

SLAVES AND SERFS IN THE POST-EMANCIPATION IMAGINATION, 1861-1915

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## **ABSTRACT**

Amanda B. Bellows: *Slaves and Serfs in the Post-Emancipation Imagination, 1861-1915*

(Under the direction of W. Fitzhugh Brundage and Louise McReynolds)

This dissertation is the first comparative analysis of mass-oriented representations of African-American slaves and Russian serfs produced during the post-emancipation era. The abolition of Russian serfdom (1861) and U.S. slavery (1865) were pivotal events that inaugurated a half-century of significant change. Emancipation freed two enslaved groups of people, but liberty proved to be disquieting as the former bondsmen, suddenly citizens and subjects, strove for absorption into the national polity. In both countries, the processes of assimilation occurred during decades characterized by territorial expansion, population growth, and industrialization, phenomena that further complicated conceptions of American and Russian national identity.

This study analyzes the ways in which authors, artists, and businesses responded to emancipation by deploying images of serfs, peasants, slaves, and freedpeople in literature, periodicals, paintings, and advertisements. In these sources, serfs and slaves appeared as victims on the eve of abolition, as contented rural laborers whose simple way of life attracted nostalgic audiences during an industrial, expansionist age, and, at the turn of the twentieth century, as urban migrants striving to improve their lives. Acts of imagination and remembrances, these portrayals were a lexicon of representation that creators and audiences endowed with significance and interpreted in competing ways.

This dissertation demonstrates the ways in which textual and visual images shaped and reflected collective memories of serfdom and slavery, affected the development of national consciousness, and influenced popular opinion as Russians and Americans struggled to incorporate former bondsmen into the social order. Furthermore, this project's examination of representational similarities and differences within their respective historical contexts prompts the consideration of the extent to which factors like race, ethnicity, economic status, and political power influenced Russians' and Americans' attitudes toward former bondsmen during an era of societal transformation.

TO MY SON

*May you grow to love the pursuit of knowledge*

TO MY HUSBAND

*Thank you for encouraging me to study history*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>RGALI</i>	Russian State Archive of Literature and Art
<i>OR GTG</i>	State Tret'iakov Gallery Archive
<i>d.</i>	file(s)
<i>f.</i>	fund
<i>l.</i>	page
<i>o.</i>	index

## INTRODUCTION

And as a ship strains and heads against the thunder and shock of mingled tempest and ocean, so with sure persistence . . . the people breasted the combined and prolonged fury of anarchy and despotism, and triumphed. *Harper's Weekly*, July 8, 1865<sup>1</sup>.

[The Russian peasant asked], 'Where is our Russia?' . . . The surging of the waters became awful, but even so [the peasant] would not go downstairs to the [ship's] cabins . . . he pulled down his cap and searched for the Fatherland. Nikolai Leskov, *Lefty*, 1883<sup>2</sup>.

Like passengers aboard a storm-tossed vessel, Russians and Americans found themselves in turbulent waters in 1861. Clouds amassed over the United States, where citizens prepared to engage in civil war to resolve the debate over slavery's future in the expanding nation. *Harper's Weekly* would subsequently characterize the four long years of battle between Union and Confederate troops as a squall that shook the nation but resulted in the "suppress[ion] of an unprecedented rebellion," the abolition of slavery, and the emergence of a new era in which, *Harper's* optimistically declared, "Every question within the nation [would] be wisely settled."<sup>3</sup> In Russia, apprehensive landowners and hopeful peasants awaited imminent news from their tsar about his possible decision to free the serfs. Tsar Alexander II issued the Emancipation Manifesto on February 19, 1861, an act that liberated approximately 40 percent of the nation's people from bondage and was the first of

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<sup>1</sup> "The Fourth of July, 1865," *Harper's Weekly*, July 8, 1865, page 418.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are my own. I completed the Russian transliteration in accordance with the Romanization table outlined by the Library of Congress. Russian dates follow the Julian calendar, which was approximately twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar during the nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> "The Fourth of July, 1865," *Harper's Weekly*, page 418.

several modernizing policies that caused significant upheaval.<sup>4</sup> Such developments were particularly unsettling for the peasantry, whose experiences during Russia's era of "Great Reforms" were dramatized in Nikolai Leskov's short story *Lefty*.<sup>5</sup> In one scene, Leskov describes how a distressed peasant on a wind-swept ship endlessly scans the horizon for "his native country," but he is unable to locate it through a raging storm.<sup>6</sup> In an operatic adaptation of the famous tale, the peasant asks the captain, "But in which direction is our Russia?" The skipper replies, "There, but it isn't visible because of the waves."<sup>7</sup>

Navigating the seas of change after emancipation was no easy task for nineteenth-century Americans and Russians. In the United States, *Harper's* buoyant pronouncement of national peace proved premature as the war's end brought the challenge of integrating about four million former slaves into a total population of 38.6 million people.<sup>8</sup> One essential factor that shaped the dynamics of assimilation was race; African-American freedpeople composed a demographic minority in a nation of 33.6 million white citizens.<sup>9</sup> In their post-emancipation efforts to exercise their right to vote, gain literacy, acquire property, or establish businesses, former slaves met strong resistance from Americans who viewed the color of their skin as a sign of racial inferiority that precluded them from equal treatment under law. Early guarantees of blacks' civil rights during Reconstruction (1865-1877), when African

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<sup>4</sup> Russia's state-owned peasants made up another 40 percent of the population in 1861 and were emancipated in 1866.

<sup>5</sup> Nikolai Leskov, "Levsha," in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh, Tom III* (Moscow: Pravda, 1981, originally published in 1881), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/l/leskow\\_n\\_s/text\\_0246.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/l/leskow_n_s/text_0246.shtml)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Playbill for Rodion Shchedrin's opera, "*Levsha: Skaz o tul'skom kosom Levshe*," page 10. Performed at the *Mariinsky II* theater in St. Petersburg, Russia on September 9, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> According to U.S. census data, the U.S. resident population was 38.6 million people in 1870.

<sup>9</sup> Slaves composed about 13 percent of the total population on the eve of their emancipation.

Americans held political positions in the Republican Party, crumbled during the 1880s and 1890s with the introduction of legal challenges to protective Reconstruction-era laws, the passage of new “Jim Crow” legislation that severely curtailed black liberties, and a rise in acts of violence against blacks intended to enforce racial subjugation.

