

Activism behind the Veil of Sentimentality: The Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album

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Abstract

This article focuses on Amy Matilda Cassey's friendship album, which contains entries from free black elite women and other antislavery activists in the antebellum North in the United States, incorporates many entries focused on fighting race- and gender-based oppression. This article posits that, though these contributors were able to take on a visible position in the public arena if so desired, they often veiled their activism with sentimentality, which was based on notions of black republican motherhood, so that this activism would be deemed acceptable by others.

In the early antebellum period in the Northern United States, a group of elite free black women began circulating a friendship album amongst themselves, which included poetry, watercolours, essays and other works in a scrapbook-like format. This album was shared not only amongst the contributors themselves, but also with a number of prominent white and black, male and female abolitionists of the era, who contributed to the album mostly by way of essays. Although these women had access to more public forums such as newspapers – where many regularly published essays, poetry and other articles – much of their more personal work was contributed to this semi-visible space where like-minded could share their thoughts in an environment that was sheltered from a highly critical sexist and racist environment in the North. This article focuses on the Amy Matilda Cassey friendship album, which contains entries from 1833 to 1856 focused mostly on the intricacies of fighting race- and gender-based oppression in the antebellum period. Although many of the elite black women who circulated this album were active and visible in the public sphere – be it as educators in schools, active congregants in their places of worship, antislavery activists or feminists – they still benefited from a less visible space to discuss both their activism and share their experiences of oppression.

This article argues that, though these contributors were able to take on a visible position in the public arena if so desired, they often veiled their activism with sentimentality, which was based on notions of black republican motherhood, so that that activism would be acceptable to their black male and white male and female activist peers. Although this reliance on sentimentality was crucial for a number of different social movements in which black women participated in the antebellum period, this article takes a specific look at contributors' work in the antislavery movement, and in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society more specifically; though this album's contributors were indeed active in a number of movements, the antislavery movement was one in which they were all very active and Philadelphia was the centre where many of the album's contributors were located. In the case of this article, a differentiation between abolitionism and antislavery is made. While abolitionism is, quite clearly, considered to be the social movement to abolish slavery, antislavery is understood as encompassing the wider goals antislavery societies had in addition to abolitionism, including providing the free black community with access to opportunities for moral reform, school-based education and vocational training.

Since the 1960s, research on the notion of spheres in the nineteenth century has

been focused particularly on white women and their domestic, religious, political and economic activities. In 1966, Barbara Welter's "Cult of True Womanhood" was published,¹ and had become the standard point of departure for historians and gender scholars by the 1970s.² Welter argues that (white) women were judged by "four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity."³ Woman's "proper" sphere was the home, where she was not only to be submissive and domestic, but also the religious centre of the family. Welter insists that one of the reasons why religion was so important for "True Womanhood" was that piety promoted submissiveness and – unlike activities in societies or social movements – did not challenge these four cardinal virtues.⁴ Many studies on women's abolitionist activities have focused on how women tried to maintain their domestic virtues while becoming active in the "male" political sphere.⁵

Approaches by scholars to this straddling of the public and private have varied since the 1980s. While some sociologists have attempted to maintain a strict demarcation between the public and private,⁶ Mary Kelley, in contrast, has advocated a complete dissolution of the concept of spheres, as the concept ignores the reality of women never having been restricted completely to the home.⁷ While this article acknowledges Kelley's argument, particularly concerning the fact that women were never truly confined to the private sphere, the term "spheres" will still be used to highlight the ideals of the demarcation between public and private; though this strict separation did not exist for most women, it still represents an ideal many middle- and upper-class women of the period referred to and publicly demonstrated their supposed willingness to obtain.

The prominence of Welter's arguments has also informed the scholarship on antebellum black women. Many historians have argued that, when black women were seen through the lens of True Womanhood, white women would have "declared [black women] not to be women at all."⁸ There are a number of reasons that black women would have been excluded from True Womanhood, or republican

1 Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-174.

2 Mary Kelley, who advocates for the use of the term "sites" rather than "spheres," argues that it was not just the publishing of Welter's work in *American Quarterly* that contributed to the pervasiveness of Welter's arguments on spheres, but rather the fact that the essay was republished multiple times in other journals and edited volumes. See Kelley, "Beyond the Boundaries," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Spring 2001) 1, 74.

