The Medico-chirurgical Review and Journal of Practical Medicine. New Series. Volume 20.* (New York: Richard & George S. Wood, 1834), 456.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 456.

⁶⁸ Elisa Cushman, “HEALTH OF N. YORK,” *Christian Secretary*, Sept. 29, 1832.

relayed a report from Troy that claimed, "...Cholera has fled our borders long since. More recently, the cholera-phobia has fled, also, and with it have departed listlessness, long faces, vacant streets, and dull times."⁶⁹ The longer the threat of cholera stayed in cities the more fear of catching it mounted. This fear created "choleraphobia."

In the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* the following year, Dr. Tellier remarked on disease being produced by fear. Tellier presented four cases of choleraphobia he witnessed and his findings. The first case occurred in a district absent of cholera. It revolved around a nervous woman who stressed over contracting the malady. Tellier put her on bed rest for a few days and she recovered.⁷⁰ But a couple days passed after her bed rest and she died of a violent attack of cholera from nowhere. The second case regarded a man of strong character who suddenly took ill from fear of cholera; but the next morning he awoke rested and healthy. The third case involved a young chambermaid who self-diagnosed herself as suffering from cholera. In reality she merely had a case of bowel irritability. The fourth case involved a woman who believed she had cholera from having the shivers, and as a consequence of fear, her heart rate increased, her skin grew hot, and as she struggled with breathing she perished at the age of thirty-five.⁷¹

These four cases as observed by Dr. Tellier reveal the anxiety of disease in the nation. Fear, according to Tellier, "cannot produce the 'blue cholera,' but bring on a particular disease, to which the name *phobia* (choleraphobia) may be given."⁷² The threat of cholera in the United States and the fear of contracting it spread. In 1833, Teller confirmed that cholera itself produced a new disease known as *choleraphobia*. "The only known cause of this disease is fear; the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Dr. Tellier, "CHOLERAPHOBIA.: Cases of Choleraphobia; with Remarks on the Effects of Fear as producing Disease during the present Epidemic Cholera," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 7, no. 22 (1828-1851), Jan. 9, 1833. 345-346. 345.

⁷¹ Ibid., 345.

⁷² Ibid., 346.

symptoms are agitation, general uneasiness, disposition to shivering, skin hot, and often moist, pulse hard and frequent, countenance excited, tongue natural, absence of vomiting and purging, bowels sometimes confined, excitement of the nervous system and often cramps.”⁷³ The cause clearly stemmed from the fear of cholera. Yet curing the ailment proved difficult. So difficult, in fact, that more often than not cholera phobia resulted in death.

Why did Americans fear cholera so much that they created a phobia that killed its hosts? Part of the fear stems from the suddenness of contracting the disease seemingly out of nowhere, followed by how quickly those infected died. For example, a resident in cholera-stricken St. Louis noted how quickly a loved one succumbed to cholera. During a cholera epidemic in 1849, Micajah Tarver wrote, "Theresa went to bed well and slept well till morning, complained of slight indigestion after morning, but ate some breakfast. She died about 3 o'clock the same day."⁷⁴ The fear of waking up healthy and by evening being on your deathbed frightened Americans. As fear grew it sent anxieties soaring and turned deadly.

Hydrophobia

Another prominent disease in antebellum America was hydrophobia. "Hydrophobia," or rabies, paralyzed the population.⁷⁵ Sketched depictions and horrifying reports of mad dogs running wild in cities consistently appeared in newspapers and magazines. *The Family Magazine; or, Monthly Abstract of General Knowledge* in 1840 published an article explaining hydrophobia to the American public. Deadly hydrophobia appeared in densely populated, highly

⁷³ Ibid., 346.

⁷⁴ Micajah Tarver, letter to Sol Sublette, 31 August 1849, Sublette Papers, MHS.; Charles Derry, "Autobiography of Charles Derry," Mormon Immigration Index, 268-270.

⁷⁵ Hydrophobia was the term used to refer to rabies, because one stage of the disease causes muscle paralysis and spasms in muscles used to swallow. The muscle spasms and being unable to control muscles used for drinking (or even swimming) caused fear of water in those infected. For more information on rabies, see; Matthew Smallman-Raynor, Peter Hagggett, and Cliff Andrew, *World Atlas of Epidemic Diseases* (U.S.: CRC Press, 2004), 51.

urbanized cities. Taken from a British report, *The Family Magazine* explained how a dog turned mad and revealed its symptoms. The first day of illness it turned irritable, sullen, fidgety, and plagued by distorted expressions. By the second day, it lost muscle control, seemed prone to constant movement, and excessive thirst. By the fourth, sometimes fifth day, infected dogs usually died in convulsions.⁷⁶ While the magazine reported the British were unsure if hydrophobia transmitted to humans, opinions differed amongst physicians in America.



Image 2: Sketch of “Mad Dog” infected with rabies printed in *The Family Magazine; or, Monthly Abstract of General Knowledge* on May 1, 1840.

Three doctors entered a discussion regarding hydrophobia a year after the magazine published its article. Doctors John M. Currier and Wm. Ingalls, Jr. wrote a letter to Dr. Wm. Stockbridge inquiring about a case of hydrophobia. Currie and Ingalls heard about the case as rumors of the character of the disease swept the medical community and public. The patient Stockbridge attended resided outside of the North in Louisiana and he found typical hydrophobic symptoms in his patient. As the patient’s condition worsened and the closer he moved towards death, the less control he maintained over his mental capacity. Wm. Stockbridge wrote, “The

⁷⁶ J.S. Redfield, “HYDROPHOBIA,” *The Family Magazine; or, Monthly Abstract of General Knowledge*, (New York: 1840), 7.

mental faculties retained their sanity until twenty-four hours previous to his death, when they became deranged, increasing in extent even to furious delirium.”⁷⁷ Rumors circled his patient’s death over whether or not it occurred from hydrophobia, and Stockbridge reported it had been. *But had a mad dog bitten the patient?* Three years prior to his death a rabid dog bit him, and three weeks before his death a dog free of symptoms also bit him. Whether or not he died from either dog bite Stockbridge could not say. Clearly his patient had hydrophobia, but how he contracted it remained a mystery. The mystery of how people sometimes contracted rabies, and its effect on the human body and psyche fueled further fears of hydrophobia, and even influenced treatment of dogs. Owners faced taxes for owning dogs and citizens even killed them without retribution.⁷⁸

Like with cholera, mentions of hydrophobia typically occurred at the same time as colorphobia for comparison and legitimation. Doing so revealed the dangers of colorphobia and the easiness with which the disease developed. One of the first colorphobia comparisons to hydrophobia occurred in July of 1839 in *The Colored American*. Edward Elder Cooper insisted the nation withered under the sick effects of colorphobia, and the easiest way for producing symptoms in those infected was by asking a white man or woman about their views on immediate emancipation. In most cases, just as Mr. Brown was asked during his trip, the person would be further questioned with: “Would you have your daughter marry a nigger?”⁷⁹

Cooper thought the only cure for colorphobia was abolitionism, and he found the idea of colonization for a possible cure as ridiculous. He contended, “this is as much as if you should attempt to cure hydrophobia by drying up all the water in the world.”⁸⁰ Instead of getting rid of

⁷⁷ “HYDROPHOBIA,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, (1828-1851), 27.15; Nov. 16, 1842), 2.

⁷⁸ “Hydrophobia and Dog-Laws,” *Maine Farmer*, (1844-1900), 17.6; Feb. 8 1849.

⁷⁹ Edward Elder Cooper, “COLORPHOBIA,” *The Colored American*, Jul. 13, 1839.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

the source of fear, such as black people, it seemed more logical to treat those showing symptoms. Drying up the world's entire water supply is not only impossible but also ridiculous. Instead of harshly treating the source of fear, an easier cure would be treating the black population with kindness and civility, and by embracing abolitionism. Once someone infected became an abolitionist, they would be cured of their malady, and find the idea of colonization as utterly unacceptable.

The National Era, another abolitionist newspaper, printed a letter written to a doctor by "T" in 1847. T requested a weekly supply of the doctor's "valuable panacea" for an entire year to soothe their ailment—colorphobia.⁸¹ T wrote, "Many of my friends, who have tried your remedy for certain moral and political diseases, pronounce it one of the best and safest medicines ever..."⁸² The medicine sought gave an adverse effect on racially prejudiced whites once taken. "—when they have tried the remedy, in almost every case, (and some of them very obstinate ones,) the disease has been entirely cured or its influence very much weakened – particularly where the medicine has regularly been taken and the *directions* strictly regarded."⁸³ Within the letter T compared colorphobia to hydrophobia. The author insisted the medicine caused reactions similar to rabies. "Some, after taking a few doses, exhibit considerable nervous excitement – a slight shuddering – and short, rather incoherent *mutterings*."⁸⁴ Eventually, racially prejudiced individuals adjusted to the medicine and found themselves cured. Those who suffered from colorphobia longer endured more violent reactions to the medicine, just as those with hydrophobia grew worse as the disease raged within their bodies. They suffered from convulsions, attempted destroying the medicine, and caused mischief or became a public

⁸¹ T, "ALBANY, (N.Y.)," *The National Era*, Aug, 19, 1847.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

nuisance.⁸⁵ The medicine T sought was exposure to abolitionism and acceptance of immediatism. Those with colorphobia needed repeat exposure to abolitionist ideology. Over time, T, like other abolitionists, thought the individual would see right from wrong and adopt abolitionism.

Steps for Successfully Using Colorphobia

As reports of racial prejudice increased so did abolitionist use of colorphobia. *The Anti-Slavery Record* printed perhaps the first article tackling colorphobia in 1835. While the article's title used colorphobia explicitly, the term did not appear in the body of the text. The abolitionist press commonly adopted this practice for encouraging the interchangeable use of "colorphobia" and "racial prejudice," and for also inferring that colorphobia caused any racially prejudiced event. Abolitionist C. Stuart wrote the editor of the newspaper regarding a conversation he partook in near Buffalo, New York as he traveled. While in their seats, he and another man started a conversation regarding the beauty of "color in the white ladies." Regarding color Stuart claimed, "But it matters not—the question is insignificant. Mere color has neither good nor evil in it: it is a physical circumstance, like difference in beauty, height, &c."⁸⁶ This claim caused the fellow traveler to disagree, in which he argued, "Not so, for the Africans are black, and are inferior to us—they are certainly of a lower race."⁸⁷

Their conversation continued in much the same manner. Stuart defended black people while the other man's views held. Stuart also claimed that mankind originated from one blood from God, black people were equal or perhaps even better to white people, and that black men belonged in America.⁸⁸ Stuart argued that if black people were sent back to Africa as part of the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ C. Stuart, "COLORPHOBIA," *The Anti-Slavery Record*, May 1835.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ For more information on the "Of One Blood" argument see; Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

colonization movement, then white people must in turn be sent back to the European countries. Their conversation ended when Stuart brought out his Bible, and read him *The New Testament* by quoting *Acts*' "And hath made of one blood, &c."⁸⁹ Stuart's conversation revealed a stranger suffering from colorphobia who seemed normal upon first encounter, while simultaneously revealing many motivations of radical abolitionists. They fought against colonization, believed in black equality, disapproved of notions of white superiority and racial inferiority, and thought color did not prove someone's character. All of these topics were eventually understood and attacked through the lens of colorphobia. By reporting on the man's racial prejudice, abolitionists not only revealed their goals and viewpoints, but also sought alienation of colorphobics from the population, and shamed them into leaving behind their racially prejudiced ways.

For successful use of colorphobia in their reform agenda, abolitionists took a series of steps for establishing and legitimizing it in the public realm. Abolitionists defined the disease, explained what caused it, diagnosed it, found a cure, and continuously reported on it for maximum exposure. While Stuart's report on colorphobia revealed various abolitionist topics and goals, other reports focused more specifically on explaining the disease and tracing its roots. In 1838, *The Herald of Freedom*, a Connecticut newspaper published by white abolitionist Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, published "COLOR-PHOBIAS." Rogers viewed colorphobia as "fouler than Old Testament leprosy," and the article established a solid foundation for abolitionist use of disease agitation.⁹⁰ Rogers reported:

Our people have got it. They have got it in the blue, collapse stage. Many of them have got it so bad, they can't get well. They will die of it. It will be a mercy, if the nation does not. What a dignified, philosophic malady! Dread of complexion.⁹¹

⁸⁹ C. Stuart, "COLORPHOBIA."

⁹⁰ Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, "COLOR-PHOBIAS," *The Herald of Freedom*, Nov. 10, 1838.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Colorphobia threatened the death of those infected like other epidemics. Americans suffering from colorphobia “in the blue, collapse stage” references cholera and its final symptom.⁹² Often cholera was referenced as “blue cholera” or “blue death,” because many died with bluish skin hues from dehydration. Likening colorphobia to cholera became part of the abolitionist tactic of legitimizing and spreading fear of colorphobia. Colorphobia seemed natural to Americans in a society of racial caste and malicious feelings towards black people even though it was unnatural, because, “It was injected into their veins and *incided* into their systems, by old Doctor Slavery.”⁹³ Therefore, a preventative for colorphobia became the adoption of anti-slavery or abolitionism. Rogers claimed, “It is a safe preventive and a certain cure. None that have it, genuine, ever catch slavery or colonization or the color-phobia.”⁹⁴ Once a man, woman, or child is cured or inoculated through abolitionism, they will never contract colorphobia from others. Rogers implied the danger and easy spread of the disease by claiming that a white person could catch colorphobia just by being near a racially prejudice person, or by staying in a space where colorphobics had stayed if not inoculated. “An abolitionist can sleep safely all night in a closed room, where there has been a colonization meeting the day before.”⁹⁵

How did abolitionists diagnose the disease? Witnessing a public attack or a sudden fit of racial prejudice seemed to be the only successful way. For example, a nameless individual in Westfield, Massachusetts suffered an abrupt attack at the sight of a black man, and his accompanying friends struggled to subdue him.

Many of the symptoms manifested themselves most unequivocally. It especially appears from the evidence, that he had a quite unusual dread of coming in contact with persons of a certain color. Yellow, if from an attack of jaundice, he was not peculiarly affected by, but

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

if from a natural hereditary cause, his alarm and uneasiness were very great. The darker the color, the greater was his dread. While the white man suffered through his attack, accompanying friends attempted to subdue and reassure him he was safe. The man he was afraid of was “by no means such a frightful object – that he was in fact, quite a harmless, clever sort of a fellow, - but all to no purpose.”⁹⁶

While his friends easily recognized the man’s colorphobia, diagnosing those infected did not always go so easily. Editors Benjamin S. Jones and J. Elizabeth Jones of *The Anti-Slavery Bugle* reported, “The diagnosis of this disease is a difficult study, as its symptoms are sometimes of the most contradictory character, and break out at the most unexpected times and places.”⁹⁷ A person with colorphobia might sit next to someone on the train or at the local theater, and the uninfected could have no idea the person next to them is diseased unless a black man, woman, or child suddenly appeared. According to Frederick Douglass, some obvious symptoms accompanying an attack were “the hand clenched, head shaking, teeth grating, hysteric yells and horrid imprecation.”⁹⁸ All of these symptoms revealed that the man or woman suffering from the disease appeared normal one moment, and then seemingly quite mad the next. Losing control of muscles, strange contortions, and unusual behaviors looked remarkably similar to those with cholera-phobia and hydrophobia.

Another way of describing colorphobia could be accomplished by simply mentioning racial prejudice and its unfairness. Charles Remond at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in 1848 referred to prejudice against color, or colorphobia, as being not only prevalent, but “as being unkind, unmanly, and predicated upon much that is false.”⁹⁹ Other than personal opinions, reports displayed its madness. A report by Frederick Douglass on colorphobia

⁹⁶ J.D., “Colorphobia, - A Discovery.,” *The North Star*, Apr. 27, 1849.

⁹⁷ Benjamin S. Jones, J. Elizabeth Jones, “Colorphobia.,” *The Anti-slavery Bugle*, Aug. 27, 1847.

⁹⁸ Frederick Douglass, “COLORPHOBIA IN NEW YORK!,” *The North Star*, May 25, 1849.

⁹⁹ William Cooper Nell, “New England Anti-Slavery Convention,” *The North Star*, Jun. 23, 1848.

in New York in 1849 suggested that, “The streets were literally crowded with persons of all classes afflicted with this terrible malady.” Referred to as an epidemic, colorphobia seemed to be everywhere a person looked. Those “at a distance of thirty or forty yards, appeared the very pictures of health, were found, on a nearer approach, most horribly cut and marred.”¹⁰⁰ Although the physical symptoms varied, the mental symptoms of colorphobia remained the same.

Douglass commented on the ruined state of mind of whites by stating:

Monsters, goblins, demons, snakes, lizards and scorpions - all that was foul, strange and loathsome - seized upon their bewildered imaginations. Pointing with outstretched arm towards us, its victims would exclaim, as if startled by some terrible sight - "Look! look!" "Where?" "Ah, what?" "Why?" "Why, don't you see?" "See what?" "Why, that BLACK! BLACK! *black!*" Then, with eyes turned up in horror, they would exclaim in the most unearthly manner, and start off in a furious gallop - running all around us, and gazing at us, as if they would read our very hearts. The whole scene was deeply afflicting and terrible.¹⁰¹

Uncontrollable pointing and shouting over free blacks in public space caused white people mental anguish and revulsion. They lost control over their words and actions from the mere presence of black people. Whether the prejudiced displayed physical or mental symptoms, they were easily spotted upon interacting with black persons in non-subservient positions. Free blacks going about their business unsettled white people. Like those with cholera and hydrophobia, racially prejudiced minds lacked the ability of control and discretion.

The cause of colorphobia clearly appeared in abolitionist writings and speeches. Slavery and its establishment of racial hierarchy became the underlying cause of colorphobia. Slavery created and fostered stereotypes and prejudiced ways of thinking about the black population, while similar feelings of racial prejudice in the North allowed for the continuance of slavery based on the color of a population's skin. By curing colorphobia, the cruel and unusual

¹⁰⁰ Frederick Douglass, “COLORPHOBIA IN NEW YORK!”

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

institution of slavery would completely crumble in America. Charles Remond at the Anti-Slavery Convention claimed abolition would end colorphobia once and for all, while William Lloyd Garrison wrote “American Colorphobia” in 1847 to argue about the injustice of slavery and how the system encouraged racial prejudice. The system of slavery created complexional caste, which became a way to ensure slavery’s survival. Immediate emancipation served as the best cure for colorphobia. Garrison wrote that, “the slave Power is continually growing weaker,” and as it continues to weaken, colorphobia logically should too.¹⁰² However, as seen in the North, colorphobia grew stronger the more the free population grew. As they more frequently deployed colorphobia radical abolitionists came to understand that eliminating slavery and preaching of its immorality would not fully cure the North of its racial prejudice. Immediate emancipation combined with the establishment of equal rights would effectively cure the disease.

Lastly, like with any disease, abolitionists had to decide on who the *real* victims of racial prejudice were. Immigrants and black people served as the scapegoats of cholera and mad dogs spread hydrophobia—but what about colorphobia? Douglass’ report on colorphobia in New York revealed his stance on victims of colorphobia. He thought the racially prejudiced deserved pity with their delusions and frightening symptoms.¹⁰³ Some abolitionists sought to assign blame, but one by the initials “J.D.” went so far as to wonder whether or not to despise those with colorphobia or pity them. Fear and violent side effects tormented those with colorphobia, and if someone witnessed an attack, one might logically find pity for their circumstances. However, *J.D.*, writing for *The North Star*, argued otherwise:

But then, when we consider that this is the result of ignorance –
ignorance of the most deplorable description, which they might, if
they had chosen, have prevented – our pity becomes, in some

¹⁰² William Lloyd Garrison, “American Colorphobia,” *The Liberator*, Jun. 11, 1847.

