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"The Modern Medea" and Race Matters

Thomas Satterwhite Noble's Margaret Garner

Leslie Furth

In 1867 the American artist Thomas Satterwhite Noble (1835–1907) portrayed a notorious incident in the history of American slavery—the discovery of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner in Cincinnati in 1856, moments after she had murdered one of her children and attempted to kill the others (frontispiece). In depicting the recapture of a runaway slave and the aftermath of her desperate act of infanticide, the artist indicted the practice of slavery; indeed, the cruelty of slavery is the principal meaning of his picture, according to art historians Albert Boime and James Birchfield. Yet the image is more ambiguous than it first appears. Rather than sustaining a monolithic narrative on the evils of slavery, the painting seems to oscillate between two discourses, one exposing the horrors of slavery and the other heightening the spectacular horror of Garner's act itself. Rich with unexpected complexities, the image echoes post–Civil War tensions over the place of blacks in American society. The picture's ostensibly sympathetic portrayal of Garner as a slave mother is compromised by competing claims that bear their own covert logic and testify to Noble and his era's ambivalence about blacks and women.[1]

Born into a wealthy slave-owning family in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1835, Thomas Satterwhite Noble was an unlikely champion of slave resistance. After studying in France with the history and genre painter Thomas Couture between 1856 and 1859, Noble returned home to his parents' new residence in St. Louis, Missouri, entering the family grocery business at his father's urging. During the Civil War, Noble fought with the Confederacy until the surrender of the South. The artist then moved to New York City, where, between 1865 and 1869, he produced a corpus of some eight paintings on slave subjects—a series that is today considered his most significant body of work. *Margaret Garner* is perhaps the most enigmatic of these pictures. On the strength of the painting, Noble was elected an associate of the National Academy of Design, where the work was exhibited in 1867.[2]

Noble created several interpretations of the theme—a pencil sketch, presumably a preliminary study (fig. 1), and two painted versions, of which the present picture is the second, cabinet version. Aside from its larger size and a few minor details, the original, now lost, appears to have been virtually identical to the second version. The noted Civil War photographer Matthew Brady photographed the image, and an engraving of his photograph appeared in *Harper's*

Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *Margaret Garner*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm (20 x 16 in.). Procter and Gamble Company, Cincinnati, Ohio

Weekly's 18 May 1867 issue (fig. 2). Both forms of duplication seem to authenticate the work as a document of antebellum history and underscore its emotional impact in the wake of the war. Reviews in the press also attested to the picture's power to fascinate, unsettle, and move postwar audiences.[3]

Noble's painting represents the denouement of events that followed Margaret Garner's dramatic escape with her family from Kentucky to Ohio. Garner fled her owner's farm with her parents-in-law, husband, four children (she was pregnant with her fifth), and several other slaves from nearby plantations, crossing the frozen Ohio River into Cincinnati. In the free state of Ohio, they intended to link up with the Underground Railroad and escape into Canada. The Garners' owners and various town marshals, equipped with the arrest warrant required by the Fugitive Slave Act, pursued the family to their refuge in a freedman's house in Cincinnati. The ensuing events were recorded in numerous detailed newspaper accounts, such as that published in the Cincinnati press in late January 1856:

Inside the cabin the frightened slaves hastily barred the doors and windows, but they realized that they were lost. Simon Garner, Jr. [Margaret's husband, sometimes referred to as Robert], fired two rounds from a revolver and this kept the arresting party off for a while, but it was hopelessly clear that nothing could save the Garners from capture. Suddenly, Margaret Garner seized a butcher knife and turned upon her three-year-old daughter. With swift and terrible force she hacked at her child's throat. Again and again she struck until the little girl was almost decapitated. The two Garner men [her husband and father-in-law] began to scream. Unable to bear the horror, they ran wildly about the cabin. Now Margaret Garner turned toward one of her little boys who pleaded piteously with his mother not to kill him. She called to old Mary Garner [her mother-in-law], "Mother, help me to kill the children." The old woman began to wail and wring her hands. She ran for refuge under the bed. Finally [the wife of the owner of the house] managed to disarm Margaret Garner who all the while sobbed that she would rather kill every one of her children than have them taken back across the river [into slavery].[4]

From Cincinnati to New York, the mainstream and abolitionist press widely publicized Garner's murder of her child on being remanded into slavery. Considered one of the most tragic incidents in the history of antebellum slavery, the event galvanized sentiment against the already-controversial Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which sanctioned seizures of runaway slaves across state lines. Numerous women and men wrote letters and poems lauding Garner's act as one of supreme motherly love. The abolitionist and feminist Lucy Stone Blackwell, passing through Cincinnati on a speaking tour, visited Garner in prison and spoke on behalf of the fugitives at the trial, declaring:

The faded faces of [Garner's] negro children tell too plainly to what degradation female slaves submit. Rather than give her little daughter to that life, she killed it. If in her deep maternal love she felt the impulse to send her child back to God . . . who shall say she had no right to do so? . . . With my own teeth would I tear open my veins and let the earth drink my blood rather than wear the chains of slavery.[5]

In his representation of the event, Noble constructed a dramatic and sensationalized confrontation between Garner and her white captors moments after her horrific act. A posse of white officials, some armed with sticks, have just entered the house to reclaim her. The constricted space heightens the

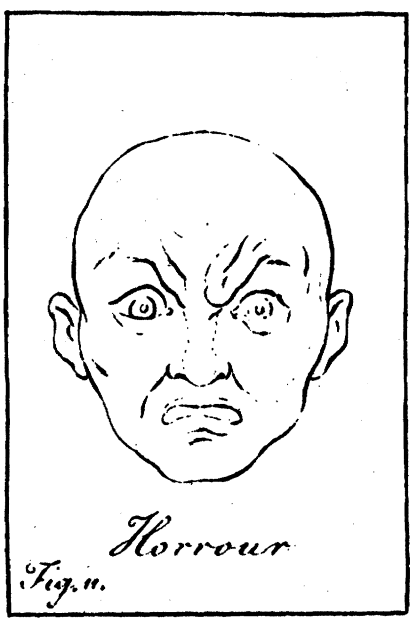
1 Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *Margaret Garner,* 1867. Sketch, graphite on paper, 74.9 x 99.1 cm (29 ½ x 39 in.). Collection of Mark N. Mueller, Salt Lake City, Utah

2 Engraving after Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *"The Modern Medea,"* reproduced in *Harper's Weekly* 11 (18 May 1867): 318. Boston Public Library

claustrophobic entrapment of Garner, as does her position in a corner of the room. The spare setting is relieved only by the simple still life behind her. Garner, her surviving children clinging to her skirt, forms a sturdy pyramid, fully counterbalancing the group of men confronting her. An exchange of theatrical gazes and rhetorical gestures charges the space with tension. The corpses on the floor lie virtually at the white men's feet, and the mirroring poses of Garner and the figure opposite her imply an ambiguity as to who is to blame. Indeed, Garner's outstretched hands transmit several messages at once; her abject posture casts her as victim rather than aggressor, since it is apparently the cruelty of slavery that has driven her to this desperate act. Motioning to the dead bodies, she appears to offer the slaveowners their chattel, which she has rendered worthless. She seems to point to the consequences of her own violent act as if to say, "See what you have driven me to!" It is both a gesture of defiance and of desperation.[6]