3 Welter, 152.

4 *Ibid.*, 153.

5 See, for example, Lucretia Mott, "Discourses by Lucretia Mott. Discourse on Woman, Delivered 12th month 17th, 1849," *James and Lucretia Mott. Life and Letters. Ed. by their Granddaughter*, ed. Anna Davis Hallowell (New York and Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and co., 1884), 487-506; Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies and the Unfinished Work of Emancipation* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 39; Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 103.

6 See, for example, Margaret R. Somers, "What's Political or Cultural about Political Culture and the Public Sphere? Toward an Historical Sociology of Concept Formation," *Sociological Theory* 13 (Jul., 1995) 2, 116.

7 Mary Kelley's book, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, and her argument against the use of spheres in historical literature was discussed in-depth in a symposium entitled "Women and Civil Society: A Symposium" in the Spring 2008 issue (vol. 28, no. 1) of the *Journal of the Early Republic*.

8 Kelley, 75.

motherhood. For example, that black families were more likely to be of a lower socioeconomic status than their white counterparts meant that a black woman's income was integral to the family's financial health. Given that she had more duties than staying home and caring for the home and the family, she would not have been considered a republican mother. Further, black women were seen by many whites as being less religious, more promiscuous, more idle and less likely to live in a stable family than their white counterparts.

Despite the lack of historical evidence to support these beliefs, black women were nevertheless not seen as being "pure" and pious enough to act as republican mothers. In the last decade or so, however, there has been a move among some historians to create the analytical tool of black republican motherhood. While "black" and "republican motherhood" create an oxymoron based on republican motherhood as a lens of analysis, historians such as Erica Armstrong Dunbar and Richard Newman have been staunch in their support of the term as a way of describing upper-class, pious black women who took on caring positions in the community.⁹ As Richard Newman describes the black republican mother, she was one "whose domestic-sphere work, religious piety, and self-sacrificing dedication to communal uplift symbolized early African American femininity."¹⁰

Alongside the development of the literature on spheres and gender, there has been a continuous contribution of article- and book-length studies to the literature on female antislavery over the past twenty years.¹¹ While this body of literature continues to grow, it remains relatively homogeneous in its structure. Aside from occasional treatment in articles or book chapters, the literature largely considers multiple antislavery societies at once and rarely includes case studies on individual societies. Given that most antislavery societies, with Philadelphia's society being an exception, either refused to admit black women as members or only permitted them to listen in on business and not take part actively in the society, the literature also focuses primarily on the experiences of white women.¹² While classic works dealing with female antislavery such as the compilation *The Abolitionist Sisterhood* or Zaeske's *Signatures of Citizenship* are considered staples of the field, the discussions introduced in such works often consider abolitionism sometimes as a purveyor and sometimes a side effect of the women's right's movement and women's bold entry into the public sphere. Even in more abolitionist-focused works such as Jeffrey's *Great Silent Army of Abolitionism* and *Abolitionists Remember*, women's public

9 On black republican motherhood, see: Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 24, 51; Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), 75; Daniel A. Payne, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891), 84.

10 Newman, 75.

11 Some of the most important contributions to the literature include: Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); also from Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember*; Beth Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1820-1860* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Anti-Slavery & Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

12 Yee's 1992 study, *Black Women Abolitionists*, remains an important exception.

activities seem to be more important than the abolition movement and women's contributions toward it.

It is nevertheless impossible to consider the narrative of female abolitionists without considering women's political actions and how they managed to enter the public sphere in a period when the ideal (black) republican mother was the centre of the domestic sphere. This article bases its argument on the notion that female antislavery activists based their antislavery work on a rhetoric that highlighted their "natural" qualities as females – piety, morality and motherhood – to justify fighting the sinful, degraded, family-destroying nature of slavery; these qualities supported the antislavery mission and thus permitted them entry to the public sphere for this work. Though important for white abolitionists, this reliance on sentimentality as a veil to public activism was even more important for black abolitionists, who were already seen as hypersexual, crude and not befitting republican motherhood; they needed to represent themselves as pious, caring, mother-like figures in order to gain public respect for their activism.

