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“I never shrink from any duty”: Mary Easton Sibley and the Gendered Politics of Abolitionism

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A woman described as indomitable, Mary Sibley was an upper class young woman originally born in New York. She was a member of a wealthy family involved with politics, as her father held the position of attorney general of Missouri for a time. She was educated and known for her stubbornness, with even a famous song sung by her students telling others to make way for Aunt Mary.[1] Mary was a woman who got what she wanted from who she wanted, exactly when she wanted it. She found herself in the St. Louis area in 1815 and married George Sibley in that same year. George Sibley was a well known figure in the area and is now known for his work in the west. In 1827 they settled in Saint Charles after time spent out west at Fort Osage.[2] In Saint Charles Mary was heavily involved in education, both educating women, as well as helping in the African School in Saint Charles. Mary was a firm believer in education for everyone, especially women which led to the founding of Lindenwood University an active university to this day. She was an extremely religious woman and during the second awakening became an old school presbyterian. Many of her days were spent working with the church, or trying to bring religion to other members of the community in Saint Charles. Like many women at this time she saw herself as a moral christian woman, working towards the betterment of others. The interesting parts of Mary are not shown in the pious public figure that she crafted, but the inner motivations and ideals that align her with the white female identity that emerged during the 1800s. Through her work with abolition and the motivations behind those actions, Mary falls into the

1 *The Indomitable Mary Easton Sibley: Pioneer of Women's Education in Missouri*, Kriste C. Wolferman, July 16, 2009 (Missouri State Archives).
2 Ibid.

category of a morally righteous white woman that aligns with the white identity as defined by historical white studies.

White studies became popular in the 1990s and early 2000s in which historians looked at what made up being white in the 1800s. Before there had always been the separation of either being free or being white, but that started to change so an identity of whiteness had to be established. Many historians look at the influence of citizenship, and the identity that was built around the ability to vote for men. This new meaning of whiteness left women out in the cold as they also could not vote. It ended up putting them in the same category as slaves as they were not white men and couldn't be grouped with them. The response to this was for women to create their own meaning of whiteness and female. This identity is what historian Mary Catherine Cain tries to pick apart and define in her research.

Mary Catherine Cain argues in her essay Rhetorics of Race and Freedom that women could not use their whiteness like men could due to not being full citizens because they lacked basic political and social rights, including suffrage. Cain argues that, in an attempt to enhance their own status, white women began to distance themselves from enslaved people, and this changed how white women, especially northern white women participated in the abolition movement in the 1820s through the Civil War.[3] She looks at how the identity of whiteness was formed and how being a white woman changed a person's societal expectations during the 19th century. She explains that there were certain parts of this identity that came together to create what made

[3] Mary Cathryn Cain, "Rhetorics of Race and Freedom: The Expression of Women's Whiteness in Anti-Slavery Activism," *Studies in Popular Culture* 29, no. 2 (2006): 1–19.

someone a white woman. These included separating themselves from slaves with their work in abolition, their belief in their own higher morality, and their need to save southern men and women from their sins.[4] They wanted to save men from the sin of slavery, and to help southern women become independent again to reverse the effects of slavery on southern women.

The need to separate themselves from slaves started the shift in the abolition movement from being focused on the salvation of slaves to the salvation of the white slave owners. Women had been put into the same box as African Americans during this time period. Cain argues that many African Americans or slaves were given traditionally female characteristics in literature or described as docile like females. Though seemingly normal and general characteristics, those are what defined women at this time. According to Theodore Tilden, a newspaper editor and abolitionist in the 1850s, African Americans were "the feminine race to the world."[5] This again put women and slaves or African Americans in the same box. This led many women to start building a definition of female whiteness, and many started with abolition. There was an idea that if a woman was fighting for the freedom of slaves, they were not a slave themselves. By being involved in the abolition movement, women not only gained some freedom and purpose outside of the home, they also were able to distance themselves from slaves. This led to a shift in the movement becoming a white-centered movement. This shift does not have a definite date, but can be placed around the mid 1800s. Before this shift, women were involved with abolition, but in a