In Russia, the abolition of serfdom generated comparable challenges for former serfs, now *poddannye* (subjects), as they strove to manage their villages’ communal land, establish schools, and participate in national initiatives by serving alongside their former owners on local governing bodies like the *zemstva* (provincial assemblies). For the most part, racism did not influence the dynamics of assimilation in Russia because peasants and landowners shared the same ethnicity, language, and Russian Orthodox religion. But neither emancipation nor subsequent government-initiated reforms eliminated the barriers created by an estate system from the Petrine era that divided the population into different social groups.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Russia’s autocratic government extended few political rights to the former serfs who, like landowners, lacked elected representation at the national level. Although the peasantry and pro-reform intellectuals harbored great hopes about the potential for individual uplift, political representation, and national progress after 1861, the newspaper *Nedelia* (Week) lamented in 1871 that while “much had changed, many dreams were not realized, [and] much did not turn out as expected.”<sup>11</sup>

Seeking to comprehend the successes and disappointments of the decades that followed emancipation, Russians and Americans turned to fiction, poetry, and various forms

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<sup>10</sup> These included *gosudarstvennoe krest’ianstvo* (the state peasantry), *dvorianstvo* (the nobility), members of the *dukhovnoe soslovie* (clerical order), and *kupechestvo* (merchantry). As the property of landowners, serfs were known as *pomeshchich’i krest’iane*. Elise Wirtschafter, *Social Identities in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 3-4, 170; and Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 144.

<sup>11</sup> “Polozhenie 19 fevralia i voprosy krest’ianskogo samoupravleniia,” *Nedelia*, February 14, 1871, page 1.



of high and low art. Between 1861 and 1915, authors, painters, and advertisers produced an abundance of textual and visual materials pertaining to the liberation and absorption of the formerly bonded populations. Images of serfs, slaves, peasants, and freedpeople flooded the public sphere via newspapers, illustrated journals, art exhibitions, and advertisements.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, these changing depictions shaped popular perceptions toward peasants and freedpeople and reflected the evolving historical environments in which they were produced.

### **Historiography, Methodology, and Theory**

This dissertation identifies, categorizes, and analyzes representations of former bondsmen following their appearance in widely circulated journals, newspapers, books, artistic exhibitions, advertisements, and ephemera. It assesses the ways in which these culturally mediated depictions changed between 1861, when the U.S. Civil War began and Tsar Alexander II emancipated the Russian serfs, and 1915, the fiftieth anniversary of the abolition of slavery and two years before Bolshevism transformed Russia.<sup>13</sup> Finally, this research studies the ways in which different groups responded to these changing depictions at specific historical moments.

Sometimes friends, always rivals, Russia and America are continually captivated by one another: Each finds its counterpart impossible to ignore. During the nineteenth century,

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed analysis of the growth of print industries in Russia and the United States, see Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway, *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: Published in association with the American Antiquarian Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Works that assess rising literacy rates in Russia and the United States include Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003); and Ben Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Russia celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the issuance of the Emancipation Manifesto in 1911.

the United States and Russia vied with each other for territory, established commercial ties, and cultivated strategic diplomatic connections. Reflecting on their relationship, *Harper's Weekly* observed in 1905 that Russia's government "had proved undeniably useful to the American Republic," in part for its decision not to support the Confederacy during the U.S. Civil War.<sup>14</sup> After the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty in 1917 and the rise of the Soviet Union, the two great military powers set aside ideological differences to defeat the Nazis, but later confronted one another through a series of proxy wars during the Cold War era.

Scholars have long noted the intriguing historical parallels between two dynamic nations with historical legacies of bonded labor, expansive geographic ambitions, and rich literary and artistic traditions. One central avenue of exploration for comparative and transnational scholars of the United States and Russia has been the history of serfdom and slavery.<sup>15</sup> Although the earliest studies of human captivity focused on the Atlantic world, Peter Kolchin's pioneering work, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (1987), drew attention to the parallels between slavery and serfdom, two institutions of bondage established within the same thirty-year span and abolished just four years apart.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "The United States and Russia," *Harper's Weekly*, September 23, 1905, pages 1368-1369. For a detailed account of a British-led plan to intervene with France and Russia in the Civil War by supporting the Confederacy, see Don H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 219-221, 234.

<sup>15</sup> In 1619, the first African slaves arrived in Jamestown, Virginia. In Russia, the *Sobornoe Ulozhenie* (Law Code) of 1649 officially established serfdom.

<sup>16</sup> The earliest studies of New World slavery include Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen, the Negro in the Americas* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1946); Herbert Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); and Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971). Comparative studies of global slavery include Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Laird Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Enrico Dal Lago and Constantina Katsari, eds., *Slave Systems: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). However, the

Subsequent comparisons of serfdom and slavery by Kolchin, Jane Burbank, and Frederick Cooper assessed the similarities and differences between the political, economic, demographic, and social aspects of the two systems, providing a critical historical foundation for twenty-first-century scholars seeking to analyze cultural, aesthetic, or intellectual elements of servitude.<sup>17</sup>

To date, the majority of research comparing Russian serfdom and U.S. slavery covers each institution's origins, practice, and abolition rather than the turmoil of the post-emancipation era. Nevertheless, a growing number of scholars including Kolchin, Cooper, Steven Hahn, Thomas Holt, Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie, and Rebecca Scott use or advocate the application of comparative history's methodological approach to the study of societies seeking to integrate formerly bonded populations.<sup>18</sup> Their works assess class divisions, free

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foremost work of scholarship comparing Russian serfdom and U.S. slavery is Peter Kolchin's *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> See Peter Kolchin, *A Sphinx on the American Land: The Nineteenth Century South in Comparative Perspective* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); and Chapter 9, "Empires across Continents: The United States and Russia," in Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). For a comparative study of Prussian landowners and U.S. slave owners, see Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-Nineteenth Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> For an assessment of the radical and conservative features of the emancipation of Russian serfs and African-American slaves, see Peter Kolchin, "Reexamining Southern Emancipation in Comparative Perspective," *The Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 1 (2015): 7-40; and "Comparative Perspectives on Emancipation in the U.S. South: Reconstruction, Radicalism, and Russia," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2, no. 2 (2012): 203-232. According to Kolchin, this essay "draw[s] from research for a [forthcoming] book . . . [about] emancipation in the southern United States and Russia" that will continue the research presented in *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (1987). Other proponents and practitioners of comparative emancipation studies include Steven Hahn, "Class and State in Postemancipation Societies: Southern Planters in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (1990): 75-98; Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedom's Seekers: Essays on Comparative Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Thomas Holt, "'An Empire over the Mind': Emancipation, Race, and Ideology in the British West Indies and the American South," in J. Morgan Kousser and James McPherson, *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Evan Rothera, "'Our South American Cousin': Domingo F. Sarmiento and the Case for Comparative Reconstructions," presented at the Society of Civil War Historians Third Biennial Meeting (2012).