Noble cast Garner as a hero in a civic conflict, lending considerable authority to his painting by drawing upon the rhetoric of French academic painting. As Albert Boime has noted, David's *Oath of the Horatii* (1784, Louvre, Paris) apparently served as a model for the artist's composition. Further, the placement of the dead body in the center and the overturned chair in the background—readily discernible in the original painting and the engraving done after it (see fig. 2)—appear to be direct quotations from Jean-Léon Gérôme's dramatic evocation of political strife, *The Dead Caesar,* which Noble may have seen at the Paris Salon of 1859 (fig. 3). Noble also drew upon the French academic painter Charles Le Brun's treatise *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions* (1698), in which he codified the human passions in a series of facial expressions. Garner's masklike visage appears to be based upon Le Brun's drawing *Anger Mixed with Rage,* while that of the marshal at the far right quotes the classification of horror (fig. 4).[7]

For his painting, Noble opted to refine the documentary reportage of his sketch in favor of a somewhat turgid narrative strategy centering on the spectacle of racial conflict. This progression, as well as Noble's departure from the facts of the event, complicates the image: while some



3 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Dead Caesar,* 1859. Oil on canvas, 218.4 x 317.5 cm (86 x 125 in.). Location unknown

4 Charles Le Brun, *Horrour* (left) and *Anger Mixed with Rage* (right), engravings published as figs. 11 and 34, respectively, in *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions* (1734). Harvard College Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

aspects of Noble's interpretation heighten the viewer's sympathy for Garner, others, conversely, intensify the sense of horror generated by her act of infanticide.

In keeping with Noble's principle narrative of Garner as hero, both the cartoon sketch and the painting show her dominating the space and illuminated by a raking light. Her isolation bestows on her a preternatural strength as she faces her captors with courage and indignation. In the cartoon, a knife lies on the floor before her, while in the painting, its absence contributes to the ambiguity about who is responsible for the murders.

Other alterations between the sketch and painting strike a similarly confusing note. Garner's face, calm and dignified in the sketch, is resolved into a conventionalized grimace in the painting. Her simple clothing in the sketch metamorphoses in the painting into frayed rags that suggest a wild state of physical and emotional agitation. In the painting, the scarf becomes a vermilion turban, its color echoing the pooling blood on the floor and thus associating Garner with her slain offspring. Her shadow looms on the wall behind her, ominously doubling her.

While Noble introduced ambiguities in his depiction of Garner, he amplified her heroism by departing from the facts of the case with regard to her children: Garner killed one female child, yet the artist drew a grisly pile of bodies in the sketch, and even in the painting, he includes two prone figures, both young boys. Perhaps Noble thought a slain infant would have been too macabre and thus altered the story to avoid compromising the viewer's empathy for Garner. Yet in fabricating two slain sons, Noble also amplified the economic facet of Garner's resistance, since a pair of young boys would have represented a much more precious commodity in terms of labor and sale value than a girl. The image thus enhances the magnitude of the slaveowner's loss, underscoring the subversive nature of Garner's act. This idea is further borne out by the composition, in which the dead boys' forms interrupt the momentum of the picture, halting the men's movement and Garner's countervailing force.[8] Garner and her captors point to a spotlighted body, whose cruciform pose and white garment connote a heroic death for a

5 *"Bodies of Mrs. Dearing and her children as they were found in the corn-crib,"* engraving published in *The Life, Confession and Atrocious Crimes of Antoine Probst, the Cruel Murderer of the Dearing Family* (1866). American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts

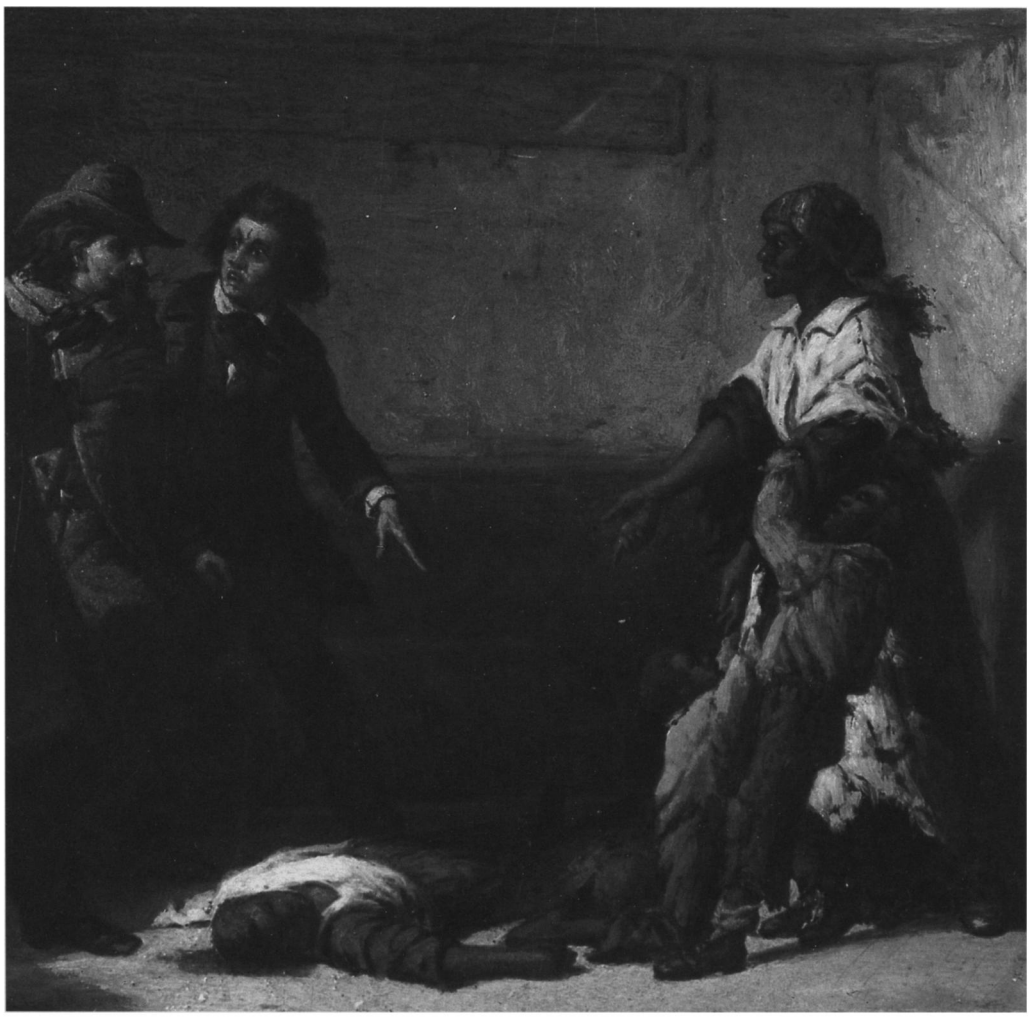
higher cause—a resonance strengthened by the painting's academic sources. The dominant narrative of Garner as heroine is therefore bolstered by the prominence and dignity of the centrally placed corpse.