In order to adequately frame the argument that friendship albums gave black women the opportunity to further their activism behind this veil of sentimentality or, in the case of this study, to contribute to the antislavery movement, first a general overview of women's antislavery activity in the antebellum North will be given. Then, a discussion of the Amy Matilda Cassey album will follow, with a particular focus on how much of the research on friendship albums – including black women's albums – has been focused on the building of friendships and not the political nature of networking and creating alliances. Ultimately, the article maintains that historical research on black women's sentimentality in friendship albums cannot be divorced from the political alliances that resulted from the sharing of thoughts, opinions and emotions.

Black female abolitionists were typically very active and highly visible in the public sphere in the antebellum period. For the most part, their public activism was nurtured in the family from an early age. Sarah Mapps Douglass, one of the more frequent contributors to the album in its early years, for example, was raised in a family of activists. After attending school and most likely receiving additional private tutoring, Douglass became a teacher of black children, teaching first in a small school that was previously run by her mother and James Forten, a wealthy freeborn sailmaker whose children were active in championing abolitionism, black rights and women's rights. Sarah Douglass later took on responsibility for the girls' school at the Quaker Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. Aside from her teaching duties, Douglass was one of the founding members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, and took an active part in the society's fundraising and running of antislavery fairs.

One of James Forten's daughters, Margaretta Forten, was another common contributor to the album in its early years and had a similar history. After receiving her own education, Forten began teaching in Sarah Douglass's school in the 1840s. In 1850, she continued her career as an educator by opening her own school which boarded its students.¹³ These women and other album contributors had a number of

13 Roger Lane, "Quakers and the Institute for Colored Youth," in *For Emancipation and Education: Some Black and Quaker Efforts*, ed. Eliza Cope Harrison (Philadelphia: Awbury Arboretum Association, 1997), 46; Marie J. Lindhorst, "Politics in a Box: Sarah Mapps Douglass and the Female Literary Association, 1831-1833" *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65 (Summer 1998) 3, 263.

things in common with each other – for one, they were all relatively well-educated for a period in which even basic literacy was a sign of privilege. They had received a mix of private school education and private tutoring, and were well-versed in foreign languages, history, geography and mathematics.¹⁴ As demonstrated by the watercolours and calligraphy found in the album, they were also well-trained in the ornamental arts, as was expected of white upper-class women of the period. Growing up as the children of some of the most outspoken antislavery activists of the early national period, these women also shared a common bond of public activism. It was not just the antislavery movement for which they were publicly active, though. The women were passionate about temperance, morality and religiosity, and many were also active in the women's rights movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵

Antislavery was, for many of the contributors to the album, however, one of their main points of activism. As previously mentioned, a number of the album's contributors, for example, were members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, and most were involved in one female antislavery society or another, be it in Boston, New York or another Northern centre. Founded in 1833, the Philadelphia society was focused on the cooperation of black and white women not just in the fight against slavery, but also in an effort to raise the socio-economic status of free blacks in Philadelphia and, to a lesser extent, Pennsylvania.¹⁶ Rioters burned down Pennsylvania Hall in 1838, for example, a building which had been built with the intention to house meetings of groups dedicated to racial and social equality on a greater scale. Rather than run to safety, the members of the antislavery society, who were attending a meeting, purposefully walked out arm-in-arm with each other, an action which – given the fact attendees were white and black – made a strong non-verbal statement on racial equality to the rioters.¹⁷

Black member Sarah Forten, sister of Margaretta Forten and daughter of the wealthy sailmaker James Forten, had often mentioned in her letters that just because the society sought to integrate white and black abolitionists did not mean that there was a lack of racism in the society. She stated that sometimes white racism was actually a significant problem for black members in the society, but that it was important to try to continue to work with the white members, as they were constantly trying to acknowledge and work past their racism.¹⁸ Forten's letters are important in this regard – they highlight black women's need to, on the one hand, work with white abolitionists who shared their main goals, but on the other hand, create a space for

14 See, for example, Marie J. Lindhorst, *Sarah Mapps Douglass: The Emergence of an African American Educator/Activist in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995); Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (Oxford, etc.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 116-117.

15 Though many women who were involved in antislavery were also active in the women's rights movement, not all were. Some members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, for example, only wished to take on public activism until slavery was abolished, and did not want to be active in other movements (see Mott's "Discourse on Woman").