labor conditions, the role of gender in policy-making, and racial tensions, all important aspects of post-emancipation societal reconstruction in different countries. However, little comparative or transnational work has been done that investigates the ways in which cultural sources influenced popular attitudes toward assimilation through analogous processes of mass communication.<sup>19</sup>

During the last few decades, scholars of Russian and American history have examined depictions of serfs, peasants, slaves, or freedpeople in various types of published materials. In the case of Russia, Cathy Frierson's *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (1993) focuses on the "eyewitness accounts, literary-journalistic sketches, reports of state commissioners, and paintings created by individuals who lived among the peasantry" that educated members of "Imperial Russia's educated society," while Jeffrey Brooks's article "The Russian Nation Imagined" surveys images of Russia's diverse peoples (including the peasantry) from popular illustrated journals and *lubki* (popular prints) that targeted and reached a broader audience.<sup>20</sup> Andrew Donskov is one of the few scholars to have assessed representations of the Russian peasant in nineteenth-century plays, whereas numerous researchers interested in commercial images of the peasantry have examined the wealth of surviving advertisements, ephemera, and *plakaty*

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<sup>19</sup> In 1955, Hannah Goldman published her dissertation comparing representations of Russian serfs and African-American slaves in pre-emancipation literature. For more information, see Hannah Goldman, *American Slavery and Russian Serfdom: A Study in Fictional Parallels* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1955). More recently, John MacKay published a transnational study assessing the impact of Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) in imperial Russia and the Soviet Union; see John MacKay, *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom's Cabin in Russian Culture and Society* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Cathy Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3; and Jeffrey Brooks, "The Russian Nation Imagined: The Peoples of Russia as Seen in Popular Imagery, 1860s – 1890s," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 3 (2010): 535-557.

(posters).<sup>21</sup> Finally, academics evaluating Russia's itinerant painters, the *Peredvizhniki* (Wanderers), have also paid close attention to their depictions of serfs and peasants in the style of Russian Realism during the late nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

By contrast, U.S. historians who have examined textual or visual representations of African-American slaves and freedpeople have been influenced by a cohort of scholars whose research concentrates on the broader field of memory studies. David Blight, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Gaines Foster, Caroline Janney, Kirk Savage, and Charles Wilson each produced important works that explore the multitude of ways in which Americans remembered and commemorated the U.S. Civil War and the abolition of slavery through ceremonies, monuments, and rituals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>23</sup> Other academics engaging in memory studies have chosen to focus on a particular element of the antebellum, Civil War, or postwar experience; for instance, scholars have assessed representations of the "Old South," slavery, planters, freedpeople, soldiers, and much more in

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Donskov, "The Changing Image of the Russian Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russian Drama" (PhD diss., Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1972). For analyses of urbanization and commercialism in fin-de-siècle Russia, see Marjorie Hilton, *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); and Sally West, *I Shop in Moscow: Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Tsarist Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011). For illustrated compilations of Russian *plakaty* (advertising posters), see Eleonora M. Glinernik, *Reklama v Rossii: XVIII - pervoi poloviny XX veka* (St. Petersburg: Aurora Press, 2007); Aleksandr E. Snopkov, *Reklama v plakate: Russkii torgovo-promyshlennyi plakat za 100 let* (Moscow: Moskva Kontakt-Kul'tura, 2007); and Irina Zolotinkina and Galina Polikarpova, *Reklamnyi plakat v Rossii: 1900-1920-e* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art: The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977); and David Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005); Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Charles Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

photography, art, advertisements, literature, and illustrated journals from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>24</sup> Their research helps explain the influence of various forms of imagery at a time when more Americans than ever before subscribed to printed periodicals, attended art exhibitions, and purchased from the growing range of consumer goods. Finally, digital history projects like the University of Virginia's "Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture," which aggregates reviews, articles, notices, and adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, focus on the popular reception of important cultural works.<sup>25</sup>

This dissertation breaks new ground as the first comparison of textual and visual mass-oriented depictions of former bondsmen produced during the post-emancipation era in Russia and the United States. It not only catalogues the most influential representations, but also places these images within their proper historical contexts in order to evaluate their forms, cultural functions, and evolutions. Furthermore, this project views representation as

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<sup>24</sup> For recent assessments of photography during the Civil War era, see Jeff Rosenheim, ed., *Photography and the American Civil War* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Jackie Napoleon Wilson, *Hidden Witness: African-American Images from the Birth of Photography to the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013). For visual representations of the Civil War and slavery in paintings, see Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian American Art Museum; and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Recent studies assessing representations of African Americans in advertisements include Kenneth Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Finally, for representations of the Civil War in literature and journals, see Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North & South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded-Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Martin Griffin, *Ashes of the Mind: War and Memory in Northern Literature, 1865-1900* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); and K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> For additional information, see "Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture," directed by Stephen Railton and the University of Virginia, at <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sitemap.html>.

more than *l'art pour l'art*;<sup>26</sup> rather, it considers the motivations of painters, writers, and businessmen, the messages embedded within particular depictions, and the ways in which audiences processed and responded to images at different moments in time. By applying a comparative methodological approach, first described by Annales historian Marc Bloch in his seminal essay “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes,” to the study of the manufacture, dissemination, and consumption of the aforementioned representations, this dissertation pinpoints the parallel and divergent ways in which people created or responded to particular images.<sup>27</sup> Although the institutions of serfdom and slavery differed in structure and practice, American and Russian citizens alike were forced to confront difficult truths during the post-emancipation era about their complicity in upholding systems that subjugated large segments of their national populations. They publicly grappled with the creation, consequences, and demise of serfdom and slavery in the literature, art, and advertisements of the late nineteenth century.

The juxtaposition and analysis of American and Russian representations of former bondsmen offer answers to a number of provocative questions relating to national memory and social absorption. When considering the legacies of serfdom and slavery, one asks: did Russians and Americans remember these distinct institutions in parallel ways? In both the United States and Russia, textual and visual post-emancipation imagery comprised what Alon Confino calls “shared cultural knowledge” that was captured in and passed down from

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<sup>26</sup> French philosopher Victor Cousin is credited with creating the phrase “*l'art pour l'art*,” or “art for art’s sake,” in his book, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* (Paris: Didier, 1853). See Marcel Françon, “Poésie Pure et Art Pour Art,” *The French Review* 20, no. 1 (1946): 15.