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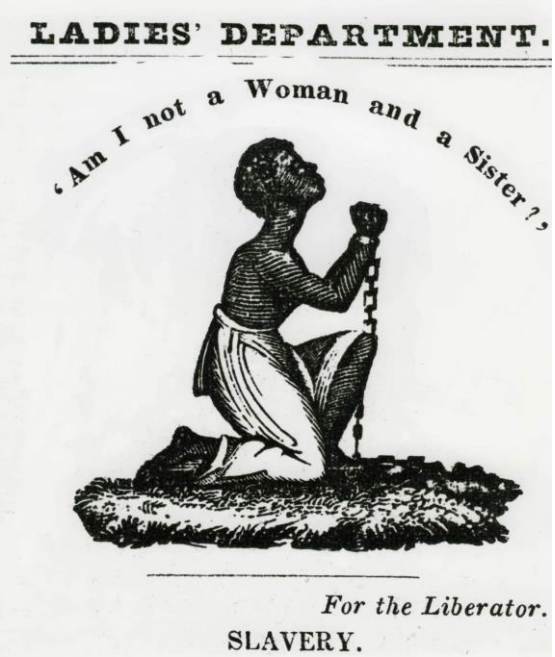
4 Ibid.

5 Mary Cathryn Cain, *The whiteness of white women: Gender and the use of race privilege in the urban Northeast, 1820–1870,* (Emory University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2001), 3018789.

very hands-on way. A very famous poster was used in this movement which showed a slave



woman kneeling in chains with the quote above her, "Am I not a women and a sister?"[6] This was what the movement for women had been. It was humanizing slaves, especially female slaves, and working to save them. This poster, as well as sympathizing with enslaved people, put women in the same category as slaves. They went as far as calling them sisters, and without the same citizenship that white men had at this time, this truly saw women being put into the same category as slaves, which during this time period put them in a category as something less than human, as property. The shift happened when abolition to white women no longer became about saving the slave, but rather saving the slaveowners from their sins. This both distanced them from slaves and also established woman as the moral of the two sexes. Due to this, abolition became a white-centered movement that had women, especially northern women, working to save southern white slaveowners from their sins of slavery. Many white women believed that slavery was immoral, and they had to save the men who did not see it that way from their own damnation due to owning slaves. One poem written in 1848 by white female writer Susan Dawson shows this new attitude when it came to abolition. She calls for prayers for the movement and ends the poem with the

6 George Bourne, *Slavery Illustrated in Its Effects upon Women* (1837)—Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

lines, “Pray for him who feels no anguish, when he owns himself a slave.”[7] This change from fighting for their sisters to fighting for those who own them is a result of the new identity of white women. Their need to distance themselves had the movement change from being slave centered to being slaveowner centered.

Another big part of what made up the whiteness of women was their morality. Women believed themselves to have a higher morality than men, especially slave-owning southern men. Due to this belief, it was their duty as the moral sex to save men from their sins of slavery. They had to go into the public sphere to end slavery as that was the way to save men’s souls. This became a huge part of what defined female whiteness and essentially a part of womanhood. In 1855, Eliza Follen who was a leader and role model among white women, claimed that abolition was so important that if they failed it would not only see slavery continue, but that they could “no longer lay claim to true womanliness.”[8] This statement shows just how important this venture was to white women. They, as members of the moral high ground, needed to save the white southern men from their sins, or they would lose part of their identity.

This analysis examines Mary Sibley as a case study of white female abolitionism, exploring her ideas and attitudes about her whiteness and her womanhood. Sibley’s attitudes closely reflect those of other white female abolitionists described by Cain, but she is unique in two important ways. First, she expresses these attitudes earlier than most. While Cain’s research covers

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7 Susan Dawson, “Pray!”, in The Liberty Bell, ed. Maria Weston Chapman (Boston: Andrews and Prentiss, 1848), 258-259.

8 Cain, *Rhetorics of Race and Freedom*, 16.

the 1820s to the 1870s but places the real shift of the abolition movement to somewhere around 1850, Sibley voices these ideas in her diary during the 1830s, making her an earlier example of this shift. Sibley also proves distinctive in that she espouses these ideals while working directly with enslaved black people, unlike many of the white female abolitionists that Cain studies. Thus, this analysis shows that within this broad shift in abolition, Mary Sibley is in a transition period. She identifies with the characteristics of female whiteness and her attitude towards slavery is removed rather than emotional, yet she is still hands on in her abolition work. She is an early example of this shift in the movement, and how this shift started with attitudes and would eventually lead to more removed actions when it came to abolition.