Destruction As Spectacle

The most strident opposing discourse on Garner is that which casts her as an "ignoble savage," a type discussed at length by the cultural and literary historian Sander Gilman. This view finds support in the artist's fascination with the act of destruction as pure spectacle, a preoccupation clearly registered in his painting. In its sensationalism, the picture ceases to function as a commemoration of Garner, seeking to thrill rather than to edify by noble example. The many lurid newspaper accounts of the incident undoubtedly served as Noble's model. Such accounts typically featured "corpse discovery" scenes drawn from Gothic horror fiction and introduced by such formulaic narratives as, "On looking around, horrible was the sight which met the officer's eyes," followed by a recitation of vivid details of the murder scene from the point of view of eyewitnesses.[9]

Noble was probably also aware of the tradition of graphic renderings of heinous crimes that proliferated throughout the nineteenth century. These images included single broadsheets known as "penny dreadfuls" and those in illustrated weeklies devoted to criminal activity, such as New York's *National Police Gazette,* first published in 1845. Noble's preparatory illustration of the murdered Garner children recalls, for example, that of a contemporaneous print depicting the aftermath of a multiple homicide in Pennsylvania in 1866 (fig. 5).

In relying on formulaic murder scenes found in the popular press, however, Noble obfuscated his painting's narratives, for in the horror genre, the perpetrator of the crime is figured as monstrous and evil, a character for whom the reader-viewer can have no empathy.[10] His reliance further disrupted his antislavery theme by neutralizing the villainy of the white men as representatives of the institution of slavery. Instead, they become mute witnesses to depravity. However much the viewer is able to intellectually construe the trials of slavery



6 Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *Margaret Garner* (detail), 1867. Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm (20 x 16 in.). Procter and Gamble Company, Cincinnati, Ohio

to be the cause of Garner's desperate act, the destructive carnage she causes and its effect upon her horrified white captors—the viewer's surrogates—is what the spectator actually sees (fig. 6).

Indeed, Garner's frenzied demeanor does little to dispel the viewer's response of horror. Her open mouth, protruding eyes, splayed arms, and spectral shadow, as well as her association with death, correspond to Mikhail Bakhtin's convention of the grotesque body. In fact, Garner's image falls within the lexicon of contemporary representations that crudely lampooned and grotesquely exaggerated the black body and physiognomy in minstrel shows and in popular illustration, as in an 1867 *Harper's Weekly* illustration of a pantheon of American citizenry that included "The Everlasting Nigger" (fig. 7). It is Noble's menacing deployment of the grotesque that causes Garner's metamorphosis from self-sacrificing nurturer to murdering monster.[11]

"Slave to His Emotions"

In its sensationalized details—the looming shadow, frayed clothing, touches of red, and Garner's conventionalized grimace—the image seems to invoke widely held beliefs about blacks' propensity for violence and mental instability. Clearly, black inferiority was part of the

7 *The Everlasting Nigger,* engraved illustration from "Citizens of the United States, According to Popular Impressions," published in *Harper's Weekly,* 12 January 1867. Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts

canon of nineteenth-century social ideology. Beliefs about black character were often contradictory, however. Noble's painting is particularly relevant in this regard, for it resonates with racial formulas of barbarian passion, challenging the popular conventions of the black as childlike and docile.

The view of the black as a "slave to his emotions" had been endorsed by various thinkers and writers in science, politics, and religion as a biologically determined racial trait since the mid nineteenth century. A turn-of-the-century edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* holds that the Negro possesses "a mental constitution . . . very similar to that of a child, normally good-natured and cheerful, but subject to sudden fits of emotion and passion during which he is capable of performing acts of singular atrocity." This assertion, reflecting a pervasive ideology in place well before the Civil War and persisting throughout Reconstruction, attributed degeneracy, congenital viciousness, and even a propensity for insanity to blacks. "As in the Negro race generally," maintained one characteristic tract, "their destructiveness is prominent. A slave never breaks any thing without an instinctive laugh of pleasure, and however careful he may be of his own life, he does not value that of another, even a relative, at the price of a goat." Noble's audience may thus have been predisposed and even conditioned to view his representation of Garner within existing conventions of black deviance.[12]

The ambiguity of Noble's work echoed social uncertainty about the new role of the freed black in American society and formed part of an impassioned, if short-lived, genre of African-American subjects that abounded in art and literature in the post–Civil War period. Indeed, the images the genre spawned were often intended—and perceived—as visual analogues to the debate about race relations and the fitness of blacks for citizenship. One critic, responding to the proliferation of such subjects at the National Academy of Design exhibition of 1867, where *Margaret Garner* was first shown, noted: "It is a natural consequence of the late war that the characteristics of the negro race in America should become a subject of study for the artist as well as the political philosopher." Such pictures functioned less often as a fulcrum for social change, however, than as reiterations of stereotypes. Even after the war, they invoked the past trials of slavery more frequently than they addressed the altered status of the freed black.[13]

Margaret Garner fits within a subgenre of black subjects treating the fugitive slave. One of the most famous interpretations of the theme is Eastman Johnson's painting *A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves* (ca. 1862, Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York), which imbues its black subjects with dignity and heroism. Indeed, Johnson's scenes of blacks probably served as models for Noble. A

8 Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *The Last Sale of Slaves on the Saint Louis Courthouse Steps,* ca. 1870 (replica of an earlier version first exhibited in 1866). Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 213.3 cm (60 x 84 in.). Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis

fellow student of Thomas Couture, Johnson had attracted critical attention and a National Academy of Design associateship for his *Negro Life at the South* (1859, New-York Historical Society, New York). Like most painters of slavery scenes in the period, Johnson eschewed violence or a direct master-slave encounter. In contrast, Noble's *Garner* confronts his audience with both, creating a vivid account of slavery's worst cruelties. While Johnson's slightly earlier image posits the black as brave and independent, meriting a central role in the war, the troubled subtext of Noble's painting seems to register postwar fears among whites of black vengeance or amorality.[14]

Margaret Garner is singular in Noble's oeuvre in its graphic treatment of a tragic historical incident in slavery, although it shares with his other works the theme of families torn apart. In *The Last Sale of Slaves on the Saint Louis Courthouse Steps,* a young mulatto woman, holding her baby, stands alone on the auction block, as a man and woman, each having been sold to different owners, sadly embrace at the left (fig. 8). In *The Price of Blood, A Planter Selling His Son,* Noble treats the slavery theme with more rancor, castigating the greed of a southern planter who sells his mulatto son to a slave trader (fig. 9). In the recently discovered canvas *Fugitives in Flight,* Noble revisited the subject of the fugitive slave, suggesting a happier conclusion to Garner's plight (fig. 10). The picture's biblical allusion to the Holy Family in flight, together with the peaceful dawn light at the horizon, suggests their imminent salvation in freedom.[15]

While ostensibly sympathetic, Noble's images, like those of his contemporaries, were typically drawn from a stock of well-worn African-American types supported by contemporary social science and popularized in fiction, such as the characters in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* These black stereotypes possessed such contradictory traits as brutishness, servility, lightheartedness, wanton sexuality, and exoticism.[16] For

9 Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *The Price of Blood, A Planter Selling His Son,* 1868. Oil on canvas, 100.3 x 125.7 cm (39 ¼ x 49 ½ in.). Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia

artists, this repertoire of types offered scant possibility to treat their subjects as individuals, signaling the general failure of language, visual and otherwise, to accord humanity to blacks.