16 For a general history on the early years of the society and women's public activism, see the seminal study: Ira V. Brown, "Cradle of Feminism: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1833-1840," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (1978) 2: 143-166.

17 Jean Soderlund, "Priorities and Power: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society," *The Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 68.

18 Sarah L. Forten, "Sarah L. Forten to Angelina E. Grimké, 15 April 1837," *Black Abolitionist Papers Volume III: The United States, 1830-1846*, ed. C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 221.

and network of black women who personally understood racism and the importance of abolishing slavery in hopes of being able to overcome, or at least lessen, that racism – this is where the importance of these friendship albums comes into play.

There are only four friendship albums circulated amongst elite black women that historians believe have survived from the nineteenth century. Of these four, the Library Company of Philadelphia has purchased three – the one which belonged to Amy Matilda Cassey, and two which belonged to sisters Mary Anne and Martina Dickerson. The three albums belonging to the Library Company were purchased partially with funds from the William Penn Foundation and became part of the Library Company's extensive Afro-Americana Collection, which consists of sources created by or related to African Americans from 1535 to 1922.¹⁹ The Amy Matilda Cassey album, like the two albums that belonged to the Dickerson sisters, is filled with poetry, essays and watercolours from activists prominent in the abolitionist movement. Although many, if not most, of the entries are from female members of the free black elite, there were also a number of entries made by white abolitionists, both men and women, including some of the most prominent members of the movement such as William Lloyd Garrison, founder of the antislavery newspaper, the *Liberator*. Regarding the purpose of these albums, an unidentified author, writing in 1845, identified the importance of the friendship album in her entry entitled "Friend." She wrote: "Receive this faint token of respect with care. As your kindness doth merit the same. I am gratified in being able to share, this tribute you'll never call fame."²⁰ Here, it is clear that, though the album was designed to be a semi-private space for black women to share their feelings and convictions with each other, it was never designed to become a public document charting their activism.

As the friendship albums have not yet been accessible to scholars for a significant amount of time, the body of literature on this topic is still in its infancy. At this time, the scholar who has arguably discussed the friendship albums most in-depth has been Erica Armstrong Dunbar. Acknowledging that scholarly literature not only on the friendship albums, but on black female friendship in general, is still virtually non-existent, Dunbar has sought to add the question of race into the growing body of literature on white female friendships. She mentions that the main difference when considering black friendships and white ones is that "[t]he issues of slavery and racial discrimination did not find their way into the central discussion of those [white] women's friendships, yet they were crucial to the lives of African American female friends."²¹ Dunbar acknowledges at this point that, in contrast to white female friendships, documentation of black female friendships did not just include emotional support, but also reflected a political agenda. Crucial to Dunbar's argument is that friendships among black women extended beyond merely a kinship network, and represented and nurtured political alliances which could be relied upon for activism. Additionally, however, it can be argued that the female friendships between black and white women were also politicized; while the friendship albums were an

19 See the Library Company's website dedicated to the three albums: <<http://www.lcpalbum-project.org>>. According to historian Richard Newman, who was appointed Director of the Library Company in 2013, the Afro-Americana collection is one of the most extensive collections of material concerning people of African descent. As such, the inclusion of these albums into the collection has great meaning for the Library and for historians now able to access them. The albums were also digitized by the Library Company in 2012 and are available online in their Afro-Americana Digital Collection.

20 Unknown, "Friend," *Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album*, 42.

21 Dunbar, 124.

important space for black women to nurture these alliances, they also provided the same opportunity for black-white alliances.

Dunbar's analysis of these friendship albums, however, focuses almost entirely on female friendships and does not discuss the political nature of the albums. Although Dunbar opens her argument by highlighting the political nature of these albums, aside from briefly mentioning the political, for the remainder of her analysis she delves into the albums as "a symbol of sentimentality and popularity for African American women in Philadelphia and across the urban North."²² In this way, Dunbar has joined the majority of historians of women's political culture in the antebellum North who have focused on the prevalence of sentimentality in women's – and, to a lesser extent, in men's – discourse. Notions of sentimentality were to be found in almost all corners of women's lives – not only did sentimentality reign in discussions of the domestic sphere, but also in women's public lives and their activism, be it in discussions about religion, temperance, education, women's rights or abolition.²³ Rather than focusing on the political nature of many of the entries in the albums, Dunbar instead highlights the sentimentality, love and admiration found in the poems and essays in the album. She also discusses the acknowledgement of the duties middle- and upper-class women had in the private sphere. Dunbar includes, for example, a poem entitled "Good Wives" by Mary Forten, sister of Margaretta and Sarah Forten:

Good wives to snails should be akin – / Always their houses keep
within / But not to carry Fashion's hacks, / All they are worth upon
their back / Good wives like city clocks should chime / Be regular
and keep in time / But not like the city clocks aloud / Be heard by all
the vulgar crowd / Good Wives like echoes still should do / Speak
but when they are spoken to; / But not like echoes most absurd /
Have forever the last word.²⁴

In response to this source, Dunbar argues that members of the female black elite worked tirelessly to imitate the modest, respectable "Victorian lady." Though Dunbar's argument is not an uncommon one in the historical literature, in this case, an important part of the historical context seems to be missing. Poems such as this one did indeed serve as reminders on proper conduct for the female black elite, and that members of this elite group worked to dispel stereotypes of black women being loud and vulgar.²⁵ While members of the free black elite did create their own form of a black Republican Motherhood and aimed to represent Victorian ideals that were prevalent in white, upper-class society, Dunbar represents these activists as being modest, depoliticized individuals mostly concerned with their outward appearance

²² *Ibid.*, 122.

²³ Mott, 493-494.

²⁴ Mary Forten, "Good Wives," *Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album*, 22.

²⁵ On the supposed hypersexuality and vulgarity of black women in the antebellum North, see, for example: Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *The American Historical Review* 100 (1995) 2: 303-334. Elise Kammerer, "Eroticization and the Imbalance of Power: Creation of a Pornographic Rhetoric by American Abolitionists after 1830," *Pornorama. American Pornographies: History, Film, Literature*, ed. Barbara Adams, et al. (Berlin, et al.: LIT, 2016), 21-36; Carol Lasser, "Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Anti-Slavery Rhetoric," *Journal of the Early Republic* 28 (2008) 1: 83-114; Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women & Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

as wives and mothers, for example.²⁶ Research by a number of scholars on women abolitionists, however, has argued that (black) republican motherhood was an important political tactic. Though members of the antislavery society did fulfil their duties as wives, mothers and being the religious centre of the home, they often used these roles to their advantage to take on very public work.

In regard to antislavery, for example, activists argued that, as moral cornerstones of society, the depravity of slavery needed to be stopped. They were, after all, women and were used to not having a voice in political and social matters. Accordingly, they often relied upon the marriage-as-slavery argument,²⁷ that is, they argued that since they were used to not being permitted to be politically active, they were the only ones who understood the plight of slaves and therefore needed to take on the very public duties of petitioning, fundraising, and speaking to large, mixed audiences. This justification of private duties and experiences being a cause for entering the public sphere was used by black and white abolitionists alike. Nevertheless, public action required coordination and networking in places not as publicly visible. While closed society meetings were, of course, one of the ways these women achieved this networking, friendship albums provided a medium where such sentiments could be discussed without necessarily needing to be put into public action by a formal society.

For the black elite women of the period, being the moral and religious centre of the home was just as crucial to their expected roles as it was for white women in similar situations. Reliance on religion by these women, however, was not just an act that was meant to impress upon whites that they were just as capable of living morally as whites – religion itself was pervasive and crucial for a group facing widespread racism and violence despite their high socio-economic status. An unidentified author wrote a poem regarding these notions in the album entitled “Trust in Heaven!”. She wrote: “Trust in heaven! When o’er thy path / Clouds and tempests come in wrath / When thy grief oppresses thee / When obscured thy prospects be / When around thee mists are driven / Heed them not but Trust in heaven!”²⁸ For many of the entries in this album discussing religion, friendship or the expected roles women needed to take on as wives and mothers, this poem is indicative of the sentimentality present in the album and reliance on the power of God. In addition to this, however, the author highlighted the difficult lives black women were usually forced to lead; regardless of the socio-cultural privileges most of the contributors to the album were born with, racism and violence against blacks was rampant in the antebellum era. Important as social activism was, the author stressed here that a reliance on and belief in God and his mercy needed to be the anchor from which activism could follow.