Outside the home, but protecting the Community

Lindenwood University founder Mary Easton Sibley became a great case study of this shift and the origins of this whiteness identity in the 1830s. In 1827 Mary and her husband George settled in St. Charles, MO. In St. Charles Mary is very involved in education, her church, and the community in general. She was a firm believer in education, especially when it came to women. This led to the founding of Lindenwood University. She was also very involved in her church and actively works to encourage her community to attend church and church related meetings. Mary is also active in the African School through her church where she helps teach the enslaved people in St. Charles. She was overall a very ambitious woman who strived to work with others and get involved wherever she felt she needed to.

She was heavily involved with the church in her community, even going as far as starting a Sunday school in Saint Charles. This Sunday school was separate from both her establishment of her girls' college as well as from the African school in which she was involved. In order to start this Sunday school, Mary writes to Brother Potts, who is a minister with the Presbyterian church of St. Louis. She asks for books and cards for the sabbath school she is establishing in her town. While he complies and sends her the necessary material, Mary is not happy with the response she is given. Though her work was successful and she was able to establish this school, she states that, "he should have given me credit for my piety."[9] The establishment of this school was the goal, but she was really looking for praise from this minister for what a great member of the church she was. This attitude is what makes Mary a good example of white women at this time. She did not do this just from her kindness, but for credit and recognition. This act of establishing a school shows her to be independent as a woman, as a person, as well as the member of the church she was so fond of. She was not a second-class citizen, nor was she to be put in a box with slaves, she was an independent women. The school would also eventually bring her into the abolition movement as she would start helping at the newly established African school through her church as well. This ultimately distanced her from slaves and gave her responsibilities outside of the home, which a lot of women saw as an important part of their whiteness.

The community activism that Mary participated in was a key aspect of the white female identity. It once again separated white women from slaves as they were not just servants to their

9 Mary Sibley, Diary entry on May 6, 1832, Lindenwood Archives, Lindenwood University, Missouri.

husbands in their homes, but active members in the community. Mary exemplifies that importance in how she talks about her duties to her community, as well as the sheer number of duties she takes on outside of her home. One major duty that has now become her legacy is the founding of Lindenwood College. Her college started with a few young girls that she welcomed into her home to educate. Female education was one of Mary's largest goals as she hated the idea of women being helpless on their own. When discussing the beginnings of her home-run school in her diary, she berates the current system of education that leaves "thousands of my sex helpless dependent creatures, mere Doll babies dressed up ___ for exhibition decorated with external accomplishments, very pretty to hold in the Drawing room or Ball room but of no manner of use either to ourselves or their fellow creatures."[10] This quote shows Mary's opinion of a woman who does not work for her community. If a woman is not educated, they are unable to benefit anyone, and part of being a woman is being useful to their community just like Mary. By Mary having such a strong opinion on what women should not be, it shows how she believes in women being useful to run a household, but also to be useful to their fellow creatures as she states.

Besides educating the next generation of useful white women, Mary also takes on other duties in her community. These activities mostly involve her spreading her religion and tending to the sick. There are plenty of instances of this in her diaries, but her writing conveys the idea that it is her noble duty as a woman to attend to these needs. She thinks very highly of herself for attending to the sick and seems to act as the messenger between the dying and God, as if she is

[10] Sibley entry on August 19, 1833.

the sole person in charge of that person's fate. She writes about many examples where she is the noble woman going to attend to these sick and dying people. She never calls them by name but simply talks about a young man looking for God in his last hours, or a young woman promising if she recovers to live in the way of the Lord.[11] Though she feels heightened by people coming to her, one quote when cholera comes to St. Charles truly shows her attitude when it comes to attending to the sick. When speaking of her many friends who were nervous that they may be the next to fall to the disease, she says that she "felt a little lifted up in my own estimation that I was superior to such a degrading fear."[12] Due to her work outside of the home, as well as her piety, she was above the fear of cholera. This could be due to the belief that she would be spared sickness due to her giving lifestyle or her lack of fear of what would happen after she died. The importance she placed on these outside responsibilities is immense, to the point that she felt they not only played a part in her identity, but that they protected her from the fear of a deadly sickness. The outside of the home responsibilities such as her school, Sunday school, African school, or attending to the sick played a huge role in her life, and she placed great importance on these outside responsibilities in her life, and in women's lives.