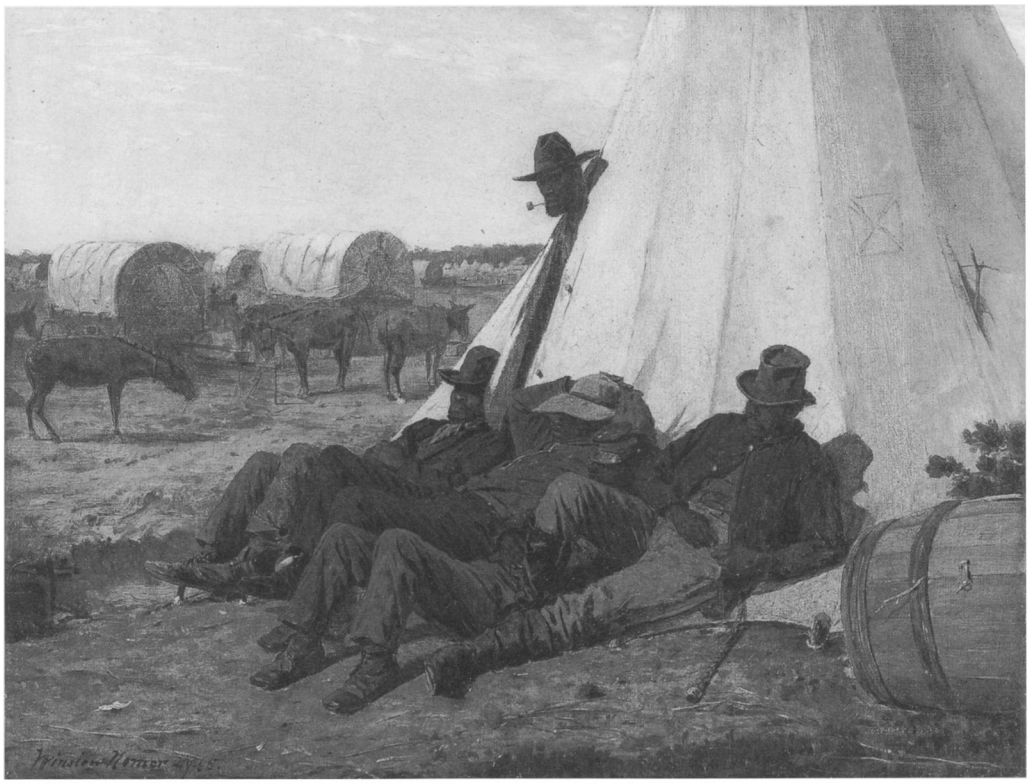
Indeed, the consensus among today's scholars is that nineteenth-century images of blacks often contain unresolvable ambiguities, suggesting that the artists of this period were gingerly negotiating a volatile political landscape of race relations in an attempt to engage and not offend a broad audience. So, for example, in Theodor Kaufmann's painting of fugitive slaves, *On to Liberty* (1867, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), the focus of attention is divided between the artist's interest in such "picturesque" details as the exotic features, the women's colorful clothing and accessories, and the emotional tension of the group's final run toward liberty, symbolized by the Union army camp in the distance. Likewise, in one of Winslow Homer's Civil War paintings, *The Bright Side,* the black, as Marc Simpson has observed, is stereotypically characterized as idle and humorously associated with the mules in the background, even though the image presents explicit

10 Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *Fugitives in Flight,* 1869. Oil on canvas, 76.5 x 102.2 cm (30 ⅛ x 40 ¼ in.). Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina, Museum purchase with funds from the 1994 Museum Antiques Show, Elliott, Davis & Company, CPAs, sponsor; Corporate Benefactors: Alice Manufacturing Company, Inc.; Barker Air and Hydraulics, Inc.; Carolina First Bank; Dodge Group-Reliance Electric; Greenville News-Piedmont Company; Hartness International, Inc.; Insignia Financial Group, Inc.; KPMG Peat Marwick; KEMET Corporation; The Liberty Corporation; Michelin North America; Odell Associates, Inc.; Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company of Greenville; Phillips Staffing; Provence Printing, Inc.; Suitt Construction Company and the Arthur and Holly Magill Purchase Fund

testimonial on the black contribution to the Civil War cause (fig. 11). This subtext was not lost on viewers at its National Academy of Design debut in 1865; one critic noted "[Homer's painting] expresses . . . an accurate knowledge of African habits and peculiarities."[17] Noble was surely not immune to such equivocal representations of blacks.

As a meditation on the past evils of slavery, Noble's image of Garner thus entered into the debate about the suitability of blacks for citizenship. Within the terms of the contemporary controversy on black character, the painting presented a troublesome enigma. By resurrecting an instance of black violence and murder and thus reminding viewers of the despair slavery caused, Noble seemed to express his wariness about its alternative—emancipation. Indeed, the painting's duality incarnates the myth of the savage African-American character, which held wide currency in the period. Observations by the critic Henry Tuckerman on the black constitution embraced the very same paradox: It was only, he wrote in 1867, "the humor the patience and serenity which redeem from brutality and ferocity the civilized though subjugated African." It was in this spirit that one critic perceived Noble's Garner as a specter of black female atavism, describing her as a "melodramatic negress, with lips drawn back like those of a panther about to spring."[18]

Noble's espousal of the African-American cause is traditionally seen to have derived from his background, particularly his upbringing at his father's slave-operated Lexington rope and bagging operation, as well as his subsequent training with Thomas Couture, an artist celebrated for championing the dispossessed in his work. Indeed, in an unpublished memoir, the artist recalled in his youth "sitting around [the slaves'] fires and listening to songs and stories." The artist's daughter, in an essay on Noble, asserted that her grandfather freed



11 Winslow Homer, *The Bright Side,* 1865. Oil on canvas, 32.3 x 43.2 cm (12 ¾ x 17 in.). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III

all his slaves shortly before the Civil War, "allowing them the same living quarters they had before. They were devoted to the family." From this early experience, she claims, "[Noble] gained his deep understanding of negroes and his strong feeling for social justice." This family narrative may well have been intended to lay the groundwork for the young Noble's later pictorial chronicles of slave rebellion and escape, despite his past in a southern slaveowning family.[19] With Noble's southern roots and his service in the Confederate army (which may have had much to do with family loyalty), there can be no facile summary of his feeling on the subject of slavery, of black emancipation, and, least of all, of blacks' competence for citizenship. The urgency and divisiveness surrounding the citizenship debate can scarcely be underestimated in the years following the Civil War, when Noble produced his series.