<sup>27</sup> In his essay, “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes,” Marc Bloch advocated the comparative methodology, describing how it allowed scholars to identify “two or more phenomena which appear, at first glance, to present between them certain analogies, to describe the curve of their evolutions, to note the resemblances and differences and, where possible, to explain them both.” *Revue de synthèse historique* 46 (1928): 17.

one generation to the next through “vehicles of memory” including advertisements, literature, oil paintings, short stories, and more.<sup>28</sup> By studying this heterogeneous body of remembrances, it is possible to detect important correspondences between the ways that Russians and Americans sought to “construct a sense of the past” through the creation of archetypes that served analogous societal purposes.<sup>29</sup> For example, during the 1880s Russian and American painters and writers produced sentimental depictions of docile rural laborers contentedly completing their fieldwork with ease and satisfaction. These literary and artistic representations of agrarian life offered audiences a psychological escape from some realities of the late nineteenth-century: increasing urbanization, industrialization, and the breakdown of rigid social hierarchies that characterized pre-abolition Russia and the United States, particularly the U.S. South. Such images were extremely popular in America, where Northern and Southern audiences gobbled up the syrupy stories of Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris, and in Russia, where members of the nobility, merchants, and the peasantry alike enjoyed the nostalgic, wistful paintings produced by members of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions. The authors and painters who composed these stories and works of art recognized that their representations of former bondsmen contributed to the creation of a powerful narrative that countered negative depictions of enforced rural labor and distracted readers and viewers from the difficult economic and demographic conditions of the post-emancipation era.

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<sup>28</sup> Alon Confino, "AHR Forum. Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386. Confino notes that Yosef Yerushalmi coined the phrase “vehicles of memory” in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: London University of Washington Press, 1982).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



The comparison of post-emancipation images of former bondsmen also provides scholars with a new framework for interpreting the complex processes of social integration in modernizing societies. In both Russia and the United States, policymakers wrestled with the challenge of assimilating the former bondsmen into the broader populations. As subjects and citizens, peasants and freedpeople sought to obtain an education, acquire jobs, and, in the United States, vote or run for political office. In striving to achieve these goals, however, many former bondsmen met strong opposition. Some landowners refused to pay their laborers adequate wages, urban workers feared competition from peasant and black rural-to-urban migrants, and, particularly in the U.S. South, white citizens in counties with large populations of freedpeople feared that former slaves who served their communities as politicians would institute policies that would threaten whites' privileged status.

Russian and American writers, artists, and businessmen sought to influence popular opinion about these post-emancipation issues through cultural representations. For example, Russian and American painters created works of art that helped establish parameters of discourse about the education of peasants and freedpeople. Painters Nikolai Bogdanov-Bel'skii and Winslow Homer depicted former bondsmen as enthusiastic students who exhibited a passion for learning through self-teaching or vigorous classroom participation; portrayals intended to encourage skeptical viewers to see them as capable pupils and to support the proliferation of public schools during the second half of the nineteenth century. By contrast, Russian and American painters including Edward Lamson Henry, Aleksei Stepanov, and Vladimir Makovskii rendered peasants and African Americans as uninterested in or even suspicious of formal education. Their representations differed significantly from

those of their more optimistic peers and point to underlying societal tensions about the value of providing educational access to former serfs and slaves.

Divergences in representations of serfs, slaves, peasants, and freedpeople also raise important questions about the roles of race and ethnicity in facilitating or impeding post-emancipation assimilation. As Peter Kolchin observes in *Unfree Labor*, there were significant differences between Russian and American conceptions of bondsmen's societal positions prior to abolition. While black slaves were considered to be "outsiders" due to their African origins, race, and distinctive cultural practices, peasants, who generally shared their masters' ethnicity, "constituted the lowest level of [Russian] society rather than outcasts from it."<sup>30</sup> When Russians referred to the *narod* (folk), Kolchin notes that "they meant precisely the peasants."<sup>31</sup> Together, these factors contributed to differences between particular depictions of peasants and African Americans that arise in a variety of primary sources.

The comparison of these cultural representations also necessitates the evaluation of the degree to which economic, political, and racial dynamics led to distinctive post-emancipation experiences. For example, U.S. companies frequently denigrated African-American freedpeople in late nineteenth-century advertisements that lampooned racial differences, while Russian businesses were less inclined to do so in their portrayals of the peasantry.<sup>32</sup> However, race and ethnicity only partially explain this representational discrepancy; economic and demographic factors played a role as well. At the turn of the twentieth century, Russian peasants composed a significant demographic majority and large

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<sup>30</sup> Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, 43-44.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Chapter Four discusses the frequency of these types of representations in more detail.

segment of the consumer base, whereas African Americans were a minority of the overall population.<sup>33</sup> Seeking to attract white buyers, many U.S. companies used racialized portrayals of African Americans to market products, while Russian businesses sought to attract peasant consumers in advertisements that depicted them as equals to members of the nobility, servicemen, and merchants.

### **Representations of Serfs, Slaves, Peasants, and Freedpeople**

Between 1861 and 1915, writers, painters, and businesses created a multitude of depictions of former bondsmen that changed in significant ways over time. Chapter One discusses how, on the eve of emancipation in both Russia and the United States, proponents of abolition like playwright Aleksei Pisemskii, poet Nikolai Nekrasov, and authors Louisa May Alcott and Martha Griffith Brown crafted sympathetic images of serfs and slaves.<sup>34</sup> These writers sought to evoke empathy in ambivalent or unreceptive readers by emphasizing the suffering the bondsmen endured under oppressive systems that restricted their freedom of choice and kept them in poverty. Griffith's fictional *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1857) and Alcott's radical, humanistic portrayals of slaves and freedpeople in her short stories "M.L." (1863) and "My Contraband" (1863) helped counter the one-dimensional, racialized