¹⁰³ Frederick Douglass, “Colorphobia in New York! The fifth of May will long be remembered,” *The North Star*, May 25, 1849.

degree, modified by an admixture of contempt. Besides the ignorance, there is always a certain degree of meanness attaching to the disposition of the man who suffers from this malady. The man of noble and refined sentiments, and warm, generous sensibilities, is never thus afflicted.¹⁰⁴

J.D. suggested that since colorphobia could be avoided by becoming an abolitionist, there remained no reason for pitying those with it. By not inoculating oneself against the disease, the white population left themselves susceptible to infection. The “man of noble and refined sentiments” is thus an abolitionist, and is free from worrying about developing the debilitating malady. Lobbying for rights, immediate emancipation, and curing the North instead of pitying those who never would have developed the disease had they become anti-slavery oriented seemed like time better spent.

Preventing Colorphobia

While comparisons of disease and colorphobia occurred, and individuals sought a cure, abolitionists also searched for ways to prevent colorphobia. Proper education for children proved vital. Abolitionists applied the early nineteenth-century penchant for moral education as a means of disease prevention. Female abolitionists found themselves especially concerned with the upcoming generation. As the future of the country, children had to learn about the evils of slavery and racial prejudice to stop colorphobia. One female abolitionist referenced to as Mrs. Griffing spoke to mothers of young children during an abolitionist meeting at New Market. She encouraged mothers of all ages to “make their children Anti-Slavery; from their very infancy, to imbue them with the sentiments and practice of kindness and love towards the sorrowful and unfortunate everywhere.”¹⁰⁵ Inoculation against disease at any age became of dire importance. Anti-Slavery indoctrination ensured the end of racial prejudice in the United States.

¹⁰⁴ J.D., “*Colorphobia – Who are its Victims?*,” *The North Star*, Oct. 6, 1848.

¹⁰⁵ C.F.P., “Meetings at New Market, Massillon, and Akron,” *The Anti-slavery Bugle*, Oct. 4, 1851.

Raising children in proper anti-slavery environments became key for prevention. Colorphobia lacked a biological root to the disease; it was learned from the surrounding social environment. *The Anti-slavery Bugle* in 1846 published a report by C.F.P. arguing about the racial innocence of children, and that racial prejudice originated from outside influences. In Franklin County a colorphobia-free female teacher oversaw a classroom in a district school full of all white students except for one young black boy. The teacher had yet “learnt to construct a scale or privileges from the color of the skin, any more from that of the hair, but verily believed that of one blood God had made all nations.”¹⁰⁶ Because of this the teacher allowed the boy to intermingle with the white children. His classmates had also not been instilled with racial prejudice yet to “scent out his inferiority, treated him as one of their own species.”¹⁰⁷ The teacher encouraged their interactions by allowing the black student to sit, stand, and play with the white students, “just as though he were a human being, and had no infectious or contagious disease about him.”¹⁰⁸ By doing so she hoped to prevent the children from developing colorphobia as they aged.

By fostering a non-prejudiced environment, children in classrooms would learn to not be racially prejudice. Children are not born with hate, fear of black people, or fear of disease. If abolitionists, like the teacher, could instill abolitionism and anti-slavery views within the new generation in the United States early on, then colorphobia could disappear. Colorphobia developed from environmental and social factors rather than a virus or bacteria. The only cure could come from changing the society that spawned it. The newest generation could be saved, and in turn save the future of America.

¹⁰⁶ C.F.P., “From the Worcester County Gazette. Toassant L’Overture,” *The Anti-slavery Bugle*, Aug. 28, 1846.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

While allowing white children to play with black children in an environment free of racial prejudice at school combated colorphobia and instilled values of equality, abolitionists sought an even more effective way of teaching youth about the perils and ills of slavery through writing about it in children books. Elizabeth J. Jones published a book in 1848 through the Anti-Slavery Office in Boston entitled, *The Young Abolitionists, or, Conversations on Slavery*. Written for children old enough to read on their own, the story followed a northern white family concerned with instilling abolitionist values in their children. The book consisted of twelve short chapters of different events that touched on abolitionism and abolitionist interests experienced through the children.

The first chapter centered on young Charlie Selden who desired to attend an abolitionist meeting. Charlie first inquired about whom abolitionists were, and his mother responded that an abolitionist “is one who is endeavoring to liberate the slaves, my dear.”¹⁰⁹ Confused about slavery, Charlie asked whether or not their house servant was a slave. His mother quickly explained the difference between slave labor and free labor by explaining that Bidy received good pay and had the option of seeking employment elsewhere. Jones filled the rest of the chapter with other abolitionist concerns regarding the black population, such as education, humanity, and cruelty. The following chapters explored abolitionist themes like religion and freedom, and traced the evolution of the Selden children into abolitionists. By the twelfth and final chapter, Charlie’s mother talked to him about slaves obtaining freedom and the challenges abolitionists continuously faced, like meetinghouses being burned, and personal property being vandalized and destroyed.¹¹⁰ Through explaining the evils of slavery and abolitionism,

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth J. Jones, *The Young Abolitionists, or, Conversations on Slavery* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849), 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

abolitionists hoped children would adopt abolitionist values and ideas early on, and inoculate themselves against colorphobia before racial prejudice became an issue in their lives.

Another book published on the evils of slavery was Abel Thomas' *Gospel of Slavery: A Primer of Freedom*. Concerned with race relations during the Civil War, Thomas created an illustrated A-to-Z in 1864 explaining the wrongs of slavery and sketches depicting what each letter stood for. When children reached the letter "F" they found the word "fugitives" and a picture showing what fugitive slaves endured.¹¹¹ Images were extremely important to Thomas' work, because most children learn better through pictures. Reading and listening to stories about slaves and the immorality of slavery served a purpose, but visualization impacted children more thoroughly and encouraged them into adopting abolition—especially in the free North.

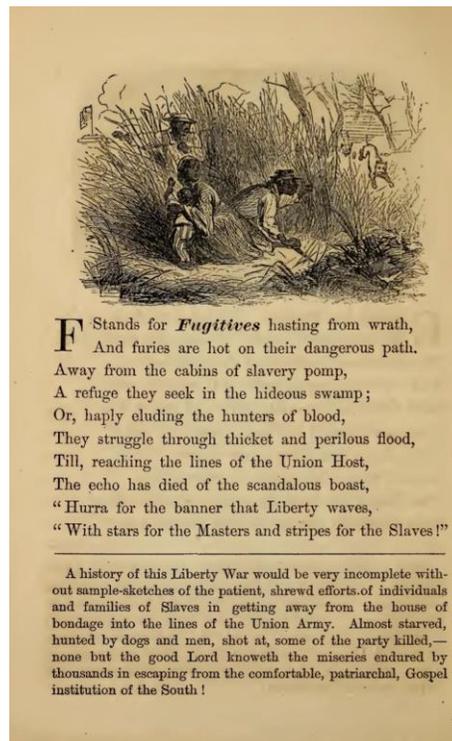


Image 3: Letter "F" in Abel Thomas' *Gospel of Slavery: A Primer of Freedom*.

¹¹¹ Abel Thomas, *Gospel of Slavery: A Primer of Freedom* (New York: T.W. Strong, 1864), 8.

Early childhood prevention and education through abolitionist writings and educational tactics created the opportunity for ending colorphobia in the newest generation. However, infected white parents and communally active adults fought over segregated schooling, equal education, and educational opportunities. Schools and education received massive attention from abolitionists in regards to educational reform, as well as instances of colorphobia preventing black children from receiving an equal education. Arguments over children and their learning environment complicated the hope of childhood inoculation. Accomplishing early childhood prevention became much harder than radical abolitionists first imagined.

Chapter 2

Deploying Colorphobia

On July 19, 1839 white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison reprinted an article from the *Lynn Record* about the newly adopted “colorphobia” in his newspaper. The *Lynn Record*’s publisher James Buffum wrote that colorphobia “signifies *dread of color* as applied to the human species; and what seems strange, is much more prevalent at the North than the South.”¹¹² In the North white persons balked at the idea or sight of black individuals riding in the same carriage or sharing the same dining area on a steamboat. Yet Buffum argued that, “On the contrary, nothing is more provoking to the slaveholders themselves, than to exclude their colored servants from the inside of stage coaches, as is the villainous practice in New England.”¹¹³ Buffum gave a basic definition of the disease, and showed the irrationality of it existing in the North when even southern slaveholders held no qualms about slaves sharing the same public space. When abolitionists deployed colorphobia, they typically started with basic commentary about the state of racial prejudice in society and followed with an example of a colorphobic incident. They then used the incident as a tool to critique society and encourage reform.

Buffum’s critique displayed the irrationality, hypocrisy, and ridiculousness of colorphobia with an example from the previous Fourth of July. One Massachusetts railway teemed with such an overabundance of passengers on the patriotic holiday that lack of seating quickly became problematic. However, one entire train car remained empty except for one person—a black gentleman sitting alone “whose dark skin had frightened away the *delicate* whites.” With train cars so overcrowded Buffum believed it illogical that white passengers did not ride in an open car. Such behavior on Independence Day illustrated the nonsensical aspect

¹¹² James Buffum, “Colorphobia,” *The Liberator*, Jul. 19, 1839.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

and hypocrisy of colorphobia. Countless numbers of people sought public transportation to Boston, but because a black man resided in a car they refused transportation. Only when white men free of colorphobia sought transportation did the car fill up. Buffum further declared, “Albeit, there were men of Independence in Lynn, who were then going to hear and celebrate the Declaration, ‘that all men are born free and equal, and have certain inalienable rights,’ whose principles were *more* than skin deep, and who did not hesitate to occupy these very acceptable vacant seats. How very shallow is pride!”¹¹⁴ On a day where Americans celebrated their independence and values, they failed in caring that a large portion of their population lacked the same equal rights. Colorphobia, or racial prejudice, kept white Americans from giving the black population natural rights they felt the Declaration of Independence guaranteed.

This chapter shows how abolitionists deployed colorphobia, and argues that it became a tactic used mostly by black abolitionists for the promotion of equal rights, fair treatment, and advancement of their race. Reports on colorphobia appeared in white and black abolitionist newspapers alike during the 1830s. White abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison lent support by reprinting articles and letters dealing with the term, writing pieces themselves, or by speaking about it. However, as using colorphobia became more popular in the following decades black abolitionists dominated the conversation. Black abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, William Cooper Nell, William Wells Brown, and James McCune Smith concerned themselves most with the spread of colorphobia throughout northern cities because it negatively impacted their lives. White abolitionists denounced the disease, but they did not suffer at the hands of prejudiced individuals in the same way as the black population. The black population met insults, discrimination, and even violence on a daily basis in public space. Black advancement remained impossible with racial prejudice blocking black men, women, and children from every direction.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

The future of the African American drove black abolitionists into an intellectual battle sometimes fueled by civil disobedience measures as the black population remained victims of racial hierarchy and white supremacy.

Yet not all freedmen in the North felt the same about confronting racial status quos and facing the consequences. The year before Garrison reprinted Buffum's article on colorphobia he relayed a quick piece of commentary on the disease. Anonymous abolitionist *Herald of Freedom* claimed, "Dark complexioned people are said to be peculiarly hostile to anti-slavery—and there is a good deal of truth in it. You find men—and women too—of such sable complexion that you would expect them to feel personally interested in the success of the enterprise and they are bitterness and colorphobia personified."¹¹⁵ Parts of the black population, afraid of the ramifications of battling racial prejudice, bristled at just the mention of colorphobia. As Frederick Douglass would soon discover, much of the northern black population seemed hesitant about changing their social status in the United States during the 1800s. But black abolitionists served as "many honorable exceptions to this rule—but be careful of talking anti-slavery in very *dark-white* company."¹¹⁶ Whether or not the general black population approved of using colorphobia, it appeared more frequently in the 1840s and 1850s as black abolitionists displayed racially prejudiced episodes in newspapers and critiqued all realms of public space—transportation, businesses, clubs, organizations, entertainment, churches and religion, morality, education, and even black advancement and betterment.

Colorphobia & Public Space:
Late 1830s-1860s

Public Transportation

¹¹⁵ *Herald of Freedom*, "Dark Complexioned People," *The Liberator*, Jul. 6, 1838.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

“The Alida Outrage,” “Another Development of Colorphobia,” “Colorphobia on a City Railroad,” and other article titles referencing racially prejudiced occurrences on segregated public transportation jumped out at readers of abolitionist newspapers beginning mostly in the 1840s. Mistreatment of African Americans by white men and women due to exclusionist practices occurred on railroads, steamboats, carriages, and omnibuses in northern cities on a daily basis. The North instituted segregation to keep black people separated from white Americans in public space. Segregation impacted life in various ways. For example, in Massachusetts “as late as 1843 Negroes were forbidden to marry whites; they were segregated in the churches, where they occupied the ‘Negro Pew’; they were confined to the most menial occupations; they could not attend the same schools as white children—in Boston this situation continued into 1855; they were segregated on stagecoaches, railroads and steamboats.”¹¹⁷ As a result, reports of famous and non-famous abolitionists alike experiencing or witnessing colorphobia on public transportation commonly graced the pages of abolitionist newspapers. Focusing on two transportation lines allows for a better understanding of the impact of colorphobia on the black population and its use as a reform tactic. The first case study looks at colorphobia on the Eastern Railroad in Massachusetts and the impact of fame and public support; and the second observes potential economic gains of steamboat Oregon for practicing non-colorphobic business operations and promotion by the abolitionist press.

In 1839 Theodore Dwight Weld claimed that white men and women holding prejudice against black people happened to be of the “vulgar” variety. Vulgarity flourished in the New England area with churchgoers, merchants, businessmen, and the poor suffering from colorphobia. Even men of substantial wealth and premiere social standing could not escape racial

¹¹⁷ Louis Ruchames, “Jim Crow Railroads in Massachusetts,” *American Quarterly*, (Spring 1956), 8.1, 61-75. 61.

prejudice—especially those connected to the Eastern Railroad. Surrounded by such a vulgar public and having multiple accounts of racially prejudiced treatment on the Eastern Railroad, abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld asked readers of *The Emancipator*, “Are the directors of the eastern railroad vulgar people that they direct colored men to be turned neck and heels out of their passage cars!”¹¹⁸ Three years prior to Weld’s assertion in 1836 Stephen A. Chase, serving as superintendent, established the Eastern Railroad in Boston. The line extended “at first from Boston to Salem and later reaching the New Hampshire border; the New Bedford and Taunton trunk line; and the Boston and Providence Railroad.”¹¹⁹

The naming of the “colored car” and the attention received from the Eastern Railroad’s treatment of Frederick Douglass made Massachusetts’s segregation different in comparison to other states. In 1838 a letter written to the *Massachusetts Spy* referred to the car as “the dirt car.”¹²⁰ Three years later in 1841 the term “Jim Crow” car appeared from the prejudiced idea that black men, women, and children were inferior and ignorant. The term originated from a popular song and dance routine created by Thomas D. Rice in which a white person imitated black persons.¹²¹ The term caught on, and became popularly used for referencing segregated cars and eventually other public spaces. A year prior to Douglass’ ordeal on the Eastern Railroad Garrison reported on two black men by the names of Thomas Jinnings and David Ruggles (the latter an abolitionist) facing eviction on two separate railroad cars in 1840. Ruggles, who sustained torn clothing, loss of personal items, and injury sued for reparations but lost in a prejudiced court system.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Mass. Abolitionist, “The Vulgar,” *The Emancipator*, Nov. 21, 1839.

¹¹⁹ Louis Ruchames, “Jim Crow Railroads in Massachusetts,” 62.

¹²⁰ Reprinted in *The Liberator*, VIII, Dec. 14, 1838.

¹²¹ Louis Ruchames, “Jim Crow Railroads in Massachusetts,” 62.

¹²² Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2016), 327.

On the morning of October 13, 1841 subscribers to the *Christian Reflector* read about an ordeal that occurred on the Eastern Railroad similar to those suffered by Jinnings and Ruggles. An abolitionist writing under the name *Free American* revealed the immoral and racially prejudiced business practices of the Eastern Railroad from its unequal and violent treatment towards black passengers. *Free American* wrote, “We are glad to see that the Eastern Railroad, which has long been laboring under the first stages of colorphobia, has reached a crisis in the disease. In other words, it has taken consistent and thorough pro-slavery ground.”¹²³ Conductors were known for physically handling and violently dragging away black passengers in the 1830s, so what was new about the company’s actions? What had prompted such a “crisis in the disease?” The unjust treatment towards the most influential black individual of the antebellum period served as the event that finally caused *Free American* to write such an article.

One morning in Boston, Frederick Douglass boarded an Eastern Railroad car with fellow abolitionist John A. Collins and the two friends sat together—even though black people were supposed to ride in third-class. Collins believed that since they traveled together and paid the same ticket price Douglass should instead sit with him in the white car. By sitting in a non-third-class seat Douglass instigated a violent confrontation—which commonly occurred on public transportation in similar scenarios. Moments after sitting, railroad workers confronted Collins and Douglass over their seating arrangements and seized both men. The same day Collins and Douglass found themselves roughly handled by the Eastern Railroad Company another man faced similar treatment. The younger man took his seat and the conductor “on seeing him, without saying a word to him, brought him six stout men, and ordered them to put him out.”¹²⁴ Several other white passengers protested such violent treatment and found themselves kicked off

¹²³ Free American, “General Intelligence.: Who Shall Ride?,” *Christian Reflector*, Oct. 13, 1841.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

the railcar with the black man. Three of them, one a doctor and another a bishop, sustained injuries. Even prominent, successful white men lacked immunity from white workers mad with colorphobia.

Two days after the report of the Eastern Railroad's behavior towards John A. Collins and Frederick Douglass, Garrison published a letter from Collins giving a firsthand account of the ordeal in *The Liberator*. Collins wrote Garrison to relay the incident to other abolitionists, shed light on a morally corrupt company, condemn it and its workers for spreading racial prejudice, and for revealing the hypocritical nature of American Christianity. Collins claimed, "Never was there a more malicious and hyena-like spirit exhibited by any body of men than by the servants of this company, who are acting under the orders and command of Stephen A. Chase, the Superintendent—who, by the way, is an influential member of the Society of Friends, of the orthodox school."¹²⁵ Already within the first paragraph of the letter Collins revealed one of America's glaring hypocrisies. How could a country harbor such morally corrupt individuals when it claimed it to be predominantly Christian? The answer seemed simple to abolitionists—American Christianity teemed with racial prejudice that ruined religious ideals, values, and morals. Its corruption encouraged poor treatment towards black persons. To Collins, Chase's Quakerism seemed extremely problematic because of Quaker history regarding slavery.

Quakers became the first religious group that denounced slavery in Europe and American Quakers similarly adopted anti-slavery values. Historians have argued over whether or not Quakers worried purely about the morality of enslaving a fellow human being or also simultaneously served selfish economic interests. According to historian Thomas Bender, economic self-interest spurred the rise of anti-slavery, and Quakers served as the premiere

¹²⁵ John A. Collins, "Communications.: Eastern Rail-Road—Colorphobia—Lynch Law—Robery—Quakerism," *The Liberator*, Oct. 15, 1841.

example of the connection between capitalism and anti-slavery values. Being barred from jobs of influence and prestige in Britain and America led Quakers to careers of moneymaking, such as mining, banking, and shipping.¹²⁶ Forced into jobs focused solely on profiting, Quakers grew concerned with factory labor. To legitimize factory wage labor slavery had to end. Quakers profited both morally and financially through abolitionism by freeing mankind from bondage while opening up the market's labor force. The damaging effects on religion are displayed by Chase's support for racially prejudiced actions even though he was a Quaker. Even the most religious individual or person from a religious background lacked immunity from colorphobia.