Perhaps Noble created his unusually strident antislavery messages because he was personally moved by the plight of freed blacks and mindful of the white debt to the black for his subjugation under slavery. As a white southerner in postwar New York, Noble was an unlikely object of romantic homage. But his images were received—as perhaps they were intended—as penance, an expiation of guilt, both personal and national, and evidence of his own "reconstruction." Critics highlighted Noble's history in just this way. One, reviewing the National Academy's exhibition for the *New York Standard,* devoted most of his review to *Margaret Garner* and Noble:

A terrible story is it, and most powerfully tragically told, and by whom do you think? Not by one of us, taught from childhood to hate and abhor that cursed institution which was the stain upon our civilization. No! The artist of this picture is one Thomas Noble, who for years wore the rebel gray, and fought to preserve this very institution. But that very experience was the fiery trial

12 Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *John Brown's Blessing,* ca. 1867. Oil on canvas, 214 x 153 cm (84 ¼ x 60 ¼ in.). New-York Historical Society, New York, © Collection of the New-York Historical Society

out of which he came a surviving man, and in every sense a reconstructed man. None but such as he who had lived in the very heart of this slave life and learned to detest it, who knew the negro character with all its possibilities, only such an one could have taken their life and given it upon the canvas and made it historical.

13 John Rogers, *The Fugitive's Story*, 1869. Plaster, 55.5 x 40.5 x 5 cm (21 7/8 x 15 7/8 x 12 in.). Cincinnati Art Museum, Appropriation

A critic for the Boston *Congregationalist* wrote a similar endorsement after contemplating Noble's *John Brown's Blessing* (fig. 12):

It adds to the interest of the picture to know that Mr. Noble, its painter, carried a sword in the rebel army for three years but has been thoroughly reconstructed, and knows what he is doing when he is bringing his pencil to bear against slavery, and in favor of freedom.[20]

Margaret Garner thus functioned like the slave narrative by carrying the authority of an eyewitness testimonial—an account from the oppressor's, rather than the victim's, perspective.

The Mother-Child Bond

Just as Noble compromised his narrative on the evils of slavery through his fascination with Garner's appalling act and his subtext on black character, so Garner's violation foregrounds and upends one of the nineteenth century's most mythologized and symbolically charged relationships—the mother-child bond. Though in 1856 the abolitionists and the mainstream press construed Garner's act as one of ultimate sacrifice, framed within the dominant myth of selfless motherhood, Noble did not—perhaps could not—create an image of Garner in 1867 within the sentimentalized rhetoric of motherhood. Rather, in Noble's painting Garner becomes a dark foil to the period's conception of the "Angel in the House" and embodies contemporary notions that a black woman's primitive nature could obviate an attachment even to her own children. Indeed, one extreme view would place Garner's killing of her children within a pattern of parental abuse and infanticide among blacks, a phenomenon argued to have its roots in African culture.[21] Cast as a threat to the social order, Garner transmitted post–Civil War anxiety about the new status of the freed black.

While many scholars have explored representations of blacks, few have sought to differentiate those of black women. Noble had no precedents in portraying a black woman in violent rebellion. Indeed, the range of acceptable representations of black women in the period was severely limited.[22] Noble's *Garner*, far outside the norm of acceptable formulas, directly flouted the most popular pictorial conventions of the time, in which men were the focus and women played a

14 George Fuller, *Negro Nurse with a Child,* 1861. Oil on canvas, 24.7 x 19.3 cm (9 ¾ x 7 ⅝ in.). Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Memorial Hall Muesum, Deerfield, Massachusetts

passive or acquiescent role. For example, in Johnson's *Ride for Liberty,* the woman sits behind the man, both as an extension of him and as a passive agent of his act. She glances apprehensively backward as her mate looks fearlessly forward. He controls her destiny as well as his own.

More characteristic were pictures portraying black women as mothers or caretakers. While the emphasis on Garner's matriarchal role in Noble's *Garner* parallels the stress on the maternal in other images of black women, her autonomy and, indeed, her power over life and death set her apart from other such portrayals. A more typical treatment of the black woman is John Rogers's small sculptural group *The Fugitive's*

15 Jeremiah Gurney, *Woman and Child,* 1850. Daguerreotype, sixth plate, 8.6 x 7 cm (3 ⅜ x 2 ¾ in.). Charles Isaacs Collection, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Story, in which white male clemency serves as its main theme (fig. 13). Three prominent abolitionists—John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Ward Beecher, and William Lloyd Garrison—listen to a fugitive slave woman, who holds her baby in her arms, as she recounts her story of escape.[23] While the image of Garner suggested a threat to the existing power structure through her capacity to destroy her own children, Rogers's submissive, dependent slave seems intended to reassure a nervous postwar audience that the newly freed black posed no threat to existing hierarchies.

The most prevalent formula for portraying the black woman was as a domestic, nurse, or "mammy," who nurtured either black or white children, as in Eastman Johnson's *Babe with Maid* (*Negro with Child)* (1862, location unknown), depicting a black nurse holding a white child. Indeed, the mammy was the most popular image of the black woman in the pre– and post–Civil War years because it was the most reassuring one to whites. The power of such depictions rested in their essentialist notions of the black female's inherent maternal gifts. As Boime points out, the black mammy type collapsed race and gender ideals: her race subordinated her to whites, while her gender made her subject to male authority. The mammy formula portrayed the black woman as a universal nurturer, as in George Fuller's *Negro Nurse with a Child* (fig. 14). Her nurturing role did not, however, affect her subordinate status. In one mid-century daguerreotype, *Woman and Child,* a complex dynamic of social distance and protective nurturance is conveyed through the stiffly posed nanny and her white charge, carefully separated, with the white child higher than the black woman (fig. 15). Noble himself depicted the mammy type in his canvas *John Brown's Blessing* (see fig. 12), which, like *Margaret Garner,* commemorates a violent resister to slavery who murdered to protest it. Yet the two women in *John Brown's Blessing,* in contrast to Noble's Garner, both fulfill the comforting mammy role—one holds a child to receive the condemned man's blessing; the other, the nurse, supervises her white charges. If the mammy represented an ideal fantasy of race-gender relations, Noble's image of *Garner* represented its nightmarish obverse—one that tapped into an existing stereotype of the black as brute negro, or "threatening subhuman," a type usually reserved for men.[24]

Noble's image seems to encode a state of flux, registering the complete reversal of the status quo: the typically powerless black woman is rendered dominant and dangerous, while the powerful white men

16 William Wetmore Story, *Medea,* 1868–80. Marble (modeled in clay 1865), 200 cm (79 in.) high. Gift of a Friend of the Department, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

are reduced to horrified witnesses to her brutality. This reversal reflected profound social changes that were then rocking the country. Though, according to the cultural historian Elaine Showalter, most periods of intense national uncertainty and social upheaval have prompted a tightening of racial, class, and gender boundaries, in post–Civil War America, it was precisely these societal stratifications that were being overturned.[25] The demise of the "subjugated African" also undermined the stereotype of the nurturing black woman, leaving in its place a horrific nightmare of black female power out of control. Garner's capacity to destroy that which was her sole and sacred function to foster and sustain not only evidenced just such a breakdown, but also raised doubts about the suitability of blacks for citizenship.