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<sup>33</sup> In 1897, the peasantry formed 84 percent of the Russian population whereas in 1900, African Americans were about 12 percent of the total U.S. population. Wirschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia*, 101-102; and "Total population in the continental United States." U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 1. United States—Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990." <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Aleksei Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 9 tomakh. Tom 9* (Moscow: Pravda, 1959, originally published in 1859) and accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/p/pisemskij\\_a/text\\_0410.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/p/pisemskij_a/text_0410.shtml); Nikolai Nekrasov, "Zabytaia derevnia," (1855), in Nikolai Nekrasov, *Sobranie stikhotvorenii*, tom 1 (1854), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/n/nekrasov\\_n\\_a/text\\_0010.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/n/nekrasov_n_a/text_0010.shtml) and "Na Volge," 1860, accessed at <http://www.ilibrary.ru/text/1117/p.1/index.html>; and Louisa May Alcott, "M. L." (originally published in *Commonwealth* 1, nos. 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 in 1863), "The Brothers/My Contraband" (originally published in *Atlantic Monthly* 12, no. 73 in 1863), and "An Hour" (originally published in *Commonwealth* 3, nos. 13 and 14 in 1864), all reprinted in Sarah Elbert, ed., *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997).

caricatures evident in minstrel shows and printed in popular illustrated journals of the era. Meanwhile, Pisemskii and Nekrasov persuaded many ambivalent Russians to consider the plight of an oft-ignored section of the population in the play *A Bitter Fate* (1859) and in poems published during the 1860s.

During the first decade after their respective emancipations, the United States and Russia underwent significant political, economic, and social transformations.<sup>35</sup> In both countries the processes of assimilation occurred during decades characterized by territorial expansion and population growth, phenomena that further complicated post-emancipation conceptions of Russian and American national identity. During the postbellum era, the United States continued its westward push as pioneers established farms and towns in the middle, southwestern, and western regions of the continent.<sup>36</sup> Although numerous Indian tribes were forced onto reservations, the government also introduced policies intending to absorb Native Americans into the broader population.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, Russia simultaneously expanded westward, southward, and eastward during the second half of the nineteenth century and annexed parts of the Caucasus, modern-day Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Alaska, and the Amur region.<sup>38</sup> Like the United States, Russia sought to absorb not only former

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<sup>35</sup> In the United States, Reconstruction lasted from 1865 to 1877, while Russia's era of Great Reforms primarily spanned the 1860s.

<sup>36</sup> Rates of settlement hovered between 1 percent and 2 percent per year between 1840 and 1910, when 75.6 percent of U.S. territory consisted of settled counties. In 1790, settled counties made up just 28.3 percent of U.S. territory. Samuel M. Otterstrom and Carville Earle, "The Settlement of the United States from 1790 to 1990: Divergent Rates of Growth and the End of the Frontier," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33, no. 1 (2002): 75, 78.

<sup>37</sup> One such policy was the General Allotment (Dawes) Act of 1887, which split reservations into private tracts of land that Native Americans and pioneers subsequently farmed or settled. Leonard A. Carlson, "The Dawes Act and the Decline of Indian Farming," *The Journal of Economic History* 38, no. 1, (1978): 274.

<sup>38</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 188, 195, 204, 205.

bondsmen, but also new ethnic groups into the populace. As their empire broadened to include Middle Asian and Transcaucasian peoples, Russians struggled to redefine their traditionally Slavic and pro-European national character.<sup>39</sup> Finally, both nations welcomed new immigrants seeking a better life across their borders, prompting citizens to ask what it meant to be Russian or American.

Although some Americans and Russians managed to keep pace with the rapid changes of the post-emancipation era, others hoped to restore or adapt for the post-emancipation era elements of the old order.<sup>40</sup> Chapter Two describes how writers from land-owning families addressed these audiences' latent apprehensions through the creation of fictional representations that idealized rural agricultural work and the relations between masters and bondsmen. The faithful former serfs in stories of Grigorii Danilevskii, Vsevolod Solov'ev, Evgenii Opochinin, and Evgenii Salias and *Moskovskii listok* (Moscow Sheet) authors, and the loyal African Americans in the tales of Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris, appealed to a broad swath of Russians and Americans who viewed the pre-emancipation era with growing wistfulness.<sup>41</sup> Through historical fiction, readers reflected

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

<sup>40</sup> Russia's landowners sought to maintain a firm grip on land production on their estates, while intellectuals known as *Narodniki* (Populists) believed that the Emancipation Manifesto did not sufficiently improve the peasantry's circumstances. They championed the *mir* (rural commune) and the *artel'* (cooperative association) as historical institutions that ought to be adapted for modern times to increase peasant autonomy. In the United States, federal troops left former Confederate states in 1877 and, in their absence, white Southerners strove to increase their political and economic positions through the passage of laws that restricted blacks' rights.

<sup>41</sup> A. Gorskii, "Metel': Novogodnii rasskaz," supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, January 2, 1894, no. 1, pages 2,3, and 6; P.B., "Soshnikov," supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, January 27, 1908, no. 5, pages 4-10; Evgenii Opochinin, "Posledniaia 'dusha'" supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, October 9, 1905, no. 75, pages 2-10. Grigorii Danilevskii, *Kniazhna Tarakanova* (Kiev: Dnipro, 1987), originally published in 1883, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/d/danilevskij\\_g\\_p/text\\_0050.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/d/danilevskij_g_p/text_0050.shtml); Vsevolod Solov'ev, *Staryi dom*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*. Tom 6 (Moscow: Bastion, 1997), originally published in 1883, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/solovxew\\_w\\_s/text\\_1883\\_stary\\_dom.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/solovxew_w_s/text_1883_stary_dom.shtml); Thomas Nelson Page, "Marse Chan: A Tale of Old Virginia," in *In Ole Virginia, or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,

upon the ostensible simplicity of a period when the social positions of masters and their servants were clearly defined within a distinct hierarchical system. Furthermore, audiences striving to make sense of increasingly diverse national populations were drawn to literature that depicted a more straightforward era in which they could escape from the social and demographic complexities of the post-emancipation age.

Russian and American painters produced fresh, humanizing representations of bondsmen that contrasted with the shallow literary representations in popular historical fiction. Chapter Three explores the works of members of organizations like the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions and New York's National Academy of Design who depicted serfs, slaves, peasants, and freedpeople in complex scenes of work, play, and worship that revealed to viewers the richness of their lives beyond the cotton and wheat fields. Together, these multifaceted paintings challenged the flatter literary representations of their peers by encouraging audiences to see the former bondsmen as fellow subjects and citizens possessing distinct hopes and aspirations.