After Collins pointed out Chase's contradictory character he explained what happened. After buying tickets for passage to Dover, New Hampshire for the Stafford Anti-Slavery Meeting Collins and Douglass sat together. Collins claimed, "No sooner were we seated, than the conductor made his appearance, and peremptorily ordered Douglass to leave, and to take his seat in the forward car; meaning the 'Jim Crow,' though he felt ashamed to call it by that name."¹²⁷ Collins figured protesting would be in vain, but since no white person around them had complained he assisted Douglass in a show of civil disobedience. Collins stayed put and kept the conductor from removing Douglass but approximately five other railroad workers were called upon for assistance. Collins sustained injuries from the tussle and Douglass' clothes tore from being tossed into the Jim Crow car. The conductor returned and reprimanded Collins' support of black protest while a second conductor sought out Douglass. The second conductor declared that, "This rule of the Directors can't be so bad, for the *churches*, you know, have their 'negro

¹²⁶ Thomas Bender, *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). 48.

¹²⁷ John A. Collins, "Communications.: Eastern Rail-Road—Colorphobia—Lynch Law—Robery—Quakerism."

pews.”¹²⁸ An Eastern Railroad employee further revealed the absurdity of American Christianity by pointing out segregation in church and unfair treatment towards religious brethren. If moral institutions separated black Americans from white congregations, why could public transportation not do the same? According to abolitionists, racial prejudice corrupted religion, and as it spread throughout churches no public space remained safe from its influence.

A third abolitionist traveling with Collins and Douglass supplied his account of what happened to *The Colored American*. Writing under the initials of G.F., the man claimed they were headed for the Strafford Anti-Slavery Meeting after a successful meeting in Boston the previous evening. The three had only been seated for a few moments when a railroad worker entered the “Jim Crow” car, where G.F. resided, and exclaimed he was not dark enough for a second-class seat.¹²⁹ G.F., whose skin color was not confirmed in his letter, reluctantly made his way to one of the white cars after challenging segregation standards. As the battle over segregated public transportation continued over the years it became more common for abolitionists, whether alone or with a friend, to board trains and challenge seating arrangements. After G.F. found his seat the conductor of the “white cars,” a Mr. Bancroft, immediately approached Douglass. While Bancroft insisted Douglass move to the Jim Crow car on account of company policy, other railroad workers surrounded him in an attempt of intimidation. The men tossed Douglass into the “cage for black folks” with a curse and highly disturbed the white passengers. One gentleman visiting from the South, shocked by the flagrant display of colorphobia, shared with G.F. that his wife had not witnessed such a sight on another railroad. Having a southerner complain about black treatment hopefully helped shame more northern abolitionists into addressing and curing colorphobia. When comparing Douglass’ irrational

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ G.F., “A Shameful Deed,” *The Colored American*, Oct. 30, 1841.

treatment on the railroad to the kindness he had received at the meeting mere hours prior, G.F. concluded that Douglass fell victim to the disease. Not only did the railroad workers suffer from colorphobia, but they also specifically targeted Douglass and Collins, because they were “‘damned abolitionists’ and traveled in interracial groups.”¹³⁰

The mistreatment of Frederick Douglass added greatly to the company’s history of colorphobia. But who was Frederick Douglass, and why was he so instrumental for ending racial prejudice and segregation practices on public transportation? Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Talbot County, Maryland around the year 1818.¹³¹ He spent much of his time enslaved in Baltimore before he fled to the North. Douglass worked under William Lloyd Garrison before establishing his newspaper *The North Star* (which would come to be known as *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*). Douglass became well known for his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* funded by abolitionists. Not only did he have a narrative, newspaper, and an autobiography by 1845, but he also spent time abroad in England and Ireland on a speaking tour. Douglass’ publications, tours, and continuous critiquing of American society made him one of the most famous men in America regardless of color. Reporting on colorphobia outbreaks involving Douglass became useful for two reasons. The first reason showed that no matter how respectable and established a black person might be mistreatment would continue unless white Americans were cured. Second, having a famous name involved brought more attention to racial prejudice. Anyone reading about the article would know the individual, whether personally or by name, and would feel more connected to the incident. Colorphobia turned into a more dire concern if a person could connect to someone affected by it.

¹³⁰ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition*, 327.

¹³¹ For information on Frederick Douglass and his life, see: Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: His early life as a slave, his escape from bondage, and his complete history* (Boston: Massachusetts, DE Wolfe & Fiske Co, 1845).

While portraying Douglass as a victim of colorphobia had its benefits for the abolitionist community, the treatment he received from the Eastern Railroad influenced his critiques on public transportation. Douglass endured harsh treatment on various modes of transportation and from different companies, yet he viewed the Eastern Railroad as the worst perpetrator. In his autobiography Douglass penned:

My treatment in the use of public conveyances at these times was extremely rough, especially on the Eastern railroad from Boston to Portland. On that road, as many others, there was a mean, dirty and uncomfortable car set apart for colored travellers, called the 'Jim Crow' car. Regarding this as the fruit of slave-holding prejudice, and being determined to fight the spirit of slavery wherever I might find it, I resolved to avoid this car, though it sometimes required some courage to do so.¹³²

Not all black men and women felt comfortable with rebelling against Jim Crow cars and segregationist policies. Douglass commented that most free blacks accepted their assigned seating and believed confrontation only made matters worse. He, like other black abolitionists, knew that bowing down to racially prejudiced demands and rules only reinforced and spread colorphobia further. Whether he faced expulsion from the company's car or physical violence, Douglass knew combating colorphobia through black resistance remained much more important than whatever injuries he sustained. Douglass' rebuttal against the railroad's segregated seating spurred a drastic response from superintendent Chase. Douglass wrote, "The result was that Stephen A. Chase, superintendent of the road, ordered all passenger trains to pass through Lynn (where I then lived) without stopping."¹³³ Other passengers and businesses suffered in Lynn from trains no longer stopping, but the community supported Douglass' actions and denounced Chase's line.

¹³² Frederick Douglass, "Frederick Douglass," *Michigan Farmer*, Jul. 27, 1886.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

The town's newspaper, the *Lynn Record*, displayed its support for Douglass and its anger towards the Eastern Railroad with a scathing article written by R.S. The journalist questioned the company's right over controlling seating of "free citizens" and what could be done about it. He wrote, "If the corporation will persist in enforcing this regulation, an appeal to the Legislature should be made, not by the colored race themselves, but by every white person who feels the insult offered to his species by their attempt to degrade his fellow-man on account of his complexion."¹³⁴ Even though the community of Lynn stood together on the issue of car segregation, Chase refused the abolishment of the Jim Crow car. Chase instead catered to individuals with prejudiced tendencies reflective of the railroad's directors. Petitions and meetings by abolitionists held over the Eastern Railroad's treatment of black riders garnered statewide support and sympathy from the public.¹³⁵ Even though Douglass did not achieve his desired results of unsegregated seating he did elicit a radical response. Chase's reaction proved that white people grew intimidated by black resistance, and it further encouraged Douglass' activist attempts and outward encouragement for reform.

Douglass did not only serve as an important figure in the abolitionist press from experiencing colorphobia firsthand. He also relayed reports and used them for encouraging racial reform in his own newspaper. For example, in 1855 in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* he published an incident of colorphobia regarding a wealthy black businessman. Thomas Downing of Rochester, New York found himself nearly expelled from a railroad car. Downing, a well-to-do and well-known man, had a reputation in the community of outstanding character. Downing made his money and built his status through selling oysters.¹³⁶ One evening one of his female customers asked Downing for assistance in mailing letters and he agreed. Together they entered

¹³⁴ R.S., "Distinction of Color in Rail-Road Cars," *The Liberator*, Oct. 1, 1841.

¹³⁵ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2016), 327.

¹³⁶ "COLORPHOBIA ON A CITY RAILROAD," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Oct. 5, 1855.

a city railroad car but the conductor disliked their presence and threatened to kick them off. Downing told the conductor they had letters to deliver and refused. Downing reported, “Then two or three gentlemen, who sat opposite us, told us to sit still, as the conductor had no right to put us out, as we had as much right to ride as they had.”¹³⁷ The ride continued with threats from the conductor of getting the police but other passengers who recognized him defended Downing and his companion. When the conductor refused to let Downing out at his desired stop as a form of retaliation, a white gentleman requested for him and the three passengers exited the car. Like Douglass, Downing was a self-made and widely known black man in Rochester in the 1850s. Even with an outstanding reputation he became the target of racial prejudice. Douglass printed this incident to show how white people could assist free blacks by supporting their right to freely interact in public space and assist them in challenging the racial status quo. Black resistance gaining white support helped emphasize the irrational actions of the driver and proved that racial prejudice did not have to exist in the white population.

Attacks on Douglass and others spurred condemnations and cries for change within the abolitionist circle. Other problematic events on public transportation drew attention as years passed. Steamboats in New York attracted abolitionist coverage as two companies condoned colorphobia and a third received promotion in the press for its lack of racial prejudice. By promoting business to a specific steamboat, abolitionists hoped to hurt the profits and reputations of anti-black vessels by attracting attention to their racial prejudice and shame the company into abandoning its prejudiced ways. If a business venture suffered economic distress there would be no way around implementing colorphobia-free business standards. Economic ruin served as a good motivator for change.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Seven years after Douglass' experience with the Eastern Railroad the first report promoting passage on steamboat *Oregon* appeared in his newspaper. The completion of the steamboat occurred in the spring of 1845 with its official first launch from Smith & Dimon's Yard.¹³⁸ Steamboat *Oregon's* service route spanned from New York to Providence, and it supplied three years of service before an incident in 1848 on another steamboat drew abolitionist attention to the vessel. On September 11, 1848 in Buffalo, New York a group of freedmen from the Cleveland Convention sought cabin accommodations. However, the workers on steamboat *Saratoga*, like those employed by the Eastern Railroad, suffered from colorphobia and denied men such passage. A.H. Francis, who wrote to *The North Star* about the experience, revealed that, "The reason assigned by the Clerk, who I think they call Merrell, (at all events he may be easily known by his diminutive, sallow sycophant expression of countenance, and much sooner I should judge by his language,) was, that colored persons could not be permitted in the cabin among whites."¹³⁹ A black servant working for steamboat *Saratoga* disheartened the black travelers for being a "heterogenous mass of abomination" and supporting white Merrell instead of other black persons. The servant embodied what Douglass and Francis feared from the black population—that white pressure and power kept many black persons silent when faced with outbursts aimed at themselves and others.

A free black man working for a racially prejudiced company and supporting its actions was counterproductive and hurt the fight against segregation. The delegates waited an entire day before boarding another steamboat. This time they chose the *Oregon* for its fair racial policies and practices—they encountered no problems. Of his time spent on steamboat *Oregon* Francis wrote, "The boat is of the first class in style and speed—Capt. Chatman, the Clerk Mr. Waldron,

¹³⁸ James Gordon Bennett, Sr., "Launch of the Steamboat Oregon," *The New York Herald*, May 25, 1845.

¹³⁹ A.H. Francis, "Editors of the North Star," *The North Star*, Sep. 15, 1848.

the Steward, and the balance of the crew, so far as came under our notice, are just about, to say the least, what they ought to be.”¹⁴⁰ By a balanced crew Francis meant the workers were not one race. Unlike a singular black servant on the *Saratoga*, crew composition ranged from an all-color spectrum. A mixed-race working environment provided passengers of both races suitable and equal accommodations. Steamboat *Oregon* supplied an ideal public space—one free of colorphobia.

Nearly a year later another report surfaced in *The North Star* promoting steamboat *Oregon*. A black family sought passage on the steamer *Rip Van Winkle* in Albany, New York. While the head of the family, Newport F. Henry, bought tickets his wife walked onto the promenade deck to stay out of the way of boarding passengers and workers scurrying about. Almost immediately her presence brought forth an outburst from one of the workers. The worker ordered her below deck because she did not belong where white passengers mingled. Her husband found himself also ordered below when he joined his wife, and highly insulted, the entire family demanded their money back before taking their business elsewhere. Once on steamboat *Oregon* the Henry Family received fair and equal treatment like the rest of the customers regardless of their race. The abolitionist writing under the name *Penn. Freeman* wrote about the Henry Family ordeal and Douglass relayed in *The North Star*. They claimed:

We trust that every man of honor and right feeling, who shall have the opportunity, will give practical proof of his appreciation of the disgraceful conduct of the of the *Rip Van Winkle*, and the honorable contrast given to it by the officers of the *Oregon*. Men who can insult and outrage respectable women, on account of their complexion, generally have an avenue to their consciences through the pocket, if all others are closed, and the public an make an appeal to them which they will feel. Such an appeal should never be omitted.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Penn. Freeman, “Colorphobia on Steamboats,” *The North Star*, Aug. 10, 1849.

Like with steamboat *Saratoga*, Rip Van Winkle customers found themselves forced into taking their business elsewhere. Treatment on steamboat *Oregon* again proved itself free of colorphobia and served the Henrys as equals. The report asserted that a white man suffering from an outburst of colorphobia verbally attacked a “respectable woman,” and it further supplied proof that any black person of sound character remained vulnerable to racial prejudice. Douglass encouraged travel on steamboat *Oregon* to economically strain steamboat *Rip Van Winkle*. Owners and employers of transportation services would only reform their standards if they hurt financially. Abolitionists thought that if enough people boycotted corrupted companies then they would have to adapt to the new reality of the communities they served—the reality that freedmen were there to stay.

Obtaining enough outside media coverage and public attention for their cause concerned abolitionists. How much did national or non-abolitionist newspapers report on colorphobia? *The New York Tribune*, founded by Horace Greeley, published an article on the Henry Family incident on August 4, 1849.¹⁴² The story appeared in *The New York Tribune* six days before Douglass’ paper relayed the story. Commentary on gender and race functioned as the only differences in Douglass’ printing. Greeley’s version mentioned what the Henry Family experienced, but did not include advocacy for social change and racial reform like the abolitionist version. While there is no real method for measuring how much of an impact the application of colorphobia had on society, the fact that popular newspapers outside of the abolitionist movement reported on it reveals the weight behind the reform tactic.

Businesses, Entertainment, Clubs, & Organizations

Like public transportation, businesses, live entertainment, clubs, and organizations in northern states often segregated their operations or even banned the black population from

¹⁴² Horace Greeley, “Colorphobia on Steamboats,” *The New York Tribune*, Aug. 4. 1849.

entering the premises. Drugstores, theaters, clubs, and organizations practiced exclusivity when it came to customers or potential members as owners and established members labored under the ill effects of racial prejudice. Racial prejudice fueled treatment of black men and women and impacted the atmosphere of public shows. Even when black persons received invitations to private parties colorphobia blocked them from joining. On January 23, 1848 prominent abolitionists Frederick Douglass and William Cooper Nell accepted invitations to a celebration of Franklin's birthday and set off for the Irving House in Rochester, New York. The arrival of two black men, regardless of their good characters, created controversy. In response to objections from a handful of other guests, the host turned the two away. Nell recalled in a letter to Garrison that, "It was in vain that we protested against his insult, and asserted our claim to equal treatment with others. We were called *intruders*, and told, that it 'was a violation of the rules of society for colored people to associate with whites,' and were threatened ejection by the police."¹⁴³ Other white partygoers not afflicted with racial prejudice intervened on behalf of Douglass and Nell, however. After white guests supported them the abolitionists attended the party they had *already* received invitations for. Black guests suddenly found themselves unwelcomed when colorphobia appeared—instead they felt inferior and became unworthy of attending the same event. Douglass and Nell thankfully found support like Downing from unprejudiced white persons. Once again white assistance helped black persons beat colorphobia.

Businesses fell prone to colorphobic tendencies; whether owners or workers themselves were prejudiced or the inside of the business hosted an incident. Owners even suffered economically or potentially suffered from the consequences of racial prejudice. The apothecary shop run by Stephen S. Thayer that banned black customers serves as a good example of race anxieties impacting business. Black customers were not banned because Thayer himself was

¹⁴³ William Cooper Nell, "Progress of Justice and Equality," *The Liberator*, Feb. 11, 1848.

racially prejudiced, but because the owner feared retaliation from racially prejudiced white people. Two black gentlemen looking for soda were denied service upon entering the store. Thayer informed them that, “it was his custom not to sell soda to colored people—if he did he should lose all his white customers.”¹⁴⁴ When one of the gentlemen tried purchasing soda again Thayer continued, “I cannot break my rule, for if I sell soda to you to-day, I cannot refuse other colored persons to-morrow, should they call to purchase soda at my store.”¹⁴⁵ Thayer admitted the wrongness of refusing them service but he felt he had no choice. If word got out that he served black customers then he would lose white customers and possibly his business. Colorphobia not only impacted those suffering from it and those it targeted by it, but also colorphobia-free individuals seeking their fortune in business if white people decided to boycott a certain store for serving all skin colors. Racial prejudice restricted individual choice and freedom of business owners and customers; which further revealed the malady’s attack on foundational American values.

While businesses played a crucial role in the community by providing services so did clubs. Some, like the Sons of Temperance, rallied for specific reform measures or goals, while others focused on community service and provided a support network for its members like the Masons. The Sons of Temperance came under the scrutiny of abolitionists as reports of non-inclusive lodges emerged. While abolitionists knew the Sons primarily promoted temperance the organization had a darker side. According to abolitionists, a secondary aim of the Sons became “the building up of caste and prejudice.” For a society based on social betterment, abolitionists viewed blocking freedmen membership as highly contradictory to the organization’s goals and emphasis on community. Abolitionist J.D. wrote about black men that, “He cannot at all, either

¹⁴⁴ Gentleman, “Colorphobia,” For the editor of the *Chronotype*, Reprinted in *The Liberator*, Aug. 10, 1849.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

as equal or unequal, become a member of a literary society of white persons... No matter what may be the color of their skin, whether black, or white, or brown—we maintain that men who can rise superior to such degrading and demoralizing treatment, have in their composition a large proportion of the material of which heroes are made.”¹⁴⁶ No matter how influential or successful a black man was he could not gain membership to a white club—only an African American branch if one existed.

J.D. continued his critique of the Sons by revealing colorphobia in one of the lodges. Rev. S. R. Ward received a membership invitation to the Sons by a Mr. Pinkerton due to his outstanding reputation and prominent role in society. The report described Ward in the usual manner of abolitionist writing by asserting he was a “gentleman.” At first Ward received admittance to the lodge but then faced expulsion on account of the revelation of his skin color to the rest of the members. In J.D.’s opinion this showed that, “The treatment of the free colored people in the Northern States, is only equaled in disgraceful and disgusting atrocity by the odious slave system of the South. The one is the natural offspring of the other.”¹⁴⁷ Slavery spawned ideas of racial hierarchy, inequality, and white superiority; in turn these products created racial prejudice and facilitated the spread of colorphobia throughout the North. Americans residing in the North could not claim moral superiority when they were just as cruel and unjust if not worse towards free blacks. Slavery was a labor system, and while colorphobia was a byproduct of it abolitionists viewed racial prejudice as more damaging and debilitating to American society and progress. The social atmosphere of the North showed that the intermixing of races would not come easily without reform.

¹⁴⁶ J.D., “Colorphobia among the Sons,” *The North Star*, Sep. 21, 1849.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Reports of colorphobia within clubs and organizations continued appearing in the abolitionist press during the years leading up to the American Civil War. Before Ward's ordeal with the Sons black men faced exclusion from joining the Young Men's Association known for its focus on moral improvement.¹⁴⁸ Banning black men from joining raised questions about the institution's morality if it did not practice what it preached. Another example of colorphobia occurred even as the war raged on in 1862. Colorphobia kept Masons from "being one in fellowship."¹⁴⁹ A portrait presented to the Masonic Grand Lodge and a presentation given reflected on the country's struggle with colorphobia throughout the decades using black soldiers. A final example occurred thirteen years after Ward's dismissal from the Sons. Edward Garrison Walker, son of David Walker, faced the same situation in Boston. William Cooper Nell wrote, "The hydra-headed monster, colorphobia, which happily has not been very active of late in this city, hissed out some of its latent venom when Edward Garrison Walker was presented for initiation in the Grand Division of the Sons of Temperance, October 15th."¹⁵⁰ Walker had been guaranteed admittance but upon arriving for initiation he found himself turned away for being black.¹⁵¹ Colorphobia spread throughout clubs and organizations focused on social betterment and communal progress. Racial prejudice defeated the purpose of clubs and made members into hypocrites. If the North could not rid its clubs of colorphobia, then goals would not be reached and the existence of various clubs would be pointless. Clubs focused on spreading morality and communal good faced an internal struggle when it came to skin color and ignored the American principle of equality.