This community activism all stems from this idea of a higher morality. Mary shows examples in her diaries of her belief in her own higher morality, and her actions to save men and women from their sins. One thing that is very apparent in her writings is the importance she places on religion. She attends Mass weekly, helps out at the church constantly, and also attends

11 Sibley entry on July 2, 1833 and April 24, 1834.

12 Sibley entry on August 1, 1833.

extra sermons around the St. Louis area. There are numerous examples of Mary talking as if she is better than not just African Americans but others in general. At one point, she decides that the current minister in her area is not the right fit for the town. She writes a letter to the elder of the Presbyterian church of St. Charles to voice her complaints about a new minister about to be appointed to her church. She felt that the minister who was to be appointed was "not competent to do good in St. Charles."[13] This insinuated that she was the judge of good not just for herself, but for her entire town. In her diary, she attached the letter that she wrote. She calls out the elder of the church and even questions their morality. She writes, "If the business of the Church is to be done by those who do not care for its interests, it will be badly done – and if the choice of our pastor is to be made for us, by those who will scarcely ever go to hear him, I for one shall fell disposed to rebel."[14] She bluntly calls out the morality of the elder of the church in this part of her diary. She claims that this new minister does not have the right motivations to be in her church and as someone who will actually go to the church, she would like someone with the correct morals. The most interesting thing about this quote is her blunt language as well as her tone of disrespect to this elder. Though Mary was a decently wealthy woman, and of a higher place in society she was not to the level of an elder of the church of St. Charles. She was in fact a pretty new member to the church as she was not raised Presbyterian. The language she uses shows how much she believed herself to be morally correct. Mary calls out this elder as just giving this posi-

13 Sibley entry on Nov. 13, 1832.

14 Sibley entry on March June 8, 1832.

tion away and not thinking about the good of the people. She sees herself as a savior of her community. Mary is protecting her peers, both men and women, by working to get the church a proper and moral minister. This shows her belief in her higher morality, which was a staple of the white female identity at this time. It was their job as the moral sex to protect their communities from moral sins they may commit. Mary does this here by working to get a minister she believes is fit for her church. This community activism stems from the belief in the higher morality of women, which is a key aspect of the white female identity identified in Cain's research, and which Mary fits very well.

Saving the White Race

The shift in abolition to being white focused is shown through Mary's tireless efforts to save the white people in her life from their own sins. These range from her young students at Lindenwood to famous writers, to the whole of southern women. Mary's teachings to her students at Lindenwood College show her need to teach young girls about their role as the moral sex. Though her diaries only cover brief moments of Mary with her students, the ones she talks about show that she is trying to instill the belief of a higher morality to her young white female students. At one point, she talks about what she is trying to teach her students regarding their purpose as women. After a friend and father of previous students has been murdered, Mary writes about how little time people have on earth and what they need to do with the time they

have. This leads Mary into talking about what she tries to teach her students at Lindenwood College when it comes to their duties in this world, specifically their moral duties. She says that she must "impress on the minds of my girls that an awful responsibility rests on every one."[15] Due to the place in society of these young white girls, they are expected to be moral representatives just as Mary is. She sees this as a responsibility of every woman, to make sure they do everything they can to prevent moral evils such as this death in the community. This shows that she not only believes in her own higher morality, but teaches young girls of their responsibility as white women to be the moral saviors of men. She is trying to instill the same belief of higher morality of women onto these girls and hopes that they understand their places as the moral sex.

Her passion for education does have limits, and they are shown when she talks about to what extent women should be educated. She even goes as far as establishing a school that would become a division I university still active today. The point where Mary draws the line is when education begins to take away a woman's womanliness. She writes that "I am opposed to the plan of making learned women at the expense of destroying their fitness for the peculiar duties allotted them in the station of life in which by the providence of God they have been designed to move."[16] This is blatantly similar to what many women in the north believed for women. Education was not specifically frowned upon as long as women still adhered to their womanliness and their womanly duties. Mary was a huge advocate for education, but only as long as women knew their place. She even continues to write that she does not want to see a day when women are

15 Sibley entry on January 13, 1836.

16 Sibley entry on April 12, 1836.

more educated than the "nobler sex," this meaning men.[17] So even though she was a proponent for female education, she was still a supporter of this cult of domesticity. Women were to know their place, and in this case, it was to be educated and moral, but stay in their place as a female.