Although many of the aforementioned authors continued to publish sentimental stories about former bondsmen during early 1900s, their work began to decline in popularity around 1910 because they failed to adequately address the significant social changes of the era. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, peasants and freedpeople made great strides by establishing schools, serving in government or lawmaking bodies, acquiring farmland, and founding businesses. As rates of industrialization increased in the two predominantly rural empires, thousands of peasants and freedpeople migrated from the

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1895); and Joel Chandler Harris, "Free Joe and the Rest of the World," in *Free Joe and Other Georgian Sketches* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887). Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998, accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/harrisj/harris.html>.

countryside to growing metropolises like St. Petersburg, Moscow, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia where they hoped to find lucrative job opportunities. Industrialization and urbanization generated potentially beneficial career prospects for the former bondsmen, but also created a new set of challenges for both rural and urban African Americans and peasants.

Russians and Americans who had never experienced bondage responded to these significant societal changes in different ways that were shaped by and reflected in the commercial marketing materials of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapter Four focuses on representations of former bondsmen in advertisements, posters, and ephemera that depicted peasants and African Americans in a variety of settings. In both Russia and America, businesses produced nostalgic images of servile peasants and African Americans that mirrored earlier literary archetypes. However, several Russian companies sought to capitalize upon the demographic changes that were transforming the nation by creating the aforementioned egalitarian ads that targeted urban peasants with growing purchasing power. By contrast, U.S. advertisers largely ignored African Americans as a consumer group and instead focused on attracting white buyers. Thus, while most U.S. commercial imagery reinforced representational stereotypes of the era, a number of Russian advertisements challenged popular notions about the former serfs' inferior social position through unique visual portrayals of an integrated peasantry.

Chapter Five turns to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, where a new cadre of authors challenged the nostalgic representations of the 1880s by depicting the complexities of post-emancipation racial and social absorption. In Russia, playwright Anton Chekhov shocked audiences with his realistic portrayal of rural poverty in the short story *The*

*Peasants* (1897) and readers learned about the fiscal hardships that urban peasants endured in short stories like “Thoughts” and “Other People’s Money.”<sup>42</sup> In the United States, Kate Chopin and African-American author Charles Waddell Chesnutt confronted audiences with the thorny issues of post-emancipation racial identity, miscegenation, and interracial violence in *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899).<sup>43</sup> Together, these thought-provoking representations challenged older literary depictions of freedpeople and emancipated serfs who preferred bondage to liberty. Moreover, this fiction acknowledged the realities of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian and American life by portraying the transformation of the pre-emancipation order, the trials of urban migration, rural and urban poverty, and the experience of social integration.

While some Americans and Russians observed and accepted the dramatic social changes of the turn of the century, others resisted developments that challenged their preferred way of life. In the U.S. South, many whites responded to black progress by establishing “Jim Crow” laws that necessitated racial segregation in many public places and restricted African Americans’ ability to vote. Violence against African Americans became increasingly common as whites beat or lynched black men and women, acts that may have occurred with greater frequency in areas of heightened interracial economic competition such as urban manufacturing hubs.<sup>44</sup> Racial tensions exploded on several occasions in Southern cities at the turn of the century, most notably in Wilmington, North Carolina, and Atlanta,

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<sup>42</sup> M. Bylov, “Razdum’e,” supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, January 1, 1906, no. 1, pages 12-16; and N. Afanas’ev, “Za chuzhie den’gi,” supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, January 8, 1908, no. 2, pages 12-14.

<sup>43</sup> Kate Chopin, *Bayou Folk* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, & Company, 1894), 53, accessed at Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chopinbayou/bayou.html>; and Charles Waddell Chesnutt, *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901).

<sup>44</sup> Sarah A. Soule, “Populism and Black Lynching in Georgia, 1890-1900,” *Social Forces* 71, no. 2 (1992): 431.



Georgia, where race riots resulted in general destruction and the murder of dozens of African Americans. Unlike Chesnutt and Chopin, who wrote with sensitivity and empathy about strained relations between blacks and whites, author Thomas Dixon, Jr., produced a trilogy of novels that sought to inflame early twentieth-century racial tensions and instill fear in white readers.<sup>45</sup> Dixon depicted freedmen as powerful sexual predators who posed a significant threat to helpless white women, a representation that played upon readers' anxieties about miscegenation.

In fin-de-siècle Russia, nobles and peasants alike remained frustrated with the nation's transformation during the four preceding decades. After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, Tsar Alexander III rolled back the nation's liberal reforms and cracked down on what he saw as destabilizing radical activity. During this reactionary period, land ownership among members of the nobility declined while the number of peasant farmers increased, but aristocrats ensured that they could continue to monitor peasant activity during the 1890s.<sup>46</sup> Many former serfs who continued to live in rural villages remained dissatisfied with the quality or size of their allotted land and the burden of redemption payments as a condition of their emancipation, periodically expressing their displeasure through protests.<sup>47</sup> In cities, urban peasants endured difficult working conditions by spending long hours in factories for low pay. Many also struggled with alcoholism and engaged in petty crimes characterized as "hooliganism," an early twentieth-century urban phenomenon that Joan

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s trilogy includes the following works: *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden: 1865-1900* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1902), *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1905), and *The Traitor: A Story of the Fall of the Invisible Empire* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1907).

<sup>46</sup> David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1762-1907* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 116-118.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

Neuberger calls “part of the process of class self-identification and self-assertion . . . in connection with rapid urbanization, industrialization, and the spread of education.”<sup>48</sup> Factors including poverty, labor strife, and strained relations between members of different estates produced an uneasy populace that erupted during the violent Revolution of 1905. Watchful Russian censors generally prevented the publication of literature criticizing the tumultuous state of affairs at the turn of the century, but popular satirical journals like *Strekoza* (Dragonfly) published humorous cartoons that critiqued current events. In these images, artists depicted peasants in a variety of unflattering settings: urban peasants drank far too much alcohol, engaged in public brawls, and tricked consumers by selling them products of inferior quality.

The variety of cultural representations of serfs, slaves, peasants, and freedpeople within each country indicates a diversity of perspectives on the legacies of bondage, emancipation, and integration. Intriguingly, however, depictions whose correspondences crossed national boundaries point to Russians’ and Americans’ parallel responses to abolition and the challenge of assimilating the former bondsmen. In the literature, paintings, and advertisements of the two nations, serfs and slaves appeared as victims on the eve of abolition, as contented rural laborers who attracted nostalgic audiences during an industrial age, and, at the turn of the twentieth century, as urban migrants struggling to improve their lives. Representational differences also prove instructive by prompting the consideration of how race, ethnicity, economic status, and political power shaped Russians’ and Americans’ attitudes toward the former bondsmen during an era of societal transformation.