¹⁴⁸ W.H. Topp, "Colorphobia, Interesting Correspondence," *The North Star*, Mar. 16, 1849.

¹⁴⁹ William Cooper Nell, "Presentation of a Portrait to a Masonic Grand Lodge," *The Liberator*, Oct. 10, 1862.

¹⁵⁰ William Cooper Nell, "Matters and Things," *The Liberator*, Dec. 5, 1862.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Even entertainment and entertainment venues were plagued by colorphobia. One famous individual in the entertainment world serves as the perfect example of breaking racial barriers but also falling short and bowing to racial prejudice. Elizabeth Greenfield, known fondly as the “Black Swan,” dazzled black and white audiences in the 1850s with her singing voice both in America and Europe. While drawing mostly praise for her talent and ability to break racial barriers Greenfield’s career did not remain picturesque for racial relations. In 1853 the Black Swan sang for guests of the Duchess of Sutherland at the Stafford House in England. A white musician supplied the music for her vocals, and the mixed race performance did not produce any kind of backlash from the white audience. “English people and their aristocracy know nothing of *colorphobia*, which is, peculiarly, the disease of the United States.”¹⁵² The Duchess had no qualms about enjoying a black artist and neither did her guests, because the English had no racially prejudiced feelings towards black people. Slavery had already ended in Great Britain and the black population existed unaffected by the disease. Greenfield proved that talent and ability were more important than one’s skin color with her performance for royalty. Why couldn’t Americans feel the same as the English?

Two years after her successful performance in England, Greenfield earned a praiseworthy review from “Communiapaw” of New York. Communiapaw, the anonymous penname used by black abolitionist James McCune Smith, revealed information about how well her performance had gone and why the singer became so significant for combating racial prejudice. Smith wrote, “Bending not one whit to the requirements of American Prejudice, never shrinking for an instant under the cover of an Indian or a Morrish descent, she stands forth simple and pure a black woman... Having selected as her aim the divinest of Arts, that are requiring the richest endowments of nature and the most prolonged and arduous culture, it was but a light thing for

¹⁵² Frederick Douglass, “We are just informed...,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Jun. 17, 1853.

her to meet Prejudice face to face and crush it.”¹⁵³ Smith urged black attendance at the Black Swan’s performances, because he thought by doing so black men and women could realize their potential based off Greenfield’s success. Greenfield embodied the possibility of a colorblind American society by bringing a diverse audience together. Black art and performance given by Greenfield ended racial barriers and helped integrate communities in unsegregated seating if even just for a few hours.

Greenfield’s success drew the attention of James McCune Smith because he strongly believed in the power of black art. According to Smith, black art could destroy racial barriers and serve as a social leveler. An individual’s talents and contribution to society should theoretically outweigh prejudice based on skin color. The Black Swan’s mixed-race audiences proved talent and art challenged white prejudiced preconceptions and blurred color lines. Audiences themselves experienced this. Smith wrote, “And Greenfield’s singing broke the taboo that prevented black men from interacting with white women: ‘colorblind’ white women sat beside and conversed with black men.”¹⁵⁴ Yet Smith knew a single talent could not completely destroy colorphobia; but he hoped that a multitude of talents and characteristics white people valued combined together could. At the National Colored Convention in May 1855 he gave a speech on this issue and said, “The colored man must do impracticable things before his admitted to a place in society. He must speak like a Frederick Douglass, write like a Dumas, and sing like the Black Swan before he could be recognized as a human being.”¹⁵⁵

Yet all the praise received by the Black Swan did not save Greenfield’s reputation with a performance given in 1857. Smith & Nixon’s Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, the most popular venue in

¹⁵³ Communipaw, “Our Correspondents,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Mar. 9, 1855.

¹⁵⁴ John Stauffer, *The Works of James McCune Smith* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 119.

¹⁵⁵ James McCune Smith, “National Colored Convention Speech,” *The Works of James McCune Smith*, May 8, 1855, 119.

the city, hosted Greenfield's concert. Smith attended the concert and argued Greenfield showed that diseased white people could persuade or intimidate black persons "to proscribe their own race when it serves their turn to obey the dictates of white American pro-slavery and colorphobia" when she allowed seating changes.¹⁵⁶ The Black Swan allowed black seating in the gallery only on account of a prejudiced white audience and venue. Many of the black audience members felt disappointment, Smith included, over her decision. The Black Swan's portrayal as a symbol of hope for the future of the black population, and as a sort of hero in breaking down racial barriers and combating colorphobia, buckled under the pressure of racial prejudice. With her performance in Cincinnati she showed just how easily colorphobia dictated situations and decisions of those pressured or targeted by it.

Religion & Morality

Other than public transportation, business, and entertainment, American religion served as a widely debated and controversial topic regarding the spread of colorphobia. The United States had been a nation of Christians since its establishment as colonies and it had grown increasingly more Protestant over time. Though immigrants, such as Irish Catholics, challenged Protestantism it still remained the dominant religious choice. With abolitionists originating from a wide protestant background, the hypocrisy and injustice occurring in churches drew their attention. Catalyzing a reformation of northern churches and religion, when they stood at the center of family and community life, would in theory assist in curing colorphobia. Whether abolitionists reported racial conflicts in churches, penned poetry, or wrote critiques about "negro

¹⁵⁶ William Cooper Nell, "Colored Colorphobia," *The Liberator*, Jul. 24, 1857.

pews,” colorphobia stood as a topic of contestation amongst abolitionists because racial prejudice rebelled against the ideals and morals of Christianity.¹⁵⁷

Abolitionists commonly wrote about their experiences with prejudiced churchgoers to bring more attention to racial prejudice and its everlasting conflict with religion. In 1841 Frederick Douglass delivered an anti-slavery speech in Plymouth County, Massachusetts. Douglass spoke of once visiting a northern Methodist Church. The day he visited the church, black and white members alike received communion but separately from one another. Douglass mentioned this in passing before tackling the topic of religious revival in New Bedford. Douglass illustrated racially prejudiced experiences in churches by stating, “But it seems, the kingdom of heaven is like a net; at least so it was according to the practice of these pious Christians; and when the net was drawn ashore, they had to set down and cull out the fish. Well, it happened now that some of the fish had rather black scales; so these were sorted out and packed by themselves.”¹⁵⁸ Douglass pointed out that while black and white people adopted Christianity, the two races experienced and participated in church activities separately because of colorphobia. Two things he witnessed while visiting bolstered his convictions.

The first event occurred during a day of baptisms. One black girl underwent baptism in the same water with no complaints from white church members. Yet when it came time for communion the black child drank from the same cup and this act produced an outburst of colorphobia in a white woman sitting beside her. It had been her turn for a drink, but “...when the cup containing the precious blood which had been shed for all, came to her she rose in

¹⁵⁷ For examples of sources on American Protestantism, see Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner, *American Protestantism* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2002); Ira L. Mandelker, *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); Margaret Bendroth, *The Last Puritans: Mainline Protestants and the Power of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

¹⁵⁸ Frederick Douglass, “The Church and Prejudice,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Nov. 4, 1841.

disdain, and walked out of the church.”¹⁵⁹ The woman seemed fine with other white people sharing the same water for baptismal but the prospect of drinking from the same cup herself sent her into a colorphobic fit. The second occurrence involved a girl falling into a trance, coming to, and claiming she visited heaven. An old woman (whose race was not addressed) questioned the girl about black people in heaven, and the girl biasedly replied with, “Oh! I didn’t go into the kitchen!”¹⁶⁰ Douglass saw the racial prejudice that tinged the child’s explanation about why she did not see a single black person—she suffered from colorphobia at a young age. Even children developed colorphobia in a racially prejudiced church environment. Did colorphobia not transcend death and God’s kingdom? A common abolitionist rebuttal against anti-black Christianity dealt with God. God created mankind and gave the black population their skin color. If the creation of skin color came from God himself, what was wrong with it? Many anti-abolitionists cited the “Curse of Ham” as why the black population was inferior and enslaved but the claim was based on biblical interpretation (which always varies). Abolitionists thought that if northern Christians cured colorphobia amongst their church populations then American religion would no longer be hypocritical with all brethren equally welcomed. Black abolitionists argued that African Americans belonged in heaven alongside the rest of humankind—not in heaven’s kitchen.

Eight years after Douglass’ speech William Lloyd Garrison published a poem in his newspaper *The Liberator* dealing with religious moral suasion and colorphobia. Poetic critiques commonly appeared in newspapers for revealing the evils of colorphobia. The poem’s author supplied a definition of colorphobia, discovered who seemed prone to infection, and displayed mankind’s reaction. The poem implied that humankind alone—not the rest of the animal

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

kingdom—could be infected with colorphobia and asserted that God viewed race prejudice as immoral. The most important lines of the poem critiqued those with colorphobia:

Would ye be just! mind not complexion;
Black though the skin, 'tis no objection;
Mind not the color, all else right;
A man's a MAN, or black or white.
This is the thought that stirs their gall, -
That colored men are MEN *at all* ;
And fix the things the best you can,
'Tis not the *color*, but the MAN.¹⁶¹

White men and women suffering from colorphobia obsessed over a person's complexion. Racial prejudice rendered white people unable to consider black individuals as human no matter their occupation in society or recognize the quality of their character because of racial prejudice's irrationality. Black skin signified inferiority, inequality, and lower mental capacity. These differences found in the black population, according to white people, justified their prejudiced actions. White men and women were adamant about keeping the racial status quo and hierarchy in the North. So adamant in fact that colorphobia spread the more the black population grew. The poem urged curing colorphobia by reforming the northern white mindset and by focusing on the character of the man instead of his color. A further critique of society is the author's name itself—"HEZEKIAH HUMANKIND."

Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz and the king of Judah in the Christian religion. Bible verse Isaiah 38:1 teaches that when Hezekiah suffered from an illness he received a message from God. "Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die; you will not recover from this illness."¹⁶² With much prayer God healed Hezekiah and for the rest of his life he praised God for sparing him. The author used both a religious name and verse as a reform technique. By using the name Hezekiah Humankind, the author implied that all humankind, kingly or not, fell

¹⁶¹ "COLORPHOBIA," *The Liberator*, Jul. 6, 1849.

¹⁶² "Isaiah 38:1," *The Living Bible: Paraphrased*, (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971). 559.

susceptible to colorphobia, and if they did not change their ways and repent, they would die, just like Hezekiah nearly did. Through connecting racial prejudice to a biblical verse abolitionists hoped for a better understanding of the stakes of colorphobia and for white repentance.

POETRY.: COLORPHOBIA. I.
Liberator (1831-1865); Jun 22, 1849; 19, 25; American Periodicals
pg. 100



For the *Liberator*.

COLORPHOBIA

BY HEZEKIAH HUMANKIND.

I.

The *Colorphobia*—what is that?
Does it infect the dog or cat?
Does the disease prove fatal ever?
Or is it but a skin deep fever?

II.

The turkey-cock, I've heard it said,
A deep aversion has to red;
O, stupid bird! O, silly biped!
OUR COUNTRY'S FLAG *with red is striped!*

III.

This *Colorphobia*—as they name it—
So mean that very few will claim it—
While it remains above the sod,
Should never curse the 'church of God'!

IV.

'Tis not the color gives offence;
They only say so for pretence;
Care they a fig how black the face?
No—if the 'nigger' 'keep his place.'

V.

Would ye be just? mind not complexion;
Black though the skin, 'tis no objection;
Mind not the color, all else right;
A man's a MAN, or black or white.

VI.

This is the thought that stirs their gall,—
That colored men are MEN *at all*;
And fix the thing the best you can,
'Tis not the *color*, but the MAN.

Image 1: Poem by Hezekiah Humankind printed in Garrison's *Liberator*.

The same year of Humankind's publication a church employee proved the poem's claims. An incident in a Protestant church displayed the hypocrisy and injustice of colorphobia because of a racially prejudiced fuelled act instigated towards a new churchgoer. A black individual

known as an “honest man and Christian, a man of good dress and *address*, was invited, on the afternoon Sunday before last, to attend meeting in the church in Hanover street. . .”¹⁶³ by a friend. A church sexton, mind untouched by the horrors of colorphobia, and harboring anti-slavery and pro-equality views, placed the newcomer in the pew in which he and his family also resided. In the next pew over a white man complained about the man’s presence and insulted him by questioning, “What is that nigger here for?” Shortly after another man entered the church, and upon finding the black man sitting in his pew refused to sit near him. Appalled by his fellow Christians, the sexton turned his back on the colorphobic churchgoers, and left with his family and the black man to show his disapproval of their blatant racial prejudice.¹⁶⁴ The sexton and the black man’s character starkly contrasted with the other church members. According to Hezekiah, a man’s actions served as an important gage of character, and both the black man and the white sexton’s family proved to be of good character. While Christian denominations focused heavily on loving one another and treating mankind equally those with prejudice did not. The white churchgoers forcing the black churchgoer out demonstrates how racially prejudiced persons could not keep their Christian morals. If religious brethren sought true Christianity the eradication of colorphobia must occur.

By 1853 the state of colorphobia in American churches remained debilitating. A single incident helps show just how much racial prejudice had intensified. In *The Liberator* Garrison published an article from *The Hartford Republican*. For twenty-five years a black gentleman attended the same church. He had always been clean and dressed well, but also “always to be found at his place in church.”¹⁶⁵ But what was meant by “his place?” Editor Colonel Cicero M. Barnett referred to the negro pew that separated white church members from black church

¹⁶³ Frederick Douglass, “Colorphobia in the Church,” *The North Star*, Nov. 30, 1849.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Colonel Cicero M. Barnett, “Colorphobia,” *The Hartford Republican*, *The Liberator*, May 6, 1853.

members through segregated seating. One day, however, the black man challenged the racially prejudiced seating arrangements out of necessity. The man had grown frail and old and could no longer climb the stairs of the negro pew that was in the balcony. The white members felt disgusted by his presence and informed him that if he could no longer sit where he belonged he should stay home. White members held a meeting without him present and voted that only during communion could he sit below; otherwise he must remain in the negro pew or never return. Barnett declared that, "His heart was almost broken to think that in the midst of his old age, his infirmities and afflictions, his *brothers in Christ* should attempt to eject him from the Lord's Temple, and he has never since attempted to sit with them."¹⁶⁶

A common theme in reported incidents of colorphobia, like the one of the old black churchgoer, revolved around the personal appearance and financial success of those targeted. Abolitionists always carefully reported on these for two reasons. First, society judged individuals on appearance and especially the appearance of those already seen as inferiors. Black men and women were always depicted as clean, orderly, and mannered. Some dressed just as well if not better than white aggressors. Skin color served as the only difference in appearance that triggered attacks. Secondly, abolitionists included the success of an individual from the belief that it battled the stereotype of black reliance on the white population. A self-made man like Douglass or Downing built their reputations and success on their own. If a black man and a white man dressed similar and both owned successful businesses, what was the problem? Logically there should not be a problem. Abolitionists hoped showing the crudeness and irrationality of racial prejudice through presenting clear pictures of African Americans targeted by unadulterated hate would instigate reform.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

While American Christianity suffered under the plight of colorphobia so did the country's morality and values. Abolitionist W.M. Whipper wrote to *The Colored American* in 1841 expressing his distaste over the decline in American standards and values. He wrote, "As a people we are deeply afflicted with 'colorphobia,' (and notwithstanding there may have been causes sufficient to implant it into our minds,) it is arrayed against *the* spirit of Christianity, republican freedom, and our common happiness, and ought once now and forever to be abolished. It is an evil that must be met, and we *must meet it now.*"¹⁶⁷ Whipper believed that unless the current generation ended racial prejudice the country would suffer a catastrophic social downfall. Colorphobia being anti-Christian, anti-republican, and anti-freedom conflicted with America's core values and morals. If colorphobia lingered and spread throughout the public then the country would no longer be a real Democracy. The institution of slavery itself kept America from being a true Democracy, while colorphobia completely destroyed the country's chance at being one altogether. To prevent America's downfall and end its hypocritical nature, Whipper continued, "We must throw off *the* distinctive features in *the* charters of our churches, and other institutions. We have refused to hear ministers preach from *the* pulpit, because they would not preach against slavery. We must pursue *the* same course respecting prejudice against complexion." By banning slavery in the northern states it effectively ended the problem of the cruel and unusual institution. Approaching colorphobia by banning segregation and establishing equality would in theory have the same impact on racial prejudice.

The same year Whipper denounced American colorphobia and sought reform one white woman known by the initials "M.F." heeded the call of ending colorphobia and reestablishing morality in the North by becoming an abolitionist. Her time spent amongst the enslaved in

¹⁶⁷ W.M. Whipper, "For the Colored American," *The Colored American*, Feb. 6 1841.

Liberty County, Georgia spurred her adoption of anti-slavery principles as well as principles of equality. M.F. recalled:

It was there, too, I was cured of that dreadful disorder of the mind, rightly called by Mrs. Child, 'colorphobia.' By being constantly with the colored people, I soon learned that they possessed hearts and minds like our own, (a fact which many are not aware of,) and that the only real difference is that of the color of the skin.¹⁶⁸

After witnessing racial interaction in the South, M.F. realized that most of the North suffered from colorphobia because of slavery in the South. She further pushed the idea of colorphobia as a disease but also combated the common stereotype of black inferiority. The black population she interacted with proved just as kind, smart, and capable as white people. Through disproving stereotypes M.F. suggested racially prejudiced states would change their views towards black men, women, and children and treat them equally. M.F. recalled the story of one mistreated slave from her time in Georgia who found herself on the auction block. Her experience convinced M.F. that northern states must be morally superior in comparison to the South. M.F. renewed her faith in the North and claimed, "They are of too noble an origin, and too high a moral sense, to be contaminated by pro-slavery doctrines, and wicked prejudices."¹⁶⁹ No abolitionist wanted northerners viewed in the same light as slaveholders, and M.F. believed that the North having rid themselves of slavery held potential for stopping the spread and continuation of colorphobia. The immorality of slavery had already been recognized amongst northerners, and logically the next step taken should address black inequality. Colorphobia could be cured if people adopted abolitionism. Doing so would reinstate their morality.

Colorphobia undermined democracy in the United States because it incited violence, hatred, fear, and inequality. In such a harsh social environment, democracy, progress, and

¹⁶⁸ M.F., "Treatment of Slaves," *London Standard of Freedom*, Sep. 15, 1842.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

betterment all turned stagnate. *The London Standard of Freedom* posed the question, “Can anything be more deplorable than the social condition of such a country?”¹⁷⁰ Social conditions in northern states drew attention outside of the American abolitionist circle. “The canker of slavery, and the spirit which it generates, has gone on from that hour to this, eating into the very vitals of American moral life, and exposing the great Transatlantic Anglo Saxony to the derision of her enemies and the contempt of even her friends.” The immorality and colorphobia of the northern states destroyed society and reflected badly on a transnational scale; and attracted an even stronger push for black advancement by black abolitionists.

Education & Black Advancement

Education served as the final area that abolitionists critiqued. In 1849 the black community in Rochester, New York faced the ejection of black students from district schools. The city hosted a meeting, and “The House was well filled; the unfortunate victims of colorphobia and prejudice who were guilty of the cruelty and injustice of excluding children from the schools simply because they are colored, met with merited exposure and reproof.”¹⁷¹ Abolitionist J.D. attended the meeting and recorded how most in attendance, all except a Dr. Long, seemed in agreement that the treatment and ejection of black children must end. Part of the problem of black children being kicked out of the schools resided in money—more specifically taxes. J.D. wrote, “...the colored men have been taxed for the erection of District schools; and if they had not, still the injustice of excluding colored children from the District Schools would be abundantly manifest, while the children of white parents, who have never paid a cent of taxes either for schools or anything else, are admitted freely and without question.”¹⁷² All children in the state of New York from age five and below twenty-one were entitled entrance to District

¹⁷⁰ “Deplorable Effects of Slavery on American Morals,” *London Standard of Freedom*, Aug. 1, 1850.