Apart from just simply education, or knowing their place, Mary also believed in a woman's ability to run a household. This once again shows how her views of women align with this new identity of female whiteness. Southern white women becoming dependent on slaves was seen as a loss of womanliness and straying from this woman identity. This view is the same for Mary. She writes about the small school she starts in her home in order to teach the young girls to be "perfectly independent of the enervating effects that slavery has produced almost universally upon the character of the people of west and South."[18] Here, she explicitly states her agreement with other northern women at the time. She saw the "domestic disarray"[19] that would occur when slavery was abolished in the south. Women could no longer fulfill their womanly duties in the home as they had become so dependent on slaves. She herself, as such a take-action female, felt that it was part of her duty to make sure that young girls in Missouri were able to take care of a household and be able to call themselves a white woman.

These ideas of making sure a woman knew the extent of her womanliness is mentioned again by Mary when she talks about southern women. The responsibility of white women extended to helping those in the south. Though the idea of sisterhood when it came to black women

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17 Ibid.

18 Sibley entry on August 15, 1833.

19 Cain, *Rhetorics of Race and Freedom*, 11.

seemed to disappear, this sisterhood was still alive between white women. Many northern white women feared not for the souls of women in the south, as they did with men, but that southern women were losing their womanliness.[20] With the new definition of a white woman, northern women became worried that southern women may have been "ethnically white but… failed to exhibit essential white female virtues."[21] They could not truly be classified as white women, and many northern white women saw this as a result of slavery. Southern white women were becoming "dependent, unreliable, and idle" as a result of slavery.[22] These three characteristics were the justification as to why slaves were racially inferior. So, to put these on southern white women puts them back into that category of slave that white women were trying to break with this new definition of whiteness in the mid-19th century. Barbara Bodechin visited the south and mimicked these sentiments. She even went as far as calling a southern women "a horrid animal" as she was less woman-like and more related to a slave with her dependency.[23] This was an important factor when it came to the shift of the abolition movement from being black and slave-centered to being white-centered. Northern women had to not only save white men from the sins of owning slaves, but also save women from losing their womanliness completely. At one point in her diaries, Mary complains about this issue of losing independence of oneself as an effect of slavery.

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20 Cain, *Rhetorics of Race and Freedom*, 11.

21 Ibid, 12.

22 Ibid, 11.

23 Barbara Bodechin, *An American Diary 1857-58*, Ed. Joseph W. Reed Jr. (London: Routledge) 1972.

Mary believes that everyone, no matter the gender, needs to be able to take care of themselves. She criticizes the south for exactly this and writes that there has been a loss of independence as an effect, "that slavery has produced almost universally upon the character of the people of west and South."[24] She believes that the women in the south are being raised to be "helpless and dependent beings" rather than being able to carry out womanly duties such as taking care of a home.[25] She explains that this lack of independence is why she is trying to educate the next generation of women to be sufficient. She looks down on these southern women as they are unable to perform simple tasks that she believes every woman should be able to perform. Mary believed that getting rid of slavery would in turn benefit the next generation of women as they would not only be saved from any sins, but also be self-sufficient women. She was not alone in this sentiment as some women would go as far as believing that women who did not identify with this white female identity and were reliant on slaves were slaves themselves. Scholar Gillian Brown writes that women who were unable to align with this white female identity were seen as "slave and slave mistress" to their husbands by many women at the time.[26] While Mary does not take it to this extent in her diaries, it is clear that she very much disapproves how southern women have lost what Mary believes makes someone a woman.

When it comes to specifically men, she has numerous examples of trying to save them as the morally right female. One example is that of her husband. George Sibley was not a part of the

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24 Sibley entry on August 17, 1833.

25 Ibid.

26 Gillian Brown, "Getting in the Kitchen with Dinah: Domestic Politics in Uncle Tom's Cabin." *American Quarterly* 36. (1984): 503-523.

church until 1836 after much convincing from his pious wife. Her joy at the success of her husband's desire to be a Christian shows her attitude towards saving men from their sin.[27] She also seems to be a moral leader when it comes to her church and community. There are instances where she is asked to be present when a friend is sick to act as a sort of moral advisor in their last few days. She also is unafraid to call men out in her community when she does not think them to be doing the right thing. One instance is when she seeks out a member of her church whom she writes that he, "appeared to neglect all his religious duties and to have suffered his family to do the same."[28] She goes out of her way to go and talk to him and hopefully convince him to come back to the church and fulfill his moral duties. She is able to convince this man to send his children to the church Sunday school. The part of this example that speaks to Mary's belief in her own higher morality is how she praises herself by saying that the man was"considerably moved with my remarks and even shed tears."[29] She points out her own impact that she had on this man and how her higher morality has convinced this man to repent and make sure his family members are participating in the church. Instead of just simply focusing on the man she helped, she had to point out how her remarks specifically were what brought him to tears and made a real impact. This example shows how she not only believes in her higher morality as a woman, but also how she has to use this to save others, especially men. She specifically seeks out this man in order to save him, and then gives herself praise for how her actions saved a man and his family.

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27 Sibley entry on January 20, 1836.

28 Sibley entry on October 13, 1833.

29 Ibid.

While her husband and a community friend are examples with plenty of emotional ties, she also wants to work to save men in which she does not know. An example from her diaries is her need to save the soul of Henry Clay. Henry Clay was an active politician and would be known as the great compromiser as he was involved in the Compromise of 1850 as well as the Missouri Compromise with the hope of relieving tensions when it came to slavery. Mary liked his writings, but the problem was that he was not a Christian. She claims that though she likes his ideas, she cannot support him as he is not a Christian, so therefore his words are not of God. She continually sends prayers to save him.[30] This example shows the extent to which Mary believed in her own power to save the souls of others. Though religion may not have been as big of a part for all white women at this time, Mary was a great example of a person who believes herself to be morally righteous. This belief is what leads her to try and save the souls of many white people, which was an important aspect of the white female identity from Cain's research.

Contradicting Abolition

As mentioned in Cain's research, a big part of this female whiteness was the involvement in abolition and how there was a shift from abolition due to the white identity. Mary was no different in that she was involved in abolition, but she is an interesting example in the way she adopts the attitudes of the new abolition movement, but still works hands-on. One of her contributions to the abolition movement was her work in the African school in Saint Charles. This school would be held on Sundays but was not a Sunday school in the modern sense. It was held

[30] Sibley entry on April 16, 1833.

on a day where slaves were not always required to work, and it was mostly to teach them to read with Presbyterian teachings or Christian ideals added to the teachings. She writes in her diaries about her time working and teaching to African Americans and slaves that were living in Saint Charles in the 1830s. What she never mentions are specific names or even progress with teaching them to read and write. What she does choose to mention is how what she is doing is extremely noble. She calls the school a "cage of unclean birds" and asks God to cleanse it.[31] This language shows how lowly she believed the African school to be and sees herself as their gateway to salvation as she is a good Christian. With her help, they can be saved. She talks about how much they paid attention to her teachings, but never about the people. They seemed to once again be numbers to her, even calling them "the black people" and "poor benighted creatures."[32] This language shows how she saw herself apart from African Americans. She was separate from this group of people, and her rhetoric is indicative of the shift in the abolition movement. Though she is still working more hands-on with slaves, there is a distinct separation. Apart from her writings of the slaves, she also writes about her belief that slavery is a sin. She calls slavery a "stain on our national character."[33] In this quote, Mary shows two parts of this shift in abolition. The first is how she has further separated herself from the slave. As she was not a slave owner herself due to the lack of property rights for women, by using the word "our", she puts herself into the category of slaveowners, or white men. This puts her further from the identity of slave and closer

31 Sibley entry on April 24, 1834.
32 Sibley entry on April 24, 1834 and Aug. 1, 1834.
33 Sibley entry on Feb. 16, 1834.

to that of white men. She is essentially taking some of the blame for the white population's actions and therefore fully taking on this white identity. With her use of the word "our", she establishes herself as a citizen of the United States, which was a large part of what made up the white male identity. The other thing that this quote shows is her disapproval of slavery, yet her removal from the problem. While she verbally disapproves of slavery, she is still more focused on what it is doing to the image of the country rather than the atrocities of slavery. Once again, she shows the beginning of this white-centered abolition that Cain talks about in her writings.

The African school is another way in which Mary can show her belief in her own higher morality through her work in the abolition movement. When writing about the students, she talks about herself giving them advice on how to repent and be moral in their lives. She writes that she "gave the whole school advice & exhorted them to repent explaining to them the meaning of repentance" and follows this by saying, "They were very much disposed to give attention to what was said."[34] Though not saying outright that she is morally above these people, it is implied through this quote. She lectures the students of the African school on how to be pious like herself, and then goes on to pat herself on the back by describing how they seemed to pay attention to what she said. This plays into the idea that she was morally above those she was trying to help. Similar to the example mentioned above with the neighbor she sought out to lecture on his lack of commitment to the church, she goes out of her way to work with this school and to lecture these people, but then reveals her true motives. She gives herself praise about how inclined

[34] Sibley entry on March 30, 1834.

these people were to listen to her speak. This is another example of her belief in her higher morality and her need to show it off to others. She gets involved in abolition which has her align with the white female identity, but she still works hands on with African americans. This may be due to the time in which she lived or the location as she was in a small town where holding lectures about abolition to other white people, many of them slave-owning, would not have been possible. She worked in abolition in a way that she could, but it was truly the attitude of her writings that show the adoption of that new way of abolition. Mary adopted the shifted version of abolition that came as a result of the white female identity that she falls into.

Eliza Ott: The Product of Mary

It is important to note that this identity of whiteness was pushed on married women more than single women, especially in the 1830s when Mary lived. While Mary may have been an early example of this whiteness identity and shift in abolition, other women in this area at the same time did not have the same views as her. Another woman at Lindenwood was Eliza Ott. Eliza was one of Mary's early students who later became a teacher at Lindenwood as well as Mary's sister in-law. While Mary found herself very involved in outside affairs and had a very removed attitude about abolition, Eliza did not. As an unmarried younger girl, Eliza was not involved in the same affairs as married women at this time. She was more focused on her betrothed and the people in her daily lives. While Mary used language such as "the black people" or "be-

nighted creatures" when she talks about those in the African school, Eliza calls the slaves at Lindenwood by name.[35] Eliza has a collection of letters in which she writes to her betrothed Alton Easton, Mary's brother, in 1847-1848. These letters are very soon before Mary Catherine Cain dates the white-centered shift in abolition, and around 15 years since Eliza was a student of Mary. In her letters, she writes about people she calls "Uncle Washington" and "Aunt Rachel."[36] These were slaves on the Lindenwood grounds in this time period. What is interesting here is the familial ties Eliza has and her use of that language in her letters. While Mary has moved away from the sentimentality that came with women in the early abolition movement, Eliza has not. Though she might not rave about the evils of slavery or have clear ties with the abolition movement, she treats the slaves at Lindenwood as not just people, but family. As mentioned earlier, women in the early abolition movement advocated for the freedom on slaves by using the term "sisters". Eliza may not be doing this in a newspaper, but she writes as if these people are her family. This shows the contrast of the role of married women versus single women but also how Mary was an early example of this shift in attitudes of the abolition movement. While Mary had written her diaries where she speaks of enslaved people in the broader sense rather than as individual people in the early 1830s, Eliza still talks about them as family in the late 1840s. This use of different rhetoric by these two women demonstrates two sides of this shift in the movement in a state that was on the line of the north and the south.

35 Sibley April 24, 1834 and Aug. 1, 1834.

36 Eliza Ott letter to Alton Easton, December 25, 1847 and March 29, 1848.

In conclusion Mary Sibley is an interesting case study when it comes to the meaning of white female identity in the 1800s. Although Mary Catherine Cain dates the adoption of this identity and subsequent shift in abolition in 1850, Mary's attitudes towards the abolition movement show that this shift was occurring much earlier and not just in the most northern states. Mary Sibley exemplifies the identity of the morally superior women. She goes out of her way to demonstrate this with her work in the community, the church, and especially through her work in education. She demonstrates her morality through her diaries, writing on her opinions of others in her community as well as those in the south. Her work with abolition also fits into the larger identity of a white woman for the time. She works hands on with the African Americans in St. Charles, yet her attitudes are what show the adoption of this identity and shift in the movement. Her removed comments and lack of personal sympathy when it comes to the people she works with fits the mold for this new identity. Mary acts as a prime example of this white female identity of the 1800s with her belief in her own higher morality and her work within her community of St. Charles.

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