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<sup>48</sup> Joan Neuberger, “Stories of the Street: Hooliganism in the St. Petersburg Popular Press,” *Slavic Review* 48, no. 2 (1989): 177.

Ultimately, these depictions explain both the distinct and the shared ways in which nineteenth-century Americans and Russians understood the consequences of emancipation and imagined the future of formerly bonded populations.

## **CHAPTER ONE: “THE FOULEST ABOLITIONISM THAT HAS EVER BEEN UTTERED:” RADICAL LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF BONDSMEN ON THE EVE OF EMANCIPATION**

As the United States teetered on the brink of war in 1861, American citizens waited anxiously to see if tensions between the North and South could be defused. But there would be no peace; the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter on April 12 marked the formal commencement of hostilities that would last until General Lee’s surrender to the Union army at Appomattox in April of 1865. When Massachusetts author and abolitionist Lucy Larcom learned of the events in Charleston, she recorded in her diary that “this day broke upon our country in gloom; for the sounds of war came up to us from the South, – war between brethren; civil war.”<sup>49</sup> Although the conflict between the North and South centered on the right to own slaves, Larcom did not believe that emancipation was inevitable. Instead, she contemplated the events unfolding before her, wondering, “What ruin [the rebels] are pulling down on their heads may be guessed, though not yet fully foretold.”<sup>50</sup>

Although many Americans opposed civil war in 1861, they harbored a plurality of opinions about the institution of slavery and its future. Slave owners may have been the loudest defenders of bonded labor, but citizens involved in the trade of bodies or goods produced by slaves also feared that slavery’s demise would harm their economic interests. *Harper’s Weekly* lampooned such Americans with its caricature of a New York businessman

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<sup>49</sup> Daniel Dulaney Addison, ed., *Lucy Larcom: Life, Letters, and Diary* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1894), 87.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

named “Cotton Pork,” a “patriot” who is “dead against civil war.” Pork implores the reader, ““Carry the sword and torch into happy plantations—and write off our outstanding Southern claims? Stain the national flag with American blood—and hand over the Southern market to foreigners?? Never, never, never!””<sup>51</sup> By contrast, abolitionists like Larcom, ex-slave Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and others formed opposing camps by advocating the emancipation of all slaves and by encouraging bondsmen to escape or rebel against their masters in the years leading up to the Civil War.<sup>52</sup> But many Americans, even those who disliked slavery, found the abolitionists’ views too extreme. As Allen Guelzo points out, “Opposition to slavery never necessitated abolition”; alternatives included “colonization . . . gradual emancipation . . . or in the minds of Northerners, nothing at all, so long as slavery got no nearer than it was.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, when Northern and Southern Unionists enlisted in the army, Gary Gallagher notes, “The loyal citizenry initially gave little thought to emancipation in their quest to save the Union” and abolition did not appear to be a certain consequence of victory.<sup>54</sup>

The experience of war also prompted the abolition of serfdom in Russia, albeit for different reasons. Tsar Alexander II issued the Emancipation Manifesto on February 19, 1861, but he began considering the process of liberation shortly after Russia’s defeat in the

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<sup>51</sup> “Better than Dollars,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 20, 1861, page 242.

<sup>52</sup> Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 8-9.

<sup>53</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, “Lincoln and the Abolitionists,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2000): 63.

<sup>54</sup> President Abraham Lincoln and U.S. Secretary of War Simon Cameron urged Americans to join the Union Army with a formal appeal to the public on April 15, 1861. Orville James Victor, *The History, Civil, Political and Military, of the Southern Rebellion, from its Incipient Stages to its Close* (New York: J.D. Torrey, 1868), 81-82; and Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

Crimean War (1853-1856).<sup>55</sup> Aware of his country's need to modernize, Alexander established a committee to advise him about emancipation, a prudent decision considering that a formal announcement about the possibility of abolition would have caused widespread peasant unrest.<sup>56</sup> Next, the tsar's government established provincial committees comprising two elected and two governor-appointed nobles that would ostensibly help craft the terms of emancipation in 1858.<sup>57</sup> Just two years later, the final Manifesto was published.

During the years preceding abolition, as in the United States, public opinion about the prospect of emancipation was mixed. Hugh Seton-Watson observes that "The majority of land-owners were still opposed to change . . . but ineffective in expressing their views," while "the reforming minority of landowners" and other liberal, public voices from the urban intelligentsia were "most articulate" in supporting the Tsar's push for emancipation.<sup>58</sup> Landowners were essentially unified in spirit but did not form a cohesive movement to challenge the tsar's government. Instead, planters on provincial committees sought to craft emancipatory terms that would minimize their losses with desired outcomes that varied by region. David Moon points out that aristocrats from areas with fertile territory wanted to "retain as much land as possible, since this was their most important source of wealth," while

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<sup>55</sup> David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1762-1907* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 53.

<sup>56</sup> This committee was later called the Chief Committee on Peasant Affairs. Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 57; and Hugh Seton-Watson, "Preparation of the Reform," in Terence Emmons, ed., *Emancipation of the Russian Serfs* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), 58, 60; and Daniel Field, *The End of Serfdom: Nobility and Bureaucracy in Russia, 1855-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 107.

<sup>57</sup> Moon points out that the Tsar's bureaucrats "sideline[d] the nobles' provincial committees" to "impose its programme" in shaping the terms of abolition. Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 85, and Seton-Watson, "Preparation of the Reform," 60.

<sup>58</sup> Seton-Watson, "Preparation of the Reform," 57.

nobles from the north focused on the serfs' redemption payments.<sup>59</sup> Despite the nobility's disapproval of emancipation and the potential unruliness of the peasantry, expectations of civil unrest upon the issuance of the Manifesto were largely unrealized. According to an officer who was on duty the evening before the Tsar's announcement, "There were no disturbances; the morning of Russia's great day passed as peacefully as the preceding night."<sup>60</sup> Even Aleksei Levshin, a statesman who took part in the reform process, reflected with wonder, "For a long time I could not understand how the bureaucrats tackled such great and terrible business with such ease."<sup>61</sup>

Although many American citizens and Russian subjects opposed emancipation, an autocracy and a republic successfully liberated millions of bonded laborers just four years apart. Political and economic forces shaped the courses of these events, but social and cultural forces played an important role as well. Chapter One considers the efforts of four writers who strove to transform public opinion toward bonded serfs and slaves. On the eve of abolition in their respective countries, poet Nikolai Nekrasov, playwright Aleksei Pisemskii, and authors Martha Griffith Browne and Louisa May Alcott produced original works of fiction, poetry, and drama that humanized the experience of bondage.<sup>62</sup> Their literary

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<sup>59</sup> Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, 63.