¹⁷¹ J.D., “Meeting against Colored Schools,” *The North Star*, Dec. 21, 1849.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Schools based on state law. Skin color was not distinguished. Legally and economically District Schools were open for black children but the School Board kept children from enrolling. Black children and students of all ages faced discrimination in the North and abolitionists sought its end in public schools and universities.

One black abolitionist's name appeared on various articles and letters regarding the importance of black education and betterment. William Cooper Nell's prominence in the abolitionist movement grew in part thanks to his relationship with William Lloyd Garrison and his fight for complete school integration in Boston (which he accomplished in 1855).¹⁷³ Nell grew more vocal as his passion for complete integration expanded over the years and as he faced increased confrontation from white Americans. A decade before he successfully integrated the public school system in Boston he gave a report on the education status of black people and the colorphobia that prevented advancement. Nell started off by relaying a report written by anonymous author T that asked, "Why are the colored people ignorant?" The black population in America suffered ignorance because of their fellow-countrymen whom were white. White men and women barred black individuals from entering college and receiving good educations from their racial prejudice. For example, one bright young black man applied to Brown University in Rhode Island but was refused, because "southern patronage would be withdraw, and some few southern students would leave the institution, if the despised sons of Africa should enjoy the facilities which are found there to qualify men for usefulness."¹⁷⁴ The white faculty kept an abled student from attending their school only because of the fear that his skin color would offend white students and they would lose money. The application cost him seventy-five dollars; he subsequently looked to Haiti for an education. An American-born black person could not receive

¹⁷³ Donald M. Jacobs, *William Cooper Nell: Selected Writings 1832-1874* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2002), xxxii.

¹⁷⁴ William Cooper Nell, "Colorphobia," *The Liberator*, Oct. 3, 1845.

an education in his native country; he had to seek one abroad where abolitionists argued racial prejudice did not exist.

In response to such an awful instance of colorphobia Nell wrote that it served as an offering, “laid on the altar of slavery by the degenerate sons of the free North; and while they aid materially in sustaining the guilt of their nation, at the same time inflict a grievous wrong upon the individuals who are the victims of such treatment, and who, though familiar with, can never grow reconciled to the discipline.”¹⁷⁵ Again an abolitionist framed colorphobia as a product of slavery that spread into the northern states where black individuals challenged the racial status quo, and where racial prejudice served as an excuse for segregation and white supremacy without the institution of slavery. Nell believed colorphobia not only hurt northern society but also individuals seeking to improve their lives.

While Nell wrote a variety of letters and articles on various public spaces regarding colorphobia education remained his main concern. Colorphobia played an important role in his campaign aimed at ending segregated schools in Boston. Four years after his article critiquing colorphobia in universities he penned an article about the various meetings held promoting education and school equality. Speakers at the meetings ranged from Wendell Phillips, Charles Lenox Remond, and William Lloyd Garrison. Nell reported that Remond believed the black population did not do enough for fighting against slavery and its byproducts of segregation and colorphobia, while Garrison spoke freely by giving praise to those supporting educational reform and rebuked those who did not. Nell believed colorphobia victims, “who, for selfish and wicked reasons, oppose the ingress of colored children to the public schools” acted as a detriment not only to the black population but also to all of society.¹⁷⁶ According to Nell, “The equality of

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ William Cooper Nell, “Continuation of Equal School Rights Meetings,” *The Liberator*, Dec. 14, 1849.

school rights was of vital importance, not only to the proscribed class, but to the whole people; for the present system fostered prejudices in the breasts of those whose associations would otherwise prompt them to mingle together, and thus exhibit a most prominent feature in the design of common school education.”¹⁷⁷ Opposing black enrollment and intermixed schooling not only facilitated colorphobia in the upcoming generation but also damaged America’s potential for improvement by supplying black children with a poorer education. Nell believed repressing a large part of the population from a good education would damage the country’s future success.

A year before school integration in Boston, Nell reported on a court case and critiqued its outcome as one born of colorphobia. Wm. T. Pindall sued the city of Boston over his son being banned from school on the basis of race. Pindall enrolled his mixed-race, fair-skinned six-year-old son in an all-white primary school; a few weeks after his enrollment the school expelled him and sent him to an all-black school. Pindall sued for \$500 and his son’s readmission. Of this trial Nell wrote, “When the child of a tax-paying citizen knocks at the door for a public school of admission, the consent is held in abeyance until the scales of colorphobia determine whether, ‘in the estimation of a hair,’ his rights to common-school instruction may not have been confiscated.”¹⁷⁸ By writing a report on the current court case Nell hoped to gain support for Pindall, critiqued the school system and strove for educational equality. Pindall’s child barely looked black, and yet he was denied a good education. Nell pushed for equal school rights in Boston for removing the “stigma” of prejudice and colorphobia from the city when other Massachusetts schools already started doing so.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ William Cooper Nell, “Equal School Rights in Boston,” *The Liberator*, Nov. 10, 1854.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Two years following Pindall's court case, Nell reported on two black teenage girls' exclusion from high school. The two girls were among the best scholars of their teacher's class and expected admission after taking tests with other white students. All of the class passed and gained admission except the black girls.¹⁸⁰ The committee's admittance of every white student, even those less academically strong, prompted the belief the committee teemed with colorphobia. After *The Telegraph* reported this injustice, O.C. Everett, a member of the school board, wrote *The Telegraph* defending their decision. The response from Everett set off a conversation back and forth between a newspaper writer and Everett. After the conversation finished, Nell concluded, "...these candidates were excluded, not for their educational deficiencies. So much for the American crime of color..."¹⁸¹ Board members unjustly kept the girls from receiving a better education because they suffered from racial prejudice. By keeping the girls out of school, the board believed they protected the white student population from black influence and kept the racial status quo. Nell immediately saw their colorphobia as an excuse for robbing the girls of equal opportunity and a brighter future.

Five years after the committee's decision an article pushing for educational rights entitled "The Educational Wants of the Free Colored People, 1859," by M.H. Freeman on black children and education appeared in the *Anglo-African Magazine*. Freeman argued black children needed a strong education for playing a good role in society, and advancing themselves through knowledge, combating prejudice, and adding to the anti-slavery cause.¹⁸² According to Freeman, "children are stern moralists, and there is no deeper hatred of injustice and wrong than that which

¹⁸⁰ William Cooper Nell, "COLORPHOBIA IN THE CHARLESTOWN SCHOOL COMMITTEE," *The Liberator*, May 9, 1856.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² M.H. Freeman, "The Educational Wants of the Free Colored People, 1859," *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 10, no. 1 (Reprinted in 1972).

throbs and glows in the bosom of a child.”¹⁸³ Essentially, children are born pure and moral. Society, the environment, parental guidance, and teachings spurred the development of ideals and outlooks that mirrored that of their parents and their surrounding society. Black children who received quality education and had good examples of role models were better equipped with knowledge of racial prejudice. “If then the child is once brought to understand the wrong and injustice of slavery and colorphobia, there is no fear the he will ‘envy the oppressor or desire any of his ways.’”¹⁸⁴

Equal education remained important but Freeman believed a good, strong education gave black children the tools needed for fighting colorphobia. Just like black children are born moral and typically adopt views of their parents, white children undergo the same process. If schools were non-segregated and equal, and racial inferiority was not instilled into them from a young age, then defeating colorphobia would work from not only abolitionism, but also education and proper teaching. If children, regardless of race, could properly understand the ills of slavery and colorphobia, then inoculation could occur before colorphobia spread to the next generation. Publishing reports and critiques on schools and education helped abolitionists promote equal education, further the next generation, and critique adults that denied children a basic right as a consequence of their colorphobia.

Other than public schools and universities, black advancement and betterment in the 1850s became popular topics for combating colorphobia. If the black population educated itself, and focused on advancing their knowledge and kinds of employment, then disputing claims of intellectual, mental, and work ethic inferiority became possible. The only drawback abolitionists foresaw in black advancement originated from the need of white financial aid and moral support.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 34.

Joseph C. Holly sent a letter to *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper* about white support. Holly wrote, "Whilst our improvement mainly depends upon our own efforts, yet there is much that our friends can do for us besides expressing their abhorrence of slavery and disapprobation of prejudice. They possess the capital and natural resources of the country."¹⁸⁵ Holly felt that while education slowly improved employment had not. To gain success black Americans needed better employment with better pay. Agriculture and husbandry, mechanical branches, mercantile pursuits, and the learned professions all served as jobs that helped combat colorphobia. Holly claimed, "I do not ask charity for the colored people, but that they be afforded the means of employing their talents, skill and industry." In a job market that discriminated against black people and kept them inferior colorphobia ran rampant. Through opening up jobs, allowing black workers to prove themselves as equals, and white people lending support Holly thought racial prejudice would end.

Holly sent his letter in August of 1851 but Douglass published it in his newspaper about two months later. Less than a month after Douglass' publishing another letter dealing with black advancement and personal betterment appeared. This time it came from Glasgow commenting on the state of white racial prejudice and black status in the United States. E.B. opened the letter by stating, "The insensate antipathy nourished by the men of the American States toward the free men of color, is so base, and the insult it stimulates so cowardly, one is forced to suspect that the physiological structure of an American white man to be too indurated for the benign influence of civilization, seeing that they are strangers to the amenities and manners of polished society; indeed this morbid aversion to particular colors is an approximation to the dislike of many of the low animals."¹⁸⁶ Racially prejudiced white Americans commonly compared the black population

¹⁸⁵ Joseph C. Holly, "Help for the Colored People," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Oct. 9, 1851.

¹⁸⁶ E.B., "Colorphobia," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Oct. 23, 1851.

to animals. E.B. took their point of view and flipped it by comparing racially prejudiced whites to animals as a means of mockery and shaming them. According to E.B., skin color served as the only difference between white people and black people and fear served as the leading cause of colorphobia. “The men of color are one by one rising to the level of the white race alarm is felt lest, with fair play and advantages, they may yet rise above this level.” Freedmen threatened the northern white population where slaves did not. As freedmen worked on bettering themselves and their status in society white racial prejudice grew. Segregation combined with colorphobia in the North became a tool for domination without enslavement.

If black people successfully tackled colorphobia they advanced in society. An article written for Garrison by William Cooper Nell showed black progress began working by 1856. Reports of black men owning successful businesses and finding good employment revealed that colorphobia could be beaten by improving and changing white opinion on the black population and by giving black citizens their rights. For example, two black men owned a coal yard, while black market men and grocers rapidly appeared across Cincinnati. Much like the earlier argument for white Americans helping black Americans, Nell believed, “The colored American confidently relies upon the aid of his friends, but will ever be zealous and progressive himself.”¹⁸⁷ Black men throughout Cincinnati successfully started businesses and made names for themselves based on hard work and perseverance. However, this had not always been the case. Black men and women had dealt with mobs of northerners riled up and seething with colorphobia for decades. “These mobs were instigated by Northern men, who, with ‘South-side views,’ deemed knowledge in the head, the love of liberty in the heart, and weapons in the hands, as a combination of elements altogether too dangerous to be possessed by colored Americans.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ William Cooper Nell, “A Recent Tour in Ohio,” *The Liberator*, Nov. 21, 1856.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

While black Americans were nowhere near equal to white Americans there had been some improvement in employment, skills, opportunity, and treatment in Cincinnati. The state of Massachusetts practically led other states in curing colorphobia but still did not allow black juries and military service remained complicated. Yet the advancement, betterment, and education of black individuals proved their willingness to elevate themselves and the capability to contribute in northern society. By asserting themselves in the community, the black population combated colorphobia through challenging racial status quos, working their way up in business, seeking better educations, and showing they could be just as successful or more as white people. Abolitionism and the implementation of equal rights combated colorphobia but so did black advancement.

Chapter 3

Impact of Colorphobia

On October 12, 1839 one of Washington, D.C.'s local newspapers, *The Native American*, revealed the latest disease sweeping a small northern minority. Editor J. Elliot Jr. wrote, “‘Negrophobia,’ is the latest name given to the disease of abolition—it is decidedly worse than hydrophobia.”¹⁸⁹ Originally, “negrophobia” appeared interchangeably with colorphobia in abolitionist texts and speeches critiquing racially prejudiced white society. However, through anti-abolitionist adoption negrophobia became the “disease of abolition”—or an affliction that caused anti-slavery and pro-equality views. Anti-abolitionists took negrophobia from the abolitionist agenda to insinuate that abolitionists were crazed and obsessed over elevating the black population at the expense of white Americans, and used the disease for justifying their preference for racial inequality, white hierarchy, and even slavery. By suggesting that abolitionists suffered from “negro on the brain,” anti-abolitionists could not only defend their views, but also discredit abolitionists by terming such a small number of the population as socially unacceptable and dangerous for the success of white society.

This chapter argues that while abolitionists used colorphobia for pointing out the ills of a racially prejudiced white society and revealing segments of public space that needed reform, anti-abolitionists used negrophobia for denouncing abolitionism, and providing social commentary on the increased free black population, and what they believed were the ramifications of ending slavery and the potential horrors of giving equal rights to African Americans. By keeping black people beneath the white population, anti-abolitionists believed they protected white society from its social and political downfall. Anti-abolitionists used negrophobia as a critiquing device against abolitionist values and focused on the areas of society

¹⁸⁹ J. Elliot Jr., “Negrophobia,” *The Native American*, Oct. 12, 1839.

where abolitionists sought equality. Topics such as black voting, politics, mixed schools, and American religion were just some of what anti-abolitionists concentrated on in their argument for continuity in race relations. The chapter also argues that Britain and Canada joined the fight against colorphobia. British abolitionists joined American abolitionists in denouncing racial prejudice by reporting on colorphobic events and individuals but also lent support in the promotion of equal rights. Canada feared colorphobia as it spread into provinces and undermined the country's freedom and equality. The spread of colorphobia into Canada reveals how racial prejudice developed and evolved out of specific populations, and social tensions and environments. Its spread also disproved the claim that colorphobia strictly resided in America. Instead, racial prejudice could develop anywhere under the right circumstances.

Anti-abolitionist Use of Negrophobia

Anti-abolitionists were northern whites that were anti-abolition and pro-slavery. They concerned themselves with rebuking the claims and goals of abolitionists, but also with driving abolitionists away and ending their movement entirely. One way they tried doing so was by adopting negrophobia. While anti-abolitionists established negrophobia as the disease of abolition as early as 1839, its use heavily increased in the 1850s and 1860s as racial tensions increased. *The Red Wing Sentinel*, founded in Minnesota by outspoken Democrat William Colvill Jr., published an article showcasing white anxieties about the black population and abolitionists. The introduction of bills to the Minnesota Legislature prohibiting slavery in the Minnesota territory occurred in 1856. Colvill disliked how the Legislature focused on the Kansas-Nebraska Act because he felt it did not directly impact the Minnesota territory. Instead negrophobia should be their greatest concern—even if Colvill thought the disease would not

fully manifest. He wrote about how local weather and climate could “cure” symptoms of negrophobia; which made the territory appealing to anti-abolitionists.

Minnesota’s environment fostered the perfect white haven. Colvill claimed, “This winter has been so severe that every negro will go down the river on the first boat never to return. The occupation of the Black Republican in Minnesota will then begone forever.”¹⁹⁰ Colvill played on stereotypical beliefs about the black population. Much of the white population believed that the darker skin a person had the better they worked in hot and humid environments, and that black people needed warmer environments to thrive. Their ancestors originating from Africa made outside work easier, and black slaves did not tire as quickly as white workers with fair skin. Black people were naturally superior for agricultural work from their genetic make up. Because of this Colvill believed free blacks and runaway slaves would not survive cold weather in Minnesota. Cold environments would not only keep black persons away but also abolitionists. Just as abolitionists believed high black populations induced colorphobia, anti-abolitionists believed a lack of black people kept negrophobia from developing. According to Colvill, negrophobia only developed if an area had a high black population. Abolitionists lived in cities with freedmen and free blacks; otherwise their misguided goal of promoting anti-slavery and pro-equality served no purpose. The lack of a substantial black population kept negrophobia out of the territory and abolitionism ceased spreading into the West—at least in Minnesota. By driving away black populations, anti-abolitionists combatted negrophobia and its encroachment into white territories.

Anti-abolitionists believed the western Minnesota Territory remained protected from the spread of negrophobia and the black population. However, Greene County, Ohio had less luck. On August 11, 1858 the *Cadiz Democratic Sentinel* published an article by the anonymous

¹⁹⁰ William Colvill Jr., “Slavery in Minoesota,” *The Red Wing Sentinel*, Feb. 9, 1856.

author *Tempora mutantur—Statesman*. The author’s name when translated is Latin for “times change” and it reveals the atmosphere of the North. The bitter fight between abolitionists and anti-abolitionists over the question of the freedman’s future challenged, shaped, and changed northern racial relations. As the black population expanded and tensions flared, abolitionism and black treatment became harder to ignore. Some states like Massachusetts were quicker in adopting anti-segregation measures and ideas while others floundered under tumultuous populations. Anti-abolitionists believed Greene County supplied them with a glimpse into the future after freeing and giving equality to African Americans. Negrophobia spread into a once white community across all class, age, and gender lines. But why did negrophobia appear? The founding of Wilberforce University served as the catalyst by attracting a new black population.

The establishment of a black university produced disastrous effects on the white population. Anti-abolitionists believed the university brought negrophobia to Greene County as the black population rose and proved themselves as intellectually capable. After numerous reports surfaced of white families contracting the disease and adopting abolitionist values doctors became involved. Doctors confirmed that the newly burgeoning black population and the self-betterment they sought produced the outbreak but they also did more than that. *Tempora mutantur* wrote, “Doctors after settling the cause of diseases, we believe, next go to work to ascertain what they call the *Pathology*, or exact nature of the disease—in other words what organ or tissue is affected.”¹⁹¹ The disease did not fester in the kidneys, stomach, or lungs. Instead it resided in the mind and spread through the “germ” of black advancement. Not only men and women contracted negrophobia. So did children. “It is in the mind of the white child, with his first idea and his first look into the face of the black man—*it lives through his whole life, and*

¹⁹¹ *Tempora mutantur*, “Negrophobia in Greene County, Ohio,” *Cadiz Democratic Sentinel*, Aug. 11, 1858.

dies only when he dies.” The doctors identified the cause and nature of negrophobia in Greene County. Yet finding a remedy that did not involve pushing out the black population and dismantling the university became impossible. Anti-abolitionists feared the repeat of similar scenarios across northern states, and believed it would lead to the ruination of a racially structured society. While black advancement might have seemed ideal to abolitionists, anti-abolitionists saw it as an end to their way of life.

Black advancement through voting threatened white lifestyles and supremacy further. Well before the passing of the 14th Amendment in 1868 that granted citizenship to ex-slaves and the 15th Amendment in 1870 securing voting rights for all citizens regardless of race, abolitionists sought black betterment and representation through voting in the antebellum North. However, anti-abolitionists held extreme anti-black voting sentiments. On August 22, 1860 the *Clearfield Republican* published an article about the push for the “negro vote” and the disastrous effects that would undoubtedly follow. The *Clearfield Republican* served the majority Democratic Party in Clearfield County and fostered Copperhead sympathies.¹⁹² Copperheads, or pro-slavery Democrats residing in the North, opposed the Union entering into war and sought peace with the South. The newspaper’s copperhead views placed blame for the war on abolitionists and printed articles against them. The published article first reiterated part of an article from the *New York Times*.

The New York Times published commentary on black voting and discrimination because of a property clause—freedmen had to own \$250 in real estate before they could register to vote. If black men had to fulfill a property requirement for voting, *The New York Times* argued, then white men should as well. Publisher D.W. Moore of the *Clearfield Republican* viewed the outcry against the property requirement and the pro-black voting stance in the newspaper as a product

¹⁹² Library of Congress, Penn State Univ. Libraries, *Clearfield Republican*, 2016.

of negrophobia. Moore wrote, “If there is one thing more degrading to the American people than another, it is the fact that a powerful party exists in our midst which, or a majority of which, is willing to sink the proud Anglo-Saxon and other European races into one common level with the lowest races of mankind.”¹⁹³ He thought allowing black men to vote would completely change the political structure. White men would no longer control American society and changes voted in by black men would produce more harm than good. Being the dominant race had its benefits—why would white people want to lose them? After all, “God has not ordained the distinct divisions of the human family which now exist, without some wise purpose.”¹⁹⁴ To anti-abolitionists, physical and mental differences between white and black people served as natural separators and the divisions supported the argument for white-only voting.

If those differences were ignored and black men voted, anti-abolitionists feared disastrous consequences as a result. Moore revealed one consequence with his continuation: “If the equality of the negro is acknowledged, and the political rights of the white man are shared with him, a mongrel race must and will follow.”¹⁹⁵ Amalgamation, or race mixing, struck fear into the hearts of anti-abolitionist individuals. In their minds, it endangered the purity of the white race and its superiority. Moore and other anti-abolitionists feared black men and mulattos gaining political power through voting and shaping the country into one that was pro-black and pro-equality. Black people would assert an equal claim on America and the white population would become victimized by the black race.

Other than voting matters, local elections stole abolitionist and anti-abolitionist attention. Which candidate won and from what political party shaped how black treatment and the fight for equal rights would play out—especially when it came to candidates who supported Black Laws.

¹⁹³ D.W. Moore, “Negro Voting,” *Clearfield Republican*, Aug. 22, 1860.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Black Laws, or “black codes,” were huge hindrances in establishing equality between the races. They were laws put in place to limit black rights and keep white American power. For example, some black codes restricted black voting.¹⁹⁶ Abolitionist concern with Black Laws and elections increased in 1862 when the Civil War for the Union had taken a turn for the worse. With the war failing in all but the West, some states turned positions of power over to Democrats instead of keeping or selecting Republicans. Having a Republican in the White House while friends and family died in a war without any victory in sight helped shift political support. In November of 1862, Democrats meeting in Hillsborough, Ohio selected Clement Vallandigham as their choice for Governor.¹⁹⁷ Vallandigham served as leader of the Ohio Democratic Party and held anti-war views. Before chosen as governor he served two terms in the House of Representatives in Congress where he rallied support for keeping Black Laws.

As soon as Vallandigham’s name was publicly released, the editor of the *Dayton Daily Empire*, newly promoted William T. Logan (who took over after his predecessor was shot seven days before the article’s publication), claimed the editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The Highland News* became enraged. Logan wrote, “The editor raves and rants like a caged hyena. But he is not at all dangerous; we know the animal. He has the negrophobia pretty bad, but the recent elections will act as an opiate on his frenzied brain.”¹⁹⁸ Logan accused the editor of suffering from negrophobia and compared him to a hyena for specific reasons. Just like abolitionists sometimes compared anti-abolitionists and slave holders to animals as a way to use their own prejudice against them, anti-abolitionists used the same tactic for proving their prejudices correct.

¹⁹⁶ For more information on Black Laws, see Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

¹⁹⁷ William T. Logan, “On the Rampage.,” *Dayton Daily Empire*, Nov. 8, 1862.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Logan combined imagery about blacks and imagery about disease to describe abolitionists. Comparing the editor to a hyena played on typical assumptions and prejudices about the black population. Slaves and freedmen commonly found themselves compared to animals in pro-slavery and anti-black writings. Abolitionists casted as hyenas lowered them to the level of the black population, demeaned them, and discredited their cause. A “raving” and “ranting” hyena also connoted an image of a mad and diseased creature. Hydrophobia in northern cities struck fear into the hearts of men and women alike. Any kind of mad animal, especially a hyena since its build and appearance was dog-like, scared northern society. Anti-abolitionists hoped critiques against abolitionists would have the same effect. Laboring under negrophobia and turning crazed when something got in the way of their agenda depicted abolitionists as dangerous to not only themselves but also the entirety of northern society.

During the height of the American Civil War in 1863 *The Bedford Gazette* in Bedford, Pennsylvania harshly denounced “negrophobics.” Local abolitionists critiqued the weekly publishings of *The Bedford Gazette* and tried shutting down the press. According to publisher Charles M’Dowell, the mere sight of the newspaper “causes them to rave and foam at the mouth, as if possessed with some unclean spirit which cannot brook the pure principles of Democracy.”¹⁹⁹ The employees and founders of *The Bedford Gazette* ignored such criticism from abolitionists and focused on their anti-abolitionist writings and other publishings instead. M’Dowell continued, “These fantastic capers of these poor victims of negrophobia, do not disturb us in the least, and no matter how much the miserable creatures may storm and rave, we intend to pursue the ‘even tenor of our way,’ regardless of all their outcry and all their curses.”²⁰⁰ *Bedford Gazette* workers claimed they harbored only worry for the safety and well being of those

¹⁹⁹ Charles M’Dowell, “‘Keep Cool!’,” *The Bedford Gazette*, Jul. 17, 1863.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

incensed with negrophobia. Anti-abolitionist writings and points of view in their newspaper were dangerous for abolitionists—it could kill them if they did not ‘keep cool.’ The only way to survive was to “‘keep cool,’ if that be possible in the dog-days, with persons laboring under attacks of negro-on-the-brain.”²⁰¹ Heavy doses of “Sensation Pills” were also prescribed along with Confederate victories and attacks against anti-slavery. If the Confederacy, filled with anti-abolitionists, won the war or made major defeats against northern whites, M’Dowell hoped abolitionists would back down and end their obsession over elevating the black population.

Suggested ways for keeping cool ranged from keeping ice in pockets and on coattails to sleeping in fresh open air. The best way to keep cool, however, “would be to mind their own business and let that of their neighbors’ alone.”²⁰² Once those suffering from negrophobia tried the cures M’Dowell claimed they would find themselves free of abolitionism. As a consequence:

Negrophobia will cease and black no longer will be white, nor white black. Reason will return to her deserted throne and the Bedford Gazette will be no longer poison, but nutriment, to the mind now relieved of the nightmare of Abolition. ‘Keep Cool!’²⁰³

Once cured, the newspaper would provide ex-abolitionists with anti-abolitionist sentiments and they would no longer contribute towards the destruction of America. Other than ice cubs and keeping cool M’Dowell touched on various topics that concerned both abolitionists and anti-abolitionists—like the war. The war resided at the forefront of every American’s mind. M’Dowell placed the blame of the war on abolitionists mad with negrophobia because they could not “mind their own business.” Placing blame of such a harsh war on a small minority served a greater purpose. If negrophobics caused the war then all of the suffering that happened to white

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Americans could be pinned on abolitionists. Such pain and brutality caused by the push for black social elevation helped discredit abolitionists.

As abolitionists worried about America dying socially and politically from colorphobia anti-abolitionists feared the same with negrophobia. A year after M'Dowell's critique telling white individuals infected to "keep cool" he reported on another case of negrophobia. On July 22, 1864 in *The Bedford Gazette* M'Dowell printed about a death in Middletown, Connecticut from the week prior. The man had contracted hydrophobia from skinning a cow infected by a mad dog and died. M'Dowell used the death for critiquing abolitionists and wrote, "In the same way men are dying political deaths of negrophobia, having assisted in skinning Uncle Samuel's cow which was bitten by the mad dog Abolition."²⁰⁴ Like in 1862 with Logan's report on negrophobics raving over the election of a Democrat and losing political power, abolitionists continued being framed as mad, and damaged their image and political stance in America. Abolitionists were so concerned over the black population and fighting for their equality that they were ruining not only the country but also their political careers. While not explicitly stated, it is clear that M'Dowell implied if abolitionists did not cure themselves of their disease of "negro on the brain" they had no future in the country.

Politico-Religious fanaticism concerned anti-abolitionists from the impact it had on church congregations, and anti-abolitionists feared that the adoption of the same negrophobic outlooks and values destroyed the sanctity of religious institutions. On October 5, 1864 the *Star of the North*, a Democratic paper originating from Pennsylvania, published an article by Col. Democrat. Democrat grew concerned over the presence of three politico-religious fanatics residing in Columbia County, Pennsylvania. The first, Rev. J. Milton Acres denounced all men who disagreed with his abolitionist politics and called them "copperheads." Acres claimed they

²⁰⁴ Charles M'Dowell, "A man died of..." *The Bedford Gazette*, Jul. 22, 1864.

would suffer in a hotter place worse than hell. The second, Rev. P. F. Eyer described Democrats as “men who resist the Draft.” Because of this outlook Eyer denounced his own father, “who is what he never was or will be, a Democrat, a gentleman, and a Christian. Shame on such hypocrisy.”²⁰⁵ The final religious figure Rev. D. A. Beckley held and led a political meeting in which he praised the Confederate loss in the Shanandoah (sic) Valley. Beckley took the win as a sign that Republicans would dominate over Democrats in the next election. Col. Democrat viewed the three reverends with contempt and wrote, “What a *trio* of Preachers. And what else could be expected of fools and fanatics—inspired by negrophobia. Oh! the horrors of ‘nigger-on-the-brain.’”²⁰⁶ Abolitionists were so badly influenced by their obsession of freeing and giving equal rights to the black population that they cursed others to hell and beyond, criticized their family, made the Christian religion hypocritical, and praised death and destruction. Abolitionists argued colorphobia corrupted Christianity and anti-abolitionists claimed negrophobia did the same—but with different goals and reasons in mind.

Abolitionists focused on anti-Christian traits, such as unequal and unfair treatment of black people, which turned American Christianity hypocritical, while anti-abolitionists critiqued abolitionists over how they treated those without the same outlook and opinions. Whenever abolitionists tried lashing out at anti-abolitionists or denouncing the way they lived their lives anti-abolitionists did the same. Anti-abolitionists not only disliked being targeted by a minority they felt threatened the entirety of the white North but also felt abolitionists were not completely perfect themselves—much like the three reverends. Adopting negrophobia provided anti-abolitionists with a weapon designed for combatting social change driven by abolitionists. Critiquing negrophobia displayed white anxieties about black equality and revealed the dim

²⁰⁵ Col. Democrat, “Politico-Religious Fanaticism,” *The Star of the North*, Oct. 5, 1864.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

future anti-abolitionists believed would follow. Anti-abolitionists used negrophobia for undermining abolitionists and commenting on the dangers of black equality and advancement.

A Transnational Front: Britain & Canada Against Colorphobia

While abolitionists illustrated public instances of colorphobia in their newspapers and writings to expedite reform and fought an intellectual battle against anti-abolitionists, they attracted attention from across the Atlantic Ocean. Transatlantic travelers noticed colorphobia while in the United States, and viewed the disease as specifically and uniquely American as they denounced it. Britain claimed to be free of colorphobia, and noticed the hypocrisy of American democracy, morality, and values by witnessing and hearing of mistreatment of black Americans. How could such a country that prided itself on freedom, liberty, and justice condemn the cruel institution of slavery in the North and ignore colorphobia? British abolitionists wrote about and reported on colorphobia to promote anti-slavery, immediate emancipation, and racial equality in America. They also used colorphobia to point out that the former British colony failed to live up to its democratic ideals. Also, Americans traveling abroad noticed a lack of colorphobia in Britain and confirmed British claims of no racial prejudice.

Well-known American abolitionists partook in speaking tours abroad for international emancipation and pushed for curing colorphobia. Many of the experiences abroad, transatlantic correspondences, and country comparisons found print in abolitionist newspapers. William Lloyd Garrison himself wrote an article entitled “American Colorphobia” and published it in *The Liberator* in 1847. Garrison wrote about the eminent abolitionist Frederick Douglass, his treatment abroad, and black choices in general. The most telling part of the article dealt with black people leaving the country for others without colorphobia. It seemed rather logical to Garrison that black men and women fled to European countries where they were not subjected to

racial prejudice. He wrote, “In fifteen or twenty days, he can place his feet on the shores of Europe—in Great Britain and Ireland—where, if he cannot obtain more food or better clothing, he can surely find that his complexion is not regarded as a crime, and constitutes no barrier to his social, intellectual, or political advancement.”²⁰⁷ Garrison claimed Douglass was a martyr for staying in a country that denied him equal rights when he had the chance for freedom abroad. Douglass stuck by his brethren, and was “surrounded by an atmosphere of prejudice which is enough to appal the stoutest heart, and to depress the most elastic spirit. Such is the difference between England and America; between a people living under a monarchical form of government, and a nation of boasting republicans.”²⁰⁸

British abolitionists held great distaste for colorphobia. With the superpower’s attention on America there was mounting pressure to address and fix black treatment and the country’s obvious hypocrisy. The English openly denounced and critiqued American colorphobia and relayed their experiences with it as a support tactic. For example, On October 27, 1847 an anti-slavery newspaper *The Emancipator* stationed in New York reported on the racially prejudiced experiences of an English Baronet. The baronet traveled to New York with his black servant on a trip for his failing health. Yet when he arrived in America he came across an issue he thought nothing about—colorphobia. The baronet suffered from a paralytic affliction and needed the support of his servant at all times for walking, assistance, and even protection.

A.S. Standard, the author of the report, revealed the baronet’s ordeal as he explored the city and gave a description of the servant to show his good character in typical abolitionist fashion. Standard wrote, “His servant is a very intelligent coloured man, who has lived in the Baronet’s family from his childhood, and is in every respect a person of good behaviour, who

²⁰⁷ William Lloyd Garrison, “American Colorphobia,” *The Liberator*, Jun. 11, 1847.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

perfectly well understands his position, and is an excellent servant, and at the same time a confidential friend.”²⁰⁹ With a black man who “knew his place” working in a subservient position and assisting an Englishman of fine standing, his presence in public should have been no issue. However, with northern whites suffering from colorphobia the baronet and his servant encountered new problems. One day the duo walked up Broadway, but with his health so poor the Baronet sought an omnibus to take them back to their lodging. The driver would not allow the servant on the omnibus because he was black and moved on without the pair. After resting from his ordeal on Broadway the baronet sought entrance to Barnum’s Museum the following day. The ticket worker would allow the Baronet inside but only if he left his servant and took the tour alone. Unable to do so because of his condition he found himself banned. These ordeals caused Standard’s following comment: “If the Englishman should happen to be one of the writing species, it is quite probable that he will be a subject of universal abuse on this side of the Atlantic, for entertaining a preference for English liberty to American independence.”²¹⁰ No other country in the entire world, according to Standard, would have banned the Baronet from public transportation or an institution of culture on account of the color of his companion’s skin. With colorphobia unknown to most British outside of the realm of abolitionists he did not know what awaited them. Colorphobia in New York cruelly kept a sick man from enjoying what might have been his last vacation on account of its obsession with complexion. Free and open public space only applied to white persons—but even some white people, like the Baron, were discriminated against.

The following year the British press picked up on a story about colorphobia in education. A young girl sought admission into a white school but was stalled by the disease. A racially

²⁰⁹ A.S. Standard, “Colorphobia,” *The Emancipator*, Oct. 27, 1847.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

prejudiced man, on account of her skin color, blocked the entrance of Rosetta Douglass— Frederick Douglass’ daughter. On November 10, 1848 *The North Star* relayed the opinion of writer H.G. Warner of the anti-slavery newspaper the *British Banner* on what happened. Warner provided general information about the event and supplied commentary. He wrote, “The chief governess of the school clearly manifests an excellent spirit, and the children, too, are, without an exception, true to the nature within them, which, unsophisticated, knows nothing of color as a condition of human love and social intercourse.”²¹¹ A colorblind student body and governess allowed admission for Douglass’ daughter. However, one parent infected with colorphobia stood against the black child receiving an equal education. Warner viewed this instance as both troubling and enlightening. While the father remained trapped in his racially prejudiced views no one else harbored them. Warner hoped that the lack of colorphobia in the school represented the general populace of the United States. Perhaps the disease did not effect most of the population, but those laboring under its ill effects drew so much attention that it seemed a widespread phenomenon. According to Warner, men like the one blocking Rosetta from school entrance “are a blot on the fair face of America!”²¹² Yet he believed there was hope for America in the upcoming generation that already seemed free of racial prejudice—as long as they did not listen to their close-minded fathers.

Just as British abolitionist Warner commented on American events surrounding racial prejudice, American abolitionists reported on non-racially prejudiced events and surprises in Europe as news of what happened made its way to the states. The following autumn William Wells Brown found himself popularly received at a meeting held in London for his arrival. Brown and other black men visiting Europe on speaking tours all faced the same warm welcome.

²¹¹ Frederick Douglass, “H.G. Warner,” *The North Star*, Nov. 10, 1848.

²¹² *Ibid.*

Frederick Douglass writing on the way Englishmen received Brown penned, “It is a source of intense pleasure, especially to the proscribed colored people of this country, to witness the cordial and heart cheering reception extended to our colored brother.” No sight would ever be seen in America unless held at an abolitionist meeting or rally. Douglass further declared that the pleasant way the men were received in France and England “should convince Americans that *colorphobia* is a disease exclusively confined to the American climate; that the colored man has but to quit the shores of this nominally *Free Country*, and land on the shores of England, or on the European continent, to have his manhood acknowledged—his rights protected—and his person respected.”²¹³ Being received so kindly in England showed that colorphobia resided in America instead of in the hearts of foreigners, but two English sisters also helped bolster the argument that racial prejudice resided only in the United States.

Close to a month after Douglass praised England for its outstanding welcome for Brown, the sisters visiting America released an eye-opening story of their run-ins with colorphobia. The first part of their story dealt with public transportation. In New York in 1849, an English lady and her sister supplied a witness account of colorphobia. Frederick Douglass’ *North Star* reported their tale of colorphobia on the Rochester railroad. The two ladies traveled with a young black boy who was no more than five years of age. Some passengers unhappily inquired about who he was, whispered, and stared, while another passenger inquired if the boy was for sale. The boy thankfully stayed “happily unconscious of his color being anything to be marveled at, and looked all his enemies in the face with the pure trust and confidence of childhood.”²¹⁴ Once the three disembarked from the train, they faced dining separately from their young companion, looks of disbelief, and gossip from passing white persons.

²¹³ Frederick Douglass, “W.W. Brown,” *The North Star*, Oct. 26, 1849.

²¹⁴ Frederick Douglass, “*Colorphobia* on the Railroad and on the River,” *The North Star*, Nov. 30, 1849.

While the sisters never explained who the child was, or what they were doing with him, they gave a further account of their experience with American colorphobia. During their trip the ladies visited a blind asylum where they sat in the parlor and chatted with institutionalized young women. Questions about the treatment of black patients produced an outburst of colorphobia. The young women responded in anger and explained that while they were black patients in the asylum, their number remained low, and they received treatment separately from the white population. Douglass relayed:

Then followed, on the part of these young ladies, a simultaneous burst of indignation against the colored people in general, suppressed murmurs that they had ever been brought from Africa, the trouble they cause in this country, and vehement declarations that *they* would never sit at table with colored people and on *no account* would they consent to marry one of them.²¹⁵

Appalled at such a reaction to their question, the visiting women lectured the blind girls on their sin and urged them to rethink their cruelty. Most shocking to the sisters about the patients' colorphobia was that even though they could not see black people they hated them. Those with colorphobia suffered outbursts at the sight of black men, women, and children. Just the mere thought of being near a black person produced irrational hatred. Perhaps the young women had not always been blind and had seen black people before, or perhaps colorphobia in blind Americans showed the disease as much more complex and easier to develop in a harsh social environment than abolitionists imagined. The English sisters never experienced colorphobia back home in Britain, and hoped America would change its views on the black population. By publishing their account, the sisters hoped they inspired the North to become more like Britain in regards to racial relations, and desired to help American abolitionists by supporting them and giving information through the publishing of their experiences.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

In 1851 George Thompson Esq. drew abolitionist attention while in America. Thompson arrived in Rochester, New York and gave a lecture about reform in Great Britain and British India. The *Daily Advertiser* slandered his character and tried provoking further hostile reactions from the general public over his speech. Journalist Roch. Herald wrote, “Thompson had ‘violated the rights of hospitality’ and ‘vilified and abused our country as a whole.’”²¹⁶ Thompson publicly denounced the American Fugitive Slave Law and slavery and also lashed out at American colorphobia. The combination brought harsh reactions from racially prejudiced audiences. They not only felt personally victimized, but also believed Thompson had attacked the American government and the Constitution itself. On the contrary, Thompson did not denounce America and its values. The United States entertained a hypocritical point of view of government by having a system based on slavery and skin color. All he did was point it out. Roch. Herald claimed that, “he has uniformly expressed love and admiration for all, with the exception of slavery and its colorphobia, and the Fugitive Slave Law.”²¹⁷ If America rid itself of slavery and the ill byproducts it produced, like racial prejudice, Thompson thought the country would be perfect.