The Destructive Female

That Noble constructed not just any horror story, but one that upended the image of the nurturing, loving woman-mother may not have been accidental. For just as Garner must be situated within the context of images and ideologies surrounding blacks, her image must also be examined in relation to contemporary portrayals of women. While flouting the conventions that dictated how black women were depicted, Noble's morally ambiguous *Margaret Garner* corresponded with a new duality in post–Civil War treatments of women in art. These treatments were, according to the Americanist scholar Joy Kasson, one manifestation of the nineteenth century's fascination with the idealized woman and a countervailing preoccupation with its opposite—the destructive female.[26]

This fantasy of the threatening woman, Kasson argues, was explored in numerous sculptures of the period. William Wetmore Story gave the idea powerful expression in his *Medea,* in which the figure from the Greek tragedy contemplates her imminent act of infanticide (fig. 16). Yet while Story stopped short of depicting Medea at the moment of destructive passion or its aftermath, Noble produced an image that directly confronted the viewer with Garner's horrific crime. However ambiguously figured, Noble's painting pushes far beyond the formula that, according to Kasson, dictated the imagery of most sculptures of powerful, destructive women. Such works typically placed their female protagonists in still,

17 *Madame Ristori as Medea,* 1867. Engraving after drawing by A. Greppi. Houghton Library, Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

18 Unidentified photographer, stage photograph of Adelaide Ristori in character as Medea with her children, n.d. Houghton Library, Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

thoughtful poses on, but not yet over, the threshold of demonic transformation. Garner, by contrast, has already acted, exercising an unnatural, even masculine, power over life and death, thus embodying anxieties that remained largely muted in contemporaneous images of women.[27]

The link with *Medea* is significant, for a much-acclaimed European production of Euripides' tragedy toured America in 1866–67, debuting and culminating in New York. The powerful interpretation of the lead role by the Italian actress Adelaide Ristori supposedly provided Story with the impetus for his sculpture. Ristori as Medea was depicted in a newspaper engraving brooding over her knife and in a stage photograph caressing her children (figs. 17, 18). This production of the play also coincided with the commission and creation of Noble's painting and may even have directly inspired Noble to retell the Margaret Garner story. Certainly, Noble's painting was read as an analogous fantasy of female destructive power when its engraving for *Harper's Weekly* was labeled with the caption "The Modern Medea" (see fig. 3).[28]

The connection that Noble and his public might have made between the Garner story and the play is vividly suggested by a review of one of Ristori's New York performances in 1867, which strikingly recalls Noble's staging of the Garner incident: "It was at the termination of the tragedy . . . when the infuriated Medea stood . . . with her murdered

children at her feet, and Jason, with the multitude transfixed by her malediction and her pose, that Ristori rose to her full hight [*sic*] and *wrung* from the audience her most heartfelt recognition of the night."[29] This scene of female deviance, mingling pathos with repulsion, resonates suggestively with Noble's image of Margaret Garner.

The possibility that Noble was inspired by Ristori's interpretation of *Medea* also strengthens a dual reading of his image of Garner, for the Italian actress drew her performance from a nineteenth-century adaptation of the play by the French dramatist Ernest Legouvé. In Legouvé's version, as Kasson points out, "the demonic implications . . . were blunted to the point of unrecognizability": Medea "kills her children from an *excess* of maternal devotion, because they are going to be taken away from her."[30] Thus if Noble's Garner were likened to or inspired by this particular Medea, the narrative might have been shaped to stress self-sacrifice and parental duty over revenge and destructive passion.

Yet to a post–Civil War audience, Garner, as an icon of her race in the white imagination, eerily echoed Medea as a frightening specter of primitivism. Medea, a sorceress, was a barbarian from the Orient. Once brought into civilization, her essentially savage nature asserted itself in her tragic and horrible murder of her children.[31]

Garner's association with Medea ultimately brings the examination of the painting back to its tacit and probably unintended subtext—an evocation of the black female as the barbarian other and a graphic rehearsal of her perversity in the face of black autonomy. In the unresolvable duality of the painting, Garner as the embodiment of an existing threat overpowers Noble's undoubtedly sincere attempt to portray her as a historical figure from a lamentable past.

Notes

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1 James D. Birchfield, Albert Boime, and William J. Hennessey, *Thomas Satterwhite Noble, 1835–1907* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Art Museum, 1988); and Albert Boime, "Burgoo and Bourgeois: The Images of a Border State Consciousness," in Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), pp. 125–52 (first published as "Burgoo and Bourgeois: Thomas Noble's Images of Black People," in Birchfield, Boime, and Hennessey, pp. 29–60). Subsequent citations to Boime are from *The Art of Exclusion* unless otherwise indicated.

2 The most comprehensive biography of Thomas S. Noble is provided by James D. Birchfield, in Birchfield, Boime, and Hennessey, pp. 1–28. Noble's record of military service is documented in Veteran Records, Civil War Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Noble's other images on slave themes are (from earliest to latest) *The Last Sale of Slaves on the Saint Louis Courthouse Steps* (fig. 8), *John Brown's Blessing* (fig. 12), *The Price of Blood, A Planter Selling His Son* (fig. 9), *Fugitives in Flight* (fig. 10), as well as three unlocated images on the plight of the African American (see n. 15).

3 For information on the two versions of the painting, see Birchfield, Boime and Hennessy, cat. no. 5, 68; and Boime, pp. 144–47. The original version, created by the spring of 1867, was commissioned by a Harlow Roys, about whom little is known, except that he was a leather broker in lower Manhattan with a share in the art dealership known as the Roys Art Gallery. See Birchfield, in Birchfield, Boime and Hennessey, p. 8, on the Royses' family art dealership. Roys was active professionally in New York City between 1866 and 1870. He is listed in *Trow's Business Directory* beginning in 1866 as a broker; in 1867–70 as a leather broker; and simply by name in 1873. Roys's commission is recorded in "In the Academy: Arts and

Letters," *Cincinnati Tribune*, 24 November 1895, Thomas Noble clippings file, Margaret L. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington (cited hereafter as the Noble File).

The composition of the original picture created for Roys is known from the 1867 woodcut in *Harper's Weekly* (see fig. 2) made after Brady's photograph and from exhibition reviews; see Birchfield, in Birchfield, Boime, and Hennessey, p. 7. The smaller version's only known showing was in "Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts, First Exhibition at Wiswell's Gallery" in 1868. The painting was cited favorably in a review of the Wiswell Gallery show in the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 6 May 1868, p. 2, and indirectly as one of Noble's "tragic and emotional subjects" in the *Evening Post*, 2 May 1867.

The sketch is reproduced in color in Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710–1940* (Washington, D.C.: Bedford Arts, Publishers, in association with the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990), p. 67.

Various accounts of Garner's act conflict in some details. I have relied upon Julius Yanuck's version, drawn from contemporary newspapers, witness testimony from Garner's trial, and contemporary literature, in "The Garner Fugitive Slave Case," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40 (September 1953): 47–66.