<sup>60</sup> L. Ruskin, "Noch' na 19-e fevralia 1861 g. v kazarmakh (so slov ochevidtsa)," *Nedelia* 7, February 15, 1881, page 247.

<sup>61</sup> A. I. Levshin, "Zapiska A. I. Levshina," *Russkii arkhiv* VIII, 1885, 528.

<sup>62</sup> Nikolai Nekrasov, *Sobranie stikhotvorenii*, tom 1 (1854) and *Stikhotvoreniiia* (Sovetskii pisatel': 1950), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/n/nekrasow\\_n\\_a/text\\_0010.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/n/nekrasow_n_a/text_0010.shtml); Martha Griffith Browne, *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (New York: Redfield, 1857), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Documenting the American South, 1999, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/browne/browne.html>; Aleksei Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 9 tomakh*, tom 9 (Moscow: Pravda, 1959, originally published in 1859) and accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/p/pisemskij\\_a/text\\_0410.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/p/pisemskij_a/text_0410.shtml); and Louisa May Alcott, "M. L." (originally published in *Commonwealth* 1, nos. 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 in 1863) and "The Brothers/My Contraband" (originally published

depictions of serfs and slaves are worthy of study for two reasons: First, they provide insight about the emancipatory imagination of four abolitionists from diverse backgrounds. Nekrasov and Browne used sentimental language and imagery to encourage audiences to sympathize with the bondsmen's present oppression, whereas Pisemskii and Alcott helped audiences conceive of their futures as integrated citizens through radical portrayals that depicted loving interracial or inter-estate relationships. Second, these works have not been given enough attention as texts that sought to inspire abolitionist emotions in readers. For example, Alcott is better known for her internationally acclaimed novel *Little Women* (1868), while her progressive short stories have been given scant scholarly treatment. American scholars are also much more familiar with writers like Dostoevskii and Tolstoi than with Pisemskii or Nekrasov, although the playwright and poet are part of the Russian canon. Lastly, Browne's fictional slave narrative warrants analysis because of its uniqueness as the work of a privileged white Southern woman who co-opts the voice of the oppressed in order to serve the abolitionist cause. Together, these four authors employed singular and daring strategies to achieve the goal of altering public perceptions of African American slaves and Russian serfs.

### **Anti-Slavery and Anti-Serfdom Literature in the United States and Russia during the 1840s and 1850s**

The printed word became an increasingly important means of transmitting information and ideas to a wide audience during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The reading revolution occurred in both Europe and the United States as a result of technological advances in the paper-making and printing processes that made possible the mass production

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in *Atlantic Monthly* 12, no. 73 in 1863), all reprinted in Sarah Elbert, ed., *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997).



of books.<sup>63</sup> Industrialization facilitated the distribution of literature; for instance, expanding railway systems helped deliver newspapers, magazines, and books to curious readers across the two countries' vast territories.<sup>64</sup> Together, these innovations enabled publishers to meet growing demand for reading materials at a time when more people could read than ever before. Literacy rates rose in both the United States and Russia during the nineteenth century, although numbers varied by region, ethnicity, class or estate, and gender. In 1850, just 1 out of every 156 Americans was illiterate except in the U.S. South, where 1 in 16 people could not read.<sup>65</sup> As a group, white Americans of European descent possessed the lowest rate of illiteracy with men and women reading in equal numbers.<sup>66</sup> In Russia, the first national census was taken in 1897 and recorded that 21 percent of the total population was literate, with lower literacy rates among the rural peasantry and women and higher rates in urban areas.<sup>67</sup> The literacy rates were most likely lower among peasants during the pre-emancipation era before the establishment of free village schools.

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<sup>63</sup> Rolf Engelsing, a German historian, wrote about the *leserrevolution*, or reading revolution, in his seminal work *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland, 1500-1800* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche, 1973). Barbara Hochman, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution: Race, Literacy, Childhood, and Fiction, 1851-1911* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 7; Carl F. Kaestle, *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading since 1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 52; Cathy N. Davidson, "Towards a History of Books and Readers," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1988): 12; and Mikhail Anikst, Nina Baburina, and Elena Chernevich, *Russian Graphic Design* (New York: Abbeville Press Inc., 1990), 12.

<sup>64</sup> Anikst, Baburina, and Chernevich, *Russian Graphic Design*, 12; and Scott E. Casper, Jeffrey D. Groves, Stephen W. Nissenbaum, and Michael Winship, *A History of the Book in America, Volume 3: The Industrial Book, 1840-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 239.

<sup>65</sup> Ronald Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 196.

<sup>66</sup> Casper, Groves, Nissenbaum, and Winship, *A History of the Book in America, Volume 3: The Industrial Book, 1840-1880*, 280.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 4.

Throughout the nineteenth century, literature became increasingly accessible to Americans and Russians. Subscription services encouraged more frequent reading, and the expansion of free public libraries allowed readers of limited economic means to obtain reading materials.<sup>68</sup> Americans, Barbara Hochman argues, began reading more “‘extensively,’ consuming and discarding a wider range of material than ever before,” including fiction, poetry, drama, essays, and articles.<sup>69</sup> *Appleton’s Journal of Literature* pronounced in 1871 that recreational reading was “the most facile distraction, the most available entertainment of our day,” noting that fiction in particular had become “a resource whereby monotonous, toilsome, and baffled lives secure a compensatory respite.”<sup>70</sup> Other publications hoped that reading would offer more than amusement. For instance, *The Methodist Review* urged bibliophiles to “get away from the idea that reading is a mere pastime,” for “one should not only read, but should read and think” to avoid becoming like “the bookworm with a crammed head [who] is one of the most useless folks.”<sup>71</sup> In Russia, fictional literature, newspapers, magazines, prayer books, and *lubki* (popular prints) were several of the most popular and widely read types of printed materials among nineteenth-

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<sup>68</sup> Tatsumi Yukiko, “Russian Illustrated Journals in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Dual Image of Readers,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, Tomus 26: 163; Casper, Groves, Nissenbaum, and Winship, *A History of the Book in America, Volume 3: The Industrial Book, 1840-1880*, 311; and Jesse Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), accessed at [https://archive.org/stream/foundationsofthe012037mbp/foundationsofthe