While British abolitionists condemned and critiqued American colorphobia in the 1840s, the following decade saw the rise of colorphobia in Canada. Just like in America, an increase in the black population served as a precondition for colorphobia in the 1850s. Some Canadians argued over how racially prejudiced certain regions were or if colorphobia impacted Canada at all. Two black newspapers, the *Provincial Freeman* and the *Voice of the Fugitive* dominated the conversation in the 1850s and even into the early 1860s. With increased black persons in provinces and Americans holding racially prejudiced sentiments, Canadians found themselves

²¹⁶ Roch. Herald, “Baseness and Mendacity,” *The North Star*, Mar. 20, 1851.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

falling victim to the disease. A country that previously claimed itself colorphobia-free before the sudden influxes in the 1850s found itself immersed in the racial drama of the United States.

As black people entered Canada to leave slavery behind, escape the Fugitive Slave Law that allowed for the return of runaway slaves residing in the North, and start new lives, colorphobia appeared in black Canadian newspapers. On May 21, 1851 the first black newspaper in Canada founded by Henry C. Bibb, *The Voice of the Fugitive*, released an article claiming colorphobia resided in the country. Bibb wrote, “This most obnoxious and fatal disease has made its way into this province where it is destined to make havoc among the ignorant and vicious if a speedy remedy is not applied.”²¹⁸ The disease seemed especially potent to lower class whites already targeted by the powerful and rich. Bibb defined colorphobia as a “contagious disease.” He stated, “It is more destructive to the mind than to the body. It goes hard with a person who is a little nervous. It makes them froth and foam as if the Bengal Tiger was in them.”²¹⁹ Various symptoms could appear during an outbreak. Sometimes those with the disease would cry out “nigger” or “darkey.” Sometimes they would “quack like crows.” Perhaps Bibb’s most revealing bit of information about the disease came from the revelation of what kind of situations it appeared in. Bibb wrote, “It excites them awfully when colored passengers enter the rail cars or stage coaches, but not when they come in the capacity of waiters or servants.”²²⁰ Like in America, Canadians remained perfectly calm around freedmen in positions of servitude, because it made them feel at ease in their racial superiority.

As racial prejudice spread its impact on children became a concern. But how did children develop colorphobia in Canada? They did so the same way as American children. Bibb claimed, “It sometimes gets into children through the wicked and unnatural teaching of parents... When

²¹⁸ Henry C. Bibb, “Color-Phobia in Canada,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, May, 21, 1851.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

they have it bad they will turn up their noses when they get near a colored person, as if they smelt something disagreeable and often say there is a cloud rising.”²²¹ Children developed racial prejudice from their social environment. People were not naturally born with hate against color. It had to be imbibed into their systems through lessons, complaints, and experiences. Bibb went on to list the various levels of religion colorphobia also infiltrated and found that Canadian Christianity suffered the same blows. All of what Bibb wrote frightened Canadians. How could they protect themselves or cure themselves of such a vile disease? It was simple. Bibb claimed that, “Anti-Slavery is the very best remedy for it. It will cure you of prejudice and hatred, and prepare you for a happier state of existence.”²²² Without anti-slavery and the further application of equality the continuance of colorphobia in both the states and provinces seemed undeniable.

On November 5, 1851 Bibb’s *Voice of the Fugitive* printed a letter from Samuel Ringgold “S.R.” Ward about the condition of colorphobia in Canada. Ward, a refugee slave from the states, lived in fear of the Fugitive Slave Law and found himself surrounded by colorphobia on public transportation. Steamboat workers in Canada suffered spasms of racial prejudice like the ones on steamboat *Saratoga* and steamboat *Rip Van Winkle* in New York. Ward reported, “As an instance of Canadian Negro hate, I took passage to-day, at Lachine, for Kingston. I could not get a cabin passage, on the steamer St. Lawrence, which carries her Majesty’s Mail, upon no terms whatever!”²²³ Half-a-dozen cabin room keys hung left unclaimed but the worker claimed lack of room. A different steamboat on Lake Champlain, the *Francis Saultus*, provided Ward with a cabin passage instead. Steamboat *Francis Saultus* appeared as the foreign version of Steamboat *Oregon* with equal treatment and passage for black travelers.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Samuel Ringgold “S.R.” Ward, “For the Voice of the Fugitive,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, Nov. 5, 1851.

Ward believed prejudiced steamboats in Canada were actually a product of Yankee America—their captains from the states labored under the cruel symptoms of racial prejudice. Yet even the British vessels teemed with racial prejudice. Ward claimed, “But the St. Lawrence, under the patronage of the British Government, and sailing upon British waters, with a British subject for a captain, compels a black man to take a deck passage.”²²⁴ In an environment surrounded by other racially prejudiced persons and situations not even the British stood strong against colorphobia. Ward believed that, “The boast of Englishmen, of their freedom from social negrophobia, is about as empty as the Yankee boast of democracy.”²²⁵ In this instance the abolitionist definition of negrophobia applied and Ward brought up the hypocrisy of American democracy. Only universal agitation would cure America and other countries of racial prejudice.

The following year Ward sent a letter to Henry Bibb and James Theodore Holly describing the state of colorphobia in Canada, and the similarities and differences between the disease in Canada and America. Ward believed that while colorphobia had spread throughout the old Western District of the country he did not believe it existed in each province. In his opinion, some abolitionists dramatized the extent to which the disease had spread. Ward wrote, “But I do deny that such a feeling, is, or ever was so general, so universal, as those gentlemen represent it, or as they would like to have it.”²²⁶ Like in America black people found themselves banned from hotels, cabin passage on steamboats, kept out of taverns and entertainment establishments, and even faced discrimination at parties and dinners they received invitations to. Religious brethren and ministers also found themselves targeted. “A Methodist minister residing near Dresden, in the Gore of Camden, invited Mr. Vick, a black brother, to his house to aid in some work. The good (?) priest called on brother Vick, to pray at family worship, but when meals were ready

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Samuel Ringgold “S.R.” Ward, “Canadian Negro Hate, No. 3.,” *Voice of the Fugitive*, Nov. 4, 1852.

brother Vick must not eat at the same table, with this reverend preacher of a ‘free salvation.’”²²⁷

Another black Methodist minister traveling on a speaking tour lacked lodging and dinner at a fellow white brethren’s home, because of the color of his skin and the owner’s fitfulness over his skin tone. Public spaces in Canada and America brought white and black people into contact with one another, and as a consequence colorphobia manifested in each country on public transportation and other public areas. While symptoms and consequences of colorphobia remained the same, Ward thought there will still important differences in Canadian colorphobia.

Ward argued that they were two major differences in Canadian colorphobia. First, Canadian colorphobia seemed decidedly worse than its American counterpart. Ward argued:

Canadian Negro Hate, is incomparably MEANER then the yankee article. The parties who exhibit most of this feeling, are as poor, as ignorant as immoral, as low, in every respect as the most degraded class of negroes. In numerous instances, are they very far below them.²²⁸

In Canada black and white individuals held power equally in politics and legal circumstances. Black persons had their freedom in the provinces and Ward thought that made colorphobia’s existence worse. In America freedmen in reality remained “demi-freeman” without any kind of political, legal, or economical freedom, while white Canadians had no way of discriminating against black people through political or legal means. Instead they only used public space and public amenities for asserting power when possible. Ward believed Canadian colorphobia stemmed from an imitation of American Yankeeism. Not only did Americans bring the idea of racial prejudice with them but also Canadians themselves facilitated the spread of disease. Citizens visited America and returned influenced by “Yankee cash, and Yankee ideas,

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

and deal out both, in small quantities around their respective neighborhoods.”²²⁹ America was a rising world power, and adopting American ideals and practices looked appealing.

The second difference between Canadian and American colorphobia goes back to Ward’s mention of political and legal rights. Ward argued, “Unlike the Yankee product of the same name, Canadian negro hate, here has neither the current religion, nor the civil law to uphold it.”²³⁰ In America if a black person faced discrimination in public space and sought a lawsuit they would unlikely win. Ward himself only knew of one time a black person won damages against a prejudiced steamboat operation. British law in Canada did not discriminate against skin color. If black persons brought their complaint to court their claims would be heard and a trial properly held. Even religion handled colorphobia differently. Ward wrote, “Not a single denomination, have we in Canada, where ministers uphold or sanction this illegal and unchristian treatment of black persons.”²³¹ Religious denominations generally did not promote racially prejudiced views but individuals residing in congregations did. In contrast, in the United States preachers and even entire congregations fell victim to colorphobia. Although Ward found colorphobia to be meaner than the American kind and challengeable by law, he did not believe it would last. According to Ward, “The labors of the anti-slavery society, the improvement, progress, and good demeanor of the black people will, in a very short time, undermine and destroy this abomination...”²³² Unless the press continued spouting prejudiced remarks and instances, and the black population failed in advancing themselves, Ward felt certain colorphobia would disappear.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

With the spread of colorphobia into Canadian provinces segregation appeared on public transportation. Anonymous abolitionist Norristown (Pa.) Olive Branch witnessed the change on the old West Chester Railroad and released an article about it in the *Provincial Freeman*. The newspaper itself played a major role in promoting black advancement and better racial relations in Canada. One of the newspaper's founders, Mary Ann Shadd Carey, belonged to a wealthy black American family that moved to Canada when she was only ten years old. Being an all black newspaper allowed for emphasizing abolitionist stories and sentiment, as well as promoting self-reliance and independence among black Canadians and settlers. The publishing of the *Provincial Freeman* occurred in the Province of Canada West, known today as Ontario, where a heavy fugitive slave population settled.²³³ The old West Chester Railroad quickly became a topic of contestation four years after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law as the black population boomed.

Just like the Eastern Railroad in Massachusetts, passengers on Canadian railroads faced segregated seating based on skin color. In the past being white or black did not dictate where one sat; neither did ticket price or class. Olive Branch, whose penname clearly symbolized the abolitionist fight for peace amongst the races and victory in the form of ending racial prejudice, wrote, "Colored persons are very carefully handed into a corner by themselves, unless they happen to be acting in the capacity of nurses or servants. This ought not to surprise us if existing in the South, or anywhere else in the world but in a region under Quaker influence like Chester Country."²³⁴ Why now did color matter? Other railroads in the area, like the Reading Railroad, separated passengers by rates and smoking. The only explanation for the sudden implementation of segregated seating on the railroad, according to Olive Branch, originated from the sudden rise

²³³ "Provincial Freeman," Accessible Archives Inc., Accessed Mar. 15, 2016, <http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-american-newspapers/provincial-freeman/>.

²³⁴ Norristown (Pa.) Olive Branch, "Colorphobia," *The Provincial Freeman*, Sep. 22, 1855.

of colorphobia in the region. Olive Branch, desperate to save the town's reputation even though it succumbed to colorphobia declared, "While on this subject of colorphobia, we might further remark, to the credit of Norristown, that our new line of Omnibusses allows no exclusion of men and women because they are not white."²³⁵ Public transportation fell victim to colorphobia in Canada just like the United States.

By 1855 the belief that "white Yankees" or white Americans also brought colorphobia to Canada continued. C.W. Windsor wrote to the *Provincial Freeman* that no improvement had been made in curing colorphobia. Instead it only increased. He said that Yankees are, "with the fewest exceptions enemies to the colored people, of the most contemptible kind. Many of them, white yankees, who came to this free country for more liberty; but who, true to their inferior training, and dirty instincts, are carrying into practice her the same tricks, as they would have done at home..."²³⁶ However, towards the end of 1860 and less than three years until the Fugitive Slaw Law ended with the Thirteenth Amendment hope remained. A.H. Francis wrote Frederick Douglass on November 5, 1860 about the status of colorphobia. Francis recently settled in Portland, Oregon from Victoria. Francis had spent time in Victoria, Vancouver's Island, and British Columbia with a friend. While in Canada he witnessed the bitter tensions and battles between the British and the Canadians. Francis, fearful over the disease sweeping across the country, found relief in the English attacks. He wrote:

The great difficulty seems to be: the English are holding out the hand of kindness and protection to the colored people. The Yankee and the Americanized foreigner are taking it in high *dudgeon*, to think they are for once compelled to yield to their prejudices, or leave the country. The last election in Victoria was most beautifully controlled by the colored people putting in and

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ C.W. Windsor, "For the Provincial Freeman," *The Provincial Freeman*, Dec. 8, 1855.

throwing out at pleasure—our old friends Lester and Gibbs taking the lead.²³⁷

The English had no colorphobia in Britain and supported American abolitionists in their fight against the disease. Colorphobia spread into Canada, because of the growing black population and American Yankees flooding the area with racially prejudiced views. The British wanted to spur and enforce social change in regards to race and black treatment in Canada, and white colorphobics wanted the English out of the country. A recent victory of the black population leading the election in Victoria fueled the British further and sent the white population into a greater rage as they felt pressured into either conforming or leaving. Francis penned, “In relation to colorphobia, I must close by saying that there is a grand future for the colored man in the British possessions on the north Pacific.”²³⁸ Windsor thought that with the help of the British, black fugitives and black Canadians might escape from racial prejudice. Yet fighting colorphobia proved harder than abolitionists hoped.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ A. H. Francis, “Letter from A.H. Francis,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, Nov. 5, 1860.

Epilogue: The Fate of Colorphobia

What happened to colorphobia after slavery ended in the United States? When the 13th Amendment officially ended slavery in the aftermath of the Civil War, abolitionists hoped that colorphobia might disappear. Yet although the black population gained its freedom, the equal rights crucial for ending racial prejudice did not follow. Without the complete assurance and application of equal rights, racial egalitarians lamented that colorphobia continued in northern cities and beyond. Even after the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, obtaining fair treatment and full access to rights remained difficult for black Americans. In the South, matters of equality became contested as the region rebuilt, and white southerners instituted Jim Crow policies alongside every day tactics of intimidation and socio-economic inequality. For many commentators, who were mostly black, colorphobia did not end in the 1860s. Instead, the disease seemed to expand, and the language of disease continued to have power as concerns about epidemics continued into the Progressive era and the immigrant population grew. Advocates of racial equality continued to use the terminology of colorphobia—even reclaiming the term negrophobia and returning it to its original meaning as a synonym for colorphobia—well into the twentieth century.

After the end of the war, the words colorphobia and even abolitionist-defined negrophobia still appeared in commentaries on public space and matters of every day life while anti-abolitionist use of negrophobia seemed to disappear. William Cooper Nell secured intermixed schools in Boston and Massachusetts that became leading examples of school integration. However, not all public schools adopted equality and integration across the country. For example, an anonymous journalist revealed the injustice of selecting H.R. Howard as County Superintendent of public schools in West Virginia. The author claimed that parents wanted a

man, “who is capable and who will teach and inculcate the great principles of morality and Christianity among the instructors of our youth and into our schools.”²³⁹ On the surface Howard appeared as the perfect candidate for teaching morality and Christian values to young minds, but in reality he suffered under the woes of negrophobia (used here as a synonym for colorphobia). The author thought Howard’s corrupted outlooks would spread racial prejudice to white students. Howard was, the author observed,

so under the influence of negrophobia that his mind is haunted by these black specters by night and by day. When he looks upon one of these children of Ham, he imagines he discovers a facsimile of self and goes off into spasms at once, and cries nigger! Nigger!! Nigger!!!²⁴⁰

The importance of equality and inalienable rights for black persons would not be taught to white students. Howard would “tell them that the negro is not a human being, that their children are little brutes and that you white children should kick and cuff them about like old shoes.”²⁴¹ In comparison to his visits at white schools, Howard’s racially prejudiced views would cause open demeaning of children at black schools. Howard would remind them that they deserved maltreatment and that equal rights were not meant for them. His negrophobia would undoubtedly infect young minds and plant seeds for a pro-white supremacist future. Why did the author believe all of this would happen? Howard worked for the Mason County *Journal* that held unequal views towards the black population, and the anonymous reporter believed he harbored the same feelings. Putting Howard and others like him into powerful positions would negatively impact the struggle for equal rights and fair treatment.

Even attacking other newspapers for holding racially prejudiced views continued past the official end of slavery. Editor Tim Ethridge of *The Evansville Journal* wished for “an antidote

²³⁹ X, “Who is H.R. Howard,” *Weekly Register*, Oct. 17, 1867.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

for the negrophobia, a malady which has recently so severely attacked the Indianapolis *Herald*, the *Courier* of this city, and other Democratic papers.”²⁴² Ethridge believed the symptoms the papers showed had grown alarming as the racial prejudice of its editors and writers. The *Courier* worried Ethridge the most with its attack on “negro juries.” Ethridge and his fellow journalists saw no problem with instituting black juries, and even offered assistance to the *Courier* and other newspapers like it if they sought an end to their racial prejudice. Ethridge claimed that, “Relief must be obtained soon, or the patients are ‘goners.’”²⁴³ Whereas persons with colorphobia believed black juries would ruin the justice system out of spite towards white Americans or misunderstandings, non-prejudiced white persons saw it as a chance for the black population to serve their government and take part in a practice they were once denied. If white people failed in overcoming their ailment they fell victim to a lifetime of misery and prejudiced attacks.

Six years after Ethridge’s critique, an African American newspaper in San Francisco, *The Pacific Appeal*, published commentary on the continuance of colorphobia in northern states. In 1873, publisher P. Anderson reported on black Americans seeking a state civil rights bill through the New York Legislature. Anderson encouraged other black citizens in northern states to do the same. Without a civil rights bill Anderson believed the continuance of colorphobia would forever plague the United States. African American children still faced discrimination in schools and black persons faced daily discrimination in public nationwide. Anderson wrote, “In view of many other colorphobia and pro-slavery disabilities yet remaining, not by organic law, but by arbitrary custom and prejudice against caste, a civil rights bill ought to be enacted in every Northern State.”²⁴⁴ Even if New York adopted a civil rights bill and enforced it the rest of the North would remain victim to colorphobia without nationwide adoption. The North still harbored

²⁴² Tim Ethridge, “We wish...,” *Evansville Journal*, Nov. 6, 1867.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ P. Anderson, “State Civil Rights,” *The Pacific Appeal*, Mar. 15, 1873.

racial prejudice nearly ten years after the Civil War. Anderson and the black population needed to secure change through black activism and legal representation.

Even health boards operated under colorphobia. The first African American newspaper ever published in Indianapolis, *The Indianapolis Leader*, exposed a negrophobic move by the local Board of Health. The three Bagby brothers ran the newspaper and argued; “The removal of Health Officer, Dr. T. N. Watson and the appointment in his stead of a white man shows the contemptibly mean sort of stuff of which the majority of the Board is.”²⁴⁵ The brothers insisted that Watson made a wonderful member of the board and did an excellent job. His ousting resulted out of one complication—his skin color. The negrophobics on the Board did not want to work with him and did not believe he suited the position based off of preconceptions about black people’s intelligence. “The colored man who takes a step out of his way to ‘bust’ this Board when the opportunity offers, will render a service to his race at the proper time.”²⁴⁶ Although Watson did not stand up to the other board members a black man of a stronger constitution hopefully would. Only once those with colorphobia faced challenges would change occur.

The North no longer held a monopoly on racial prejudice with the end of the Civil War. Colorphobia spread beyond the North and into the South as a consequence of the collapse of slavery. Racial inequality that was once enforced through the institution of slavery became implemented through segregation.²⁴⁷ Two decades after the end of the Civil War R.H. Allen published an article in *The New-York Evangelist* entitled “The Children of the Freedmen.” The article centered on racial prejudice in the South and discussed topics ranging from schooling to

²⁴⁵ Bagby Brothers, “Negrophobia...,” *The Indianapolis Leader*, Jun. 5, 1880.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ For more information on the rise of southern segregation, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865-1920*, (Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

colorphobia. Education remained an important topic amongst the black population post-Reconstruction. A large amount of black children resided in the country but their educational progress remained weak after emancipation. The same racial prejudice and the rise of Jim Crow prevented children from intellectual pursuits. Abolitionists strongly pushed for an equal education for black children before the end of the war but free individuals still lagged behind white children. Allen declared, “But alas! not one-half of this number have ever been to school in their lives, for there are not schools enough to go around among so many.”²⁴⁸ Most still suffered from illiteracy in the South, because their families needed their help managing crops. Black children lacked time for education, because of a dependent work system known as “sharecropping.” Sharecropping was a post-Civil War agricultural system in the South. Tenants grew crops and gave landowners a portion of their profits in exchange for living on their land. The system kept black Americans landless, dependent on white landowners, and in debt as they continuously owed money to both landowners and merchants who provided credit to purchase farming supplies. Sharecropping kept black people from economically advancing—and even educationally—in the South.²⁴⁹

Children of southern freedmen desired an education, yet rarely achieved one worth anything from the influence of outside forces and oppression. One female student wrote her teacher, “My parents say that if you will take me in on a scholarship, they will plant small crops and spare me the whole term, for they want me to make all the improvement that I can.”²⁵⁰ The girl’s father spent her school money on a new mule for tilling land after losing their other one and their crops failed from weather related issues. Many other students frequently returned home

²⁴⁸ R.H. Allen, “The Children of the Freedmen.,” *New-York Evangelist*, Aug. 20, 1885. 87.

²⁴⁹ For more information on sharecropping, see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁵⁰ R.H. Allen, “The Children of the Freedmen.,” 88.

partway into the school term when their money ran out, or if the family needed them for crops or help with younger siblings. Even when black students attended school the quality of the schoolhouse looked dismal in comparison to white schoolhouses. The buildings were dilapidated, and supplies such as desks and writing utensils stayed sparse. Schoolhouses served as a means of self-improvement and social mobility for black children. Without obtaining a good education or having the materials to do so, black children were doomed with the same fate as their parents.

Allen continued her article by including what one child had to say about colorphobia. The student claimed, “The presence of colorphobia is usually seen and felt in railroad cars, hotels, and places of amusement, and even in the house of God. People afflicted with colorphobia cannot even kneel together at the Lord’s table in Holy Communion, but the white man must be served first, then the negro.”²⁵¹ The girl found that colorphobia appeared in the South but also continued its reign of terror in the North. The country teemed with racially prejudiced individuals, who declared black people would have “no political or social equality.”²⁵² Twenty years prior, abolitionists fought for black freedom and equality and covered the same public topics of education, schools, public space, transportation, and religion. Allen’s article reveals that while slavery no longer existed in America, the racial prejudice harbored by the northern white population still thrived with it also appearing in the South as a consequence of the end of slavery. Abolitionists finally achieved immediate emancipation in the United States but failed in their quest for curing colorphobia.

The United States military still buckled under racial prejudice during Reconstruction. Black Americans sought full recognition of their time in the service while also proposing

²⁵¹ Ibid., 90.

²⁵² Ibid., 91.

equality in the armed forces. However, there were instances of African Americans using the military for fighting back against preconceived notions regarding the black population. One such example occurred when two black congressmen appointed two white cadets to West Point after a competitive examination. The congressmen could have easily ignored their scores and sent men of color, but they kept things fair while simultaneously showing that African Americans would not abuse positions of power by only helping or benefiting their race. Publisher Linden E. Bentley of *The Donaldsonville Chief* viewed the instance as an “example of liberality ought to cure some of the extremists of negrophobia.”²⁵³ Just because the black population gained power did not mean they would use it as a means of only elevating people of their color. The racially prejudiced, according to Bentley, had no reason to worry.

Beginning in the 1890s, America entered into the Progressive Era and colorphobia expanded to include more skin colors. The Progressive Era became a time for reform focused on immigrants, religion, education, eugenics, race, and more.²⁵⁴ In a society promoting perfection, where did the black population and even other non-whites fit into society? To many white Americans the answer seemed simple. Those with non-white skin did not belong. For example, the military still served as a point of contestation in the North and South. William C. Chase of the African American newspaper *The Washington Bee* reported on growing negrophobia in Florida. Black soldiers no longer resided in Tampa from the area’s negrophobic ways. Chase denounced the town by stating, “We would prescribe an everlasting dose of good sense and strong patriotism to remove the morbid condition of Negrophobia,” but at the same time he

²⁵³ Linden E. Bentley, “Two colored...,” *Donaldsonville Chief*, Jun. 21, 1873.

²⁵⁴ For examples of sources on Progressivism, see Michael Willrich, *City of Courts: Socializing Justice in Progressive Era Chicago*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Sydney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur, *Progressivism and the New Democracy*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, (New York: Vintage, 1960); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

feared remedies were too late.²⁵⁵ Tampa residents served as a good example of the extremes of racial prejudice and its irrationality towards military protection services.

About two months later *The Richmond Planet* under editor Edmund A. Randolph pointed out unfair criticism of black troops by *The Washington Post*. The newspaper suffered an attack of negrophobia, because it unfairly critiqued black troops and left out a critique of white soldiers. *The Washington Post* claimed their staff held no qualms about black soldiers entering into war. However, African American troops were hard to control, loud, obnoxious, they could not follow directions and rules, and they ruined peaceful communities. Randolph complained that only white individuals filed grievances against the black troops, and that white troops never received such backlash from the public. For example, “The white troops at Chickamauga, Ga., were so riotous that the state authorities had to threaten to take a hand.”²⁵⁶ Other white troops at Phoebus, Va., Newport News, Va., Fort Monroe, and Camp Alger, Va. were also guilty of poor behavior and misconduct. At Camp Alger “white troops not only were guilty of riotous conduct, but disobeyed their commanding officers and insulted their Major General...”²⁵⁷ Why should there be reprimands against black troops when white troops were no better and perhaps even worse in behavior? If anything African American troops were complained about less frequently and did not deserve negative press.

Colorphobia continued to permeate public spaces and public services other than schooling and education, school and health boards, religion, and public transportation. Newspapers during the Progressive Era focused on colorphobia in public entertainment like plays, sports, and film. Black journalist and diplomat Lester A. Walton’s articles continuously graced *The New York Age*, an African American newspaper, on colorphobia, race relations, and

²⁵⁵ William C. Chase, “Tampa is...,” *The Washington Bee*, Jun. 18, 1898.

²⁵⁶ Edmund A. Randolph, “Again Suffering,” *Richmond Planet*, Aug. 27, 1898.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

civil rights. On January 20, 1916 he reviewed a play about race that depicted colorphobia. Essentially the play “Pride of Race” told the story of a wealthy Yale graduate happily living unaware that he was one-sixteenth black until he became engaged to a white woman. Walton wrote, “Colorphobia, the most virulent and contagious of American diseases, an affliction which so thoroughly saturates the victim with egotism and conceit that he labors under the hallucination that the mere color of his skin makes him the superior of all in the sight of God and man, is being skillfully diagnosed and treated at Maxine Elliott’s Treatre, where Robert Hilliard, one of America’s foremost actors, is appearing in a most powerful and gripping race problem play...”²⁵⁸ Walton argued that the play made a powerful racial statement. Black men were men just like white men. They had the same desires, hopes, dreams, and instincts. Black people deserved fair and equal treatment not based on the color of their skin. “Pride of Race” showcased the impact and effects of racial prejudice from the non-white point of view for displaying how it hurt the black population, and also provided a supportive stance for equal rights—just as abolitionists did in their newspapers. Whereas white Americans typically focused on themselves in race relations, the play pushed back white conceptions and explored those of the black race.²⁵⁹

A few months later on March 30, 1916, the section on drama and sports in *The New York Age* revealed racial prejudice in American boxing. Walton found himself disgusted by the blatant lack of respect and obvious racial prejudice in the sport that brought down the quality of matches. Walton wrote, “It seems as if our fellow white citizens, or rather the majority of them, would much prefer to see a white American of ordinary ability holding the heavyweight title to a black American of undisputed skill. What care they for standards who are victims of that most

²⁵⁸ Lester A. Walton, “Colorphobia is Diagnosed,” *The New York Age*, Jan. 20, 1916.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

contagious American disease, colorphobia?”²⁶⁰ Instead of an African American man rightly laying claim to the title based off talent and hard work, white Americans infected with racial prejudice preferred a white individual dominating the boxing world. Whether or not the white boxer actually deserved the title he won. According to Walton, the boxer received the title because of his race and it kept the black boxer where he belonged—beneath the white man.

Sports remained an area of emphasis as decades passed. In 1939, twenty-three years after Walton’s critique of boxing, Cuban baseball players faced the same problem if they earned admittance into the big leagues. *The California Eagle* run by Charlotte Bass, the first African American newspaper originating in the West focused on local news and black help, revealed the injustice of colorphobia targeting new persons. According to the article’s nameless author, every Cuban experienced the American disease upon arriving in the states from being non-white and challenging white players. For example, Clark Griffith gave Cuban players tryouts at his Washington baseball club training camp with hopes of admitting a few into the professional leagues. However, he knew Cubans faced massive discrimination from the race that dominated the game—white baseball players. “Put him against a lad who skin isn’t exactly a rosy blonde, and sometimes the Anglo-Saxon will resort to a bean ball to see if he can’t turn the dark skin pale with fear.”²⁶¹ By the 1930s white persons with colorphobia deviated from holding racial prejudice specifically towards black skin. Instead, now any skin other than white warranted unfair treatment. However, Cubans facing colorphobia in baseball were not the first group outside of black Americans victimized by it. In the early 1900s the Japanese faced racial prejudice over the mounting concerns of World War One.

²⁶⁰ Lester A. Walton, “Willard-Moran Bout A Colossal Burlesque,” *The New York Age*, Mar. 30, 1916.

²⁶¹ Anonymous, “Cubans Face Colorphobia in Majors,” *The California Eagle*, Apr. 6, 1939.

In 1917 Lester A. Walton moved on from pugilism and denounced movies for displaying and promoting colorphobia to Americans across all class and gender lines. However, this time colorphobia did not target black persons. Racial prejudice adapted itself to current fears and anxieties of the country. With America on the brink of going to war white Americans turned their racial prejudice towards the Japanese. Even though political activist and anarchist James F. Morton, Jr. wrote to the editor of *The New York Tribune* three years prior in 1914 in favor of the Japanese and anti-colorphobia it did not matter. Morton believed the current war had nothing to do with colorphobia and wrote, “The fact that the inhabitants possess skins of a hue unlike or own is totally irrelevant, inasmuch as she deservedly acquired recognition as a civilized power.”²⁶² The irrationality of fear and uncertainty spurred American racial prejudice towards the Japanese no matter what activists or the government claimed.

The federal government framed Japan as an ally and friend during World War One but the movie industry painted a different picture. Movies depicted people of Japanese descent as enemies, spies, and anti-democratic. Walton viewed the nameless film and claimed it showed the Japanese as a, “‘a silent menace,’ a sneaking, snake-like, treacherous creature, who made it his business to secretly learn about as much as possible about the business of the United States. It is obvious to those who can diagnose America’s most contagious of all diseases—‘colorphobia’—that that this outbreak against the Japanese has been provoked because of the white American’s color prejudice.”²⁶³ The federal government’s views and opinions on topics did not always reflect those of the general public. Movies, however, influenced the outlook of audiences as they gained popularity. White Americans no longer only held racial prejudice against the black

²⁶² James F. Morton, Jr., “Colorphobia in This War: Correspondent Rebuked for Evoking It Against Japan,” *The New York Tribune*, Aug. 7, 1914.

²⁶³ Lester A. Walton, “The Silent Menace,” *The New York Age*, Mar. 29, 1917.

population on a massive level but also those of any Japanese decent—especially first generation immigrants from the island country.

Walton gave his opinion about the Japanese and the atmosphere of the country itself. Were the Japanese in America suspicious? Walton believed they were just as curious and interested in the country as any other foreign group but did not require extra attention. “The act of the movies in seeking to inflame the public against the Japanese is indiscreet and untimely.”²⁶⁴ Aggravating an already on edge public with paranoia served no purpose other than to make war seem closer than ever before and to tip off the Japanese if they really were spying on Americans. Walton found that targeting a specific group of people in movies became an American phenomenon—much like colorphobia itself. Walton claimed, “The white people have been so greatly impressed with their own importance, laboring under the hallucination that the United States could successfully defend itself against all invaders, that the nation has not been as cautious as it might have been.”²⁶⁵ White Americans always believed they ranked above other colors and races. With their dominance and the belief that God remained on their side they remained safe from invasion of non-white countries. Yet the movies spanning the nation impacted the Japanese like it would have black people if they had been the primary subjects of the films. Some Japanese lost their jobs in the states. For example, many wealthy families fired their Japanese help over fears of espionage. The burgeoning film industry knew the fears and worries of white Americans and used them for profitmaking.

About three months after Walton’s critique over the Japanese in film a more general critique of the country’s racial prejudice appeared in *The New York Age*. Contributing editor James W. Johnson declared, “The American people are afflicted with a more or less willful state

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

of mental blindness in regard to the question of race and color prejudice. Many shut their eyes to the injustices born of colorphobia, while prattling loudly about the blessings of liberty and democracy.”²⁶⁶ Of course the American people referred to were white. If the disease did not discriminate against white skin they saw no reason for destroying racial prejudice and reshaping race relations. Abolitionists complained about colorphobia in a similar manner; but the hypocrisy of a free country discriminating against a large portion of its people frequently made its way into their writings as well. White supremacy continued into the 1900s.

Disarmament and immigration restriction swept the country in 1924 as Congress sought limitations and laws after the horrors of World War One. Robert L. Vann, editor of *The Pittsburgh Courier* critiqued America’s continuance of racially prejudiced ways towards the Japanese with its immigration restrictions. Vann wrote, “If this country is afraid of any one thing above another it is the thing known as color applied to peoples of the earth. Color is the rock on which this country will, one day, split into seething, fighting units unless some intelligent agency saves it from the present day color frenzy.”²⁶⁷ Already the country broke into two separate units during the American Civil War, and fought over slavery and to many, such as abolitionists, racial prejudice. What was to stop the United States from doing it again? What if the Union never recovered? Yet this time it was not over people already residing in the country but foreigners from Japan. The immigration law Congress pushed for blocked the Japanese from the country, and Secretary Hughes feared it would destroy the success of the Disarmament Conference by upsetting the Japanese Government. But the country had “anti-Japanese journals” and they made it clear that the “colorphobias of this country want Japan shut out; and they employ language

²⁶⁶ James W. Johnson, “When The Blind See,” *The New York Age*, Jun. 14, 1917.

²⁶⁷ Robert L. Vann, “That Yielding Color Fear,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Mar. 8, 1924.

almost insulting to convey their feeling.”²⁶⁸ The Japanese were singled out in the bill instead of lumped together with the rest for immigration concerns on account of colorphobia.

In an increasingly connected world some Americans feared the emergence of more enemies than friends with the continuance of colorphobia. Vann warned, “If this country is allowed to cultivate colorphobia and race hatred, with Japan as the target of its attack, it will be but a question of a few years when the whole sentiment will find its way into other countries where darker peoples live.”²⁶⁹ The American conscience shifted from only including the black population to including the Japanese. Vann’s fear that American racial prejudice would soon encompass more nationalities and parts of the globe came true with Cubans and others as the decades passed and America grew more diverse. Racially prejudiced white Americans hated having their supremacy threatened. Colorphobia or negrophobia continued appearing in the press as late as 1940. *The California Eagle* published a poem by Dr. Edna Griffin in 1940 that observed the state of American racial prejudice. Griffin composed the poem to include hatred, Abraham Lincoln, the North and South, and lack of freedom. Perhaps most revealing was her second-to-last paragraph. Griffin wrote:

There’s not enough religion operating as it should, Sincerely for all
races in America for their good; The curse of Colorphobia weakens
all that should be strong, And there’s no Abraham Lincoln to
correct the hellish wrong.²⁷⁰

Even by 1940 American religion remained corrupted by immorality and race prejudice. Improvements in race relations were at a standstill, and no hope appeared on the horizon for the Jim Crow South. Griffin believed men like Abraham Lincoln and abolitionists no longer existed for fighting colorphobia, and the future of racial prejudice in the United States fell to another

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Dr. Edna Griffin, “I Would Like to Sing ‘America,’” *The California Eagle*, Sept. 12, 1940.

new generation. The battle against racial prejudice heated up under the guidance of the new generation in the 1950s and 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement, and racially prejudiced practices faced two major blows in 1964 with President Johnson's Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts.

Abolitionists failed to eradicate northern colorphobia by the end of the Civil War. Colorphobia still invaded public space and daily life, and infected new generations through social and environmental influences. Post-war colorphobia expanded from just infecting whites with aversion to black skin to all skin colors except white as immigration soared and the country grew. The impact of abolitionists adopting colorphobia and the following use of negrophobia by both abolitionists and anti-abolitionists is hard to measure. There is no real way to gage the effect of the use of colorphobia on the public. However, its widespread deployment by abolitionists, Democratic, Republican, local, regional, and national newspapers suggests that racial prejudice created real concern before, during, and decades after the American Civil War. Negrophobia even appears in the 1973 version of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. According to the dictionary, a "negrophobe" is "one who strongly dislikes or fears Negroes," and a negrophobe suffers from negrophobia.²⁷¹ The definition chosen for negrophobia in the dictionary is the one used by abolitionists. The continued use into the twentieth-century and the listed definition suggests that abolitionists accomplished a lasting impact even though the term colorphobia did not survive. Even though colorphobia did not endure, it mattered because of the way it impacted the abolitionist movement and added to the abolitionist reform agenda. It also mattered because of how it changed the way abolitionists viewed racial prejudice, and it revealed the mechanics of nineteenth-century disease logic and use. Colorphobia allowed for the black population to not

²⁷¹ "Negrophobe," *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1973), 762.

only use disease rhetoric as a tool of self-empowerment, but it also allowed black abolitionists to come together and assert themselves in a society dominated by white people.

Colorphobia or negrophobia still might be mentioned today in a general history class or one solely focused on abolitionism. Yet they are not used in every day conversations. Even journalists stopped using the terms. Why did the terms disappear? Perhaps the use stalled and slowly ended as abolitionists and the generation they influenced died off. More than likely the phasing out of colorphobia happened because of a combination of three factors; First, abolitionists and their sentiments disappearing as the decades passed. Second, a new word, “racism,” appeared in the American lexicon. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), the first use of the terms “racism” and “racist” in the United States occurred in 1932 and 1936 respectively.²⁷² The appearance of “racism” and “racist” coincides with the downturn in use of colorphobia and negrophobia in newspapers beginning in the mid to late 1930s. Third, while colorphobia and racism are essentially the same, the terminology of racism supplied a new intellectual approach to the same issue; and with the widespread understanding of how disease worked, the notion of colorphobia no longer held the same impact on white Americans. While there is no obvious answer for why colorphobia and negrophobia largely disappeared over time from the public conscience, in the future a new research project might shed more light on what abolitionists termed a truly American phenomenon.

²⁷² Alastair Bonnett, *Anti-Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 10.

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Emancipator and Free American
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