Some poems were even less obvious in calling its readers to action. For example, a poem selected by Sarah Mapps Douglass highlighted the need for black women to band together and take care of themselves, albeit in a very subtle way. The poem, transcribed by Douglass, began: “No marvel woman should love flowers, / They bear so much of the fanciful similitude to her own history; / Like herself repaying / With such sweet interest / All the cherishing that calls their beauty or their sweetness

26 While Dunbar does focus on black women’s activism throughout *A Fragile Freedom*, she largely removes activism from her section on the friendship albums.

27 Zaeske, 127.

28 Unknown, “Trust in Heaven!,” *Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album*, 36.

forth; / and like her, too – / dying beneath neglect.”²⁹ For all the emphasis on ornamental arts and items to beautify the private sphere such as flowers, there is a hint in this poem that such interests, though expected to be cultivated and expressed by elite women, were not enough – both beautiful flowers and women were left to die “beneath neglect.” To avoid the neglect of “her own history,” the only possibility for a woman was to become politically active to take care of herself and others.

Although most of the entries were sentimental and almost ornamental in some ways, not all entries were. In a sonnet by Ann Warren Weston, white abolitionist and sister of Maria Weston Chapman, the antislavery crusade took centre stage, and Weston implored readers to actively join in the fight against slavery in the name of God. The sonnet began: “Three million men by God created free in this America of ours are slaves; Lives dark with suffering, unremembered graves, Behold the story of their destiny. And yet not merely because such things be. Does every noble heart indignant burn?”³⁰ Weston went on about how the “bitterer shame” was that there were eighteen million strong who did nothing to stand up to slavery, yet claimed to live in Christ. Instead, they allowed the white jailers to continue the imprisonment of slaves. She called to the readers, “This is the cause for anguish, this the shame!”³¹ This text is an important one in the collection. Many entries, such as the poem selected by Sarah Douglass or the one entitled “Trust in Heaven!”, hinted at an agenda of women’s rights or antislavery that nevertheless still reflected the sentimentality and artistry women of the time used these albums to showcase their talents in. But this entry was loud and unforgiving, and challenged its readers to take an honest look at themselves and their complicity in slavery. Even for abolitionists, complicity took a variety of forms, from purchasing slave-made or -produced goods, to refusing to work in the Underground Railroad because of the belief that assisting runaway slaves to escape to free lands only helped individuals and did little to attack the actual institution of slavery itself.³² Despite the political importance of this contribution to the album, it was written by a white woman.

While many of the pieces written by white men and women were more loud and political in nature, most of the contributions written by black women were political, but hidden beneath a veil of sentimentality. Despite the album being dedicated to friendship- and network-building amongst black women, the album was only semi-private not only in that it was shared with other women, but also white activists. Here, even in their own album, black women found themselves needing to rely on notions of black republican motherhood in order to provide a neutral, socially accepted backdrop for their work. Whether or not black women could contribute such bold accounts and have them be read as well-informed, carefully formed opinions is debatable, given the nature of this album and the fact it was shared amongst whites as well.

It is in these different types of entries and approaches to discussing often politically charged issues that contributors were able to create a safe space – away from the criticism found in the public sphere, typically from those opposed to antislavery and women’s activism – to share their ideas and approaches to the topics of political

29 Unknown, *Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album*, 24.

30 Ann Warren Weston, “Sonnet,” *Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album*, 51.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember*, 188; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 158.

activism, but also topics more personal in nature. This sharing of the album amongst themselves enabled black women to create a sense of closeness between themselves and other like-minded individuals that could be relied upon when working in the public sphere. Additionally, the wide reach of the album, which circulated across the entire North of the United States, ensured that women who may not have otherwise come into contact with each other would be able to see what activists in other cities were undertaking and build networks and relationships that could be continuously strengthened and expanded. Nevertheless, however, though the space was somewhat shielded from the public sphere and gave black women a voice that would be heard among others, there was still a difference in how political or sentimental a contribution was, depending on whether the contributor was white or black. Though there were clear attempts at black equality through the antislavery movement, it is clear here that black women's need to demonstrate black republican motherhood more obviously than their white counterparts did shows a reflection of the racial hierarchy in greater society in this protected space, as well.

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