4 *Cincinnati Commercial* and *Cincinnati Times*, quoted in the *New York Daily Times*, 2 February 1856, paraphrased in Yanuck, p. 52. Garner's escape and that of Eliza in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) are strikingly similar. An apocryphal story maintains that "Margaret Garner, an ex-slave woman who lived in Cincinnati after the Civil War, escaped over the frozen Ohio River and thought she inspired Mrs. Stowe's story." Forrest Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Co., 1941), p. 147. Garner's escape, however, was in 1856, four years after Stowe's novel was published. There is a remote possibility that Garner herself was indirectly inspired by Eliza's example: unconfirmed reports at the time of her escape held that "[the Garners'] determination to escape was strengthened by two English ladies who were at that time guests in the home of Archibald K. Gaines. Soon after the slaves fled the ladies were accused of encouraging them." *New York Daily Times*, 16 February 1856, as cited in Yanuck, "Garner Case," n. 18.

This account of Garner's fate is based on a letter from Robert Garner, Margaret's husband, to the *New York Tribune*, and reported in "The Case of the Garner Fugitive Slave Family," an article in the black newspaper *Pacific Appeal*, 1 November 1862 (reprint, Saratoga, Calif.: R. & E. Associates, 1968), pp. 123–24, Du Bois Institute, Harvard University. After she was returned to her master in Kentucky, Margaret Garner was sold farther south in or after 1856. She died a slave 1 May 1861. (This refutes rumors in the press of her drowning in a steamboat accident on the way south from Ohio.)

On the impact of the incident, see John J. Lalor, ed., *Cyclopaedia of Political Science, Political Economy, and of the Political History of the United States* (New York: Charles E. Merrill & Co., 1888), p. 317; Yanuck, pp. 49, 66; and Lowell H. Harrison, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), p. 91. Birchfield, in Birchfield, Boime, and Hennessey, p. 65, suggests that the painting is partly a retroactive protest against the Fugitive Slave Law. Garner's story continues to resonate, serving in its latest incarnation as the basis for Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). See "Toni Morrison, In Her New Novel, Defends Women," *New York Times*, 26 August 1987.

5 Blackwell, quoted in *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 14 February 1856, as cited in Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "'Margaret Garner': A Cincinnati Story," *Massachusetts Review* 32 (fall 1991): 433. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* also paraphrased Blackwell's remarks in its 14 February edition.

Letters and poems about Garner appeared in the *Liberator*, 22 February (reprinted from the *New York Tribune*) and 29 February 1856. The sentiments of one sympathizer, Henry C. Wright, as expressed in the *Liberator*, are representative of abolitionist views on the case: "Margaret Garner is a name that will long be preserved and consecrated in the hearts of the people of Ohio. That heroic mother, in the deep, holy love of her maternal heart, cut the throat of one child and tried to kill her three others, to save them from the lash and the lust of [slavery]." "Letter from Henry C. Wright," *Liberator*, 11 April 1856, p. 59.

6 Boime, p. 146, has pointed out that both groups—the men and Garner with her children—form a pyramid, creating an inverted triangle between them, with one of the dead boys lying in the middle of the floor as its apex. An object that appears to be a set of shackles is draped on the chest behind Garner.

7 On Noble's reliance on David, see Boime, pp. 146–47. Gail Weinberg has noted Noble's iconographic debt to Gérôme; Weinberg, conversation with author, 13 April 1996. *The Dead Caesar* (see fig. 3) was preliminary to Gérôme's masterpiece *The Death of Caesar* of 1867. See also Charles Le Brun, *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions*, trans. John Williams (1698, trans. 1734; reprint, Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society Publication, and the University of California, 1980), pp. 200–201, *Horrour*, fig. 11, p. 30, and *Anger Mixed with Rage*, fig. 34, p. 46.

8 Boime, p. 146, points out that the "powerful pyramidal configuration" of Garner and her clinging child "arrests the forward motion of her pursuers."

9 On the "ignoble savage," see Sander L. Gilman, "On the Nexus of Blackness and Madness," in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 140. While I agree with Boime that Noble is commemorating Garner's rebellion as a slave and as a mother (pp. 146–47), I find the painting's theme of protest significantly undercut by a sensationalism he does not acknowledge.

Karen Halttunen, "Early American Murder Narratives: The Birth of Horror," in *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 89, identifies the corpse discovery scene as a central motif in murder narratives in the Gothic horror genre. She argues that "close narrative attention to the moment when a murder was initially discovered was calculated to induce a horror-response in the reader that would replicate the [reaction] of those who first came upon the scene of the crime."

Several contemporary accounts focused on the white men's reaction to Garner's bloody deed, including "Dreadful Slave Tragedy," in the *Liberator*, 8 February 1856, p. 23; and

"Stampede of Slaves," in the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 26 January 1856, p. 3. An exhaustive compilation of newspaper accounts on the Garner incident was readily accessible to the artist in an antiabolitionist tract by Rev. William G. Hawkins, a southerner turned abolitionist. Hawkins's publication was *Lunsford Lane; or, Another Helper from North Carolina* (1863; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969). The source for the account in *Lunsford Lane* is apparently the aforementioned article, "Dreadful Slave Tragedy," in the *Liberator*. Excerpts from contemporary newspaper accounts of the Garner incident appear on pages 119–36. According to the *Lunsford Lane* account, a compilation of articles on Margaret Garner's story was also published in pamphlet form in Baltimore.

10 See Halttunen, pp. 92–94.

11 On Mikhail Bakhtin, see Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 174. Interestingly, Allen applies Bakhtin's grotesque body paradigm to the evolution of the highly exaggerated minstrel physiognomy in America in the late 1860s.

The *Harper's Weekly* cartoon also includes caricatures of white males, including the Yankee and the Kentuckian, yet these parodies turn primarily on costumes and props, not on physical distortions, as in those of the black. "Citizens of the United States, According to Popular Impressions," *Harper's Weekly* 11 (12 January 1867): 29.

12 On "slave to his emotions," see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 101. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (1911), as cited in Malcolm Gladwell, "Personal History: Black Like Them," *New Yorker* 72 (29 April and 6 May 1996): 77. The ninth edition (1878–89) characterizes the negro as "nonmoral," indolent, and in a state of arrested intellectual development from puberty. Tract quotation is from Lindley Spring, "The Negro at Home: An Inquiry After His Capacity for Self-Government . . . ."(1868), in John David Smith, ed., *Racial Determinism and the Fear of Miscegenation: Pre-1900*, vol. 7 of *Anti-Black Thought 1863–1925* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), p. 278.

According to Fredrickson, northerners "approached Reconstruction with their basic racial prejudices largely intact" (p. 174). See also Gilman on the belief in a predisposition among blacks toward mental instability and deviant behavior. On racist doctrine of the period, see "Is Ohio to Be Africanized," speech delivered to the U.S. House of Representatives by the Ohio Congressman Samuel Sullivan Cox on 6 June 1862, reprinted in "Emancipation and Equality: Racist Reflections During the Civil War," in *The Poisoned Tongue: A Documentary History of American Racism and Prejudice*, ed. Stanley Feldstein, (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1972), pp. 142–44. An argument for the animal ancestry of blacks appears in the pamphlet, J. R. Hayes, *"Negrophobia 'On the Brain,'"* in *White Men. Or an Essay upon the Origin and Progress, both Mental and Physical, of the Negro Race, and the Use to be Made of Him by the Politicians of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Powell, Ginck & Co. Press, 1869), p. 14.

13 National Academy of Design review, *New York Evening Post*, 2 May 1867, cited in Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., "The School of War," in Cikovsky and Franklin Kelly, *Winslow Homer* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 48.

Peter H. Wood and Karen C. C. Dalton provide a detailed historical and art historical context for the development of a genre of African-American subjects in post–Civil War America, including a time-line of images (pp. 135–44) in their catalogue, *Winslow Homer's Images of Blacks: The Civil War and the Reconstruction Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988). See also Hugh Honour, "Uncle Tom on the Freed Slave, 1852–76," in *From the American Revolution to World War I*, vol. 4 of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 195–258; Boime; McElroy; Karen M. Adams, "Black Images in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature: An Iconological Study of Mount, Melville, Homer and Mark Twain," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1977); and Elizabeth Johns, "Standing Outside the Door," in *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991). For an overview, see also Jessie Carney Smith, ed., *Images of Blacks in American Culture: A Reference Guide to Information Sources* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

On the debate over the fitness of blacks for citizenship, see Boime, 79–124. See also "General Introduction," in vol. 7 of Smith, ed., p. xii; and Henry Flanders, "Observations on Reconstruction" (1866), in *Disenfranchisement Proposals and the Ku Klux Klan*, vol. 9 of Smith, ed., pp. 115–45.

14 Honour observes that the imagery tends to focus on the "abject state from which slaves had been freed rather than the high aspirations of freemen" (p. 258). He identifies this category of imagery and discusses a series of works depicting the fugitive slave, though he does not discuss Noble's image of Garner; pp. 209–14.

Boime, p. 103, contends that white support for education of blacks was based on the fear that they "would emerge from slavery with benumbed moral faculties and vengeful attitudes."

15 According to Boime, p. 131, Noble also created three important canvases entitled *Past, Present, and Future Conditions of the Negro*, providing a description of *Present Condition*. Boime gives no source for his information on these untraced works.

16 Honour, pp. 200–202, and Boime, pp. 132–33, point out the important precedent of Stowe's novel for public interest in pictures of black subjects. Boime also observes a reliance on stereotypes in Noble's *Last Sale of Slaves on the Saint Louis Courthouse Steps*, pp. 134–35.

On black traits, see Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Face and Voice of Blackness," in McElroy, p. xxix. Gates enumerates stereotypes identified from literature by the critic Sterling A. Brown.

17 National Academy of Design review, *New York Times*, 29 May 1865, excerpted in Marc Simpson, "*The Bright Side:* 'Humorously Conceived and Truthfully Executed,'" in Simpson et al., *Winslow Homer: Paintings of the Civil War* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Bedford Art Publishers, 1988), p. 56. On *The Bright Side*, see pp. 47–63.

18 Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (1867; reprint, New York: G. P. Putnam, 1966), p. 470; and "Pictures at the National Academy," *Round Table* 5 (18 May 1867): 310.

19 Noble, quoted by Mary Noble Welleck Garretson, "Thomas S. Noble and His Paintings," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin* 24 (October 1940): 113–14. The history of the Noble family's ownership of slaves is irregularly documented. According to tax rolls, the family owned fourteen slaves in 1849, their last year in Lexington, Kentucky. Tax rolls, Lexington Public Library, cited in James D. Birchfield to author, 18 January 1996. Noble's granddaughter, Grace Church, to Emily Church, 12 November 1921, indicates that Noble's family moved its entire rope and bagging business, along with its slaves, to St. Louis; letter, collection of Shawn Ryan. The 1860 census for St. Louis lists the Noble family but no slaves; census records, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

Boime, p. 130, also notes that Noble's studies with Couture occurred during his mentor's transition from a "historical to a more popular genre style"; certainly, *Garner* reflects both genres. He also credits Noble's concern for blacks partly to his mentor's preoccupation with the underdog.

20 National Academy of Design review, *New York Standard,* 9 May 1867, Noble File; and *Congregationalist,* 19 December 1867, Noble File.

21 *The Angel in the House* is the title of a poem (1854–56) by the British poet Coventry Patmore about the idealization of womanhood. Wolff, pp. 419–20, highlights the centrality of the nineteenth-century's "Cult of True Womanhood" and discusses this myth in relation to the cruel realities of female oppression and powerlessness, such as the Garner infanticide. On lack of attachment to children, see Wolff, p. 420. That this belief was a convenient justification for slaveowners to separate families through sale and trade is evidenced by the fact that women slaves were routinely entrusted with the care of white children. For assertions on the alleged widespread practice of infanticide among Africans, see Spring, pp. 172–73.

22 Despite the plethora of recent work on images of blacks in American art, little scholarly work has been published specifically on images of black women. See Sarah Burns, "Black, Quadroon, Gypsy: Women in the Art of George Fuller," *Massachusetts Review* 26 (summer-autumn 1985): 405–24; Smith, ed., *Images of Blacks,* pp. 18–20; Judith Wilson, "Optical Illusions: Images of Miscegenation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Art," *American Art* 5 (summer 1991); and Jo-Ann Morgan, "Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New Century," *American Art* 9 (spring 1995).

23 Honour, pp. 23–24, writes, "Blacks figure most frequently in pictures of daily life where their place usually conformed with that accorded to them by white society." See also his discussion of Rogers's sculpture, pp. 255–56. My treatment of Rogers's work is especially indebted to Boime, p. 195.

24 Boime, p. 98; "Threatening subhuman" citation from McElroy, p. xi. Both McElroy, p. xiii, and Patricia Hills, *The Genre Painting of Eastman Johnson: The Sources and Development of His Style and Themes* (New York: Garland Publishing: 1977), p. 63, briefly note the black woman's typical role as mammy or servant in genre paintings. A notable exception to tropes of the servile black woman is provided in William Sidney Mount's powerful matriarchal figure of a black woman fishing in *Eel Spearing at Setauket* (1845, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown). Another pervasive stereotype in art and literature sexualized the black female, often casting her as a mulatto and foregrounding her sexual vulnerability.

25 Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 4.

26 Joy S. Kasson, "Domesticating the Demonic: *Medea,*" in *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 203–40.

27 Story's first version of *Medea* was produced in 1866. He produced two replicas; see Kasson, p. 221. Kasson cites numerous examples of such potentially powerful, destructive historical female subjects in meditative, rather than active, stances, such as Judith, Delilah, Salome, and Pandora.

28 Kasson, p. 223, identifies Ristori as the inspiration for Story's piece. Noble would probably also have been aware of Eugène Delacroix's paintings of *Medea* from 1838, 1859, and 1862.

The author of the *Harper's Weekly* article on Garner, in which the engraving appeared, tacitly acknowledged the correlation when he wrote, "Margaret Garner, with a far nobler jealousy than that which actuated the mythical Medea, finding her children were about to be given up to the slavery she had endured, seized a knife and took the lives of two of them." "The Modern Medea," Harper's Weekly 11 (18 May 1867): 318.

29 George C. D. Odell, "1866–1867, A Season of Sensations: Ristori," in *Annals of the New York Stage,* vol. 8 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927–1949), p. 164.

30 Kasson, p. 223.

31 See Emily A. McDermott, *Euripides' Medea: The Incarnation of Disorder* (University Park, Penn.: State University Press, 1989); and Pietro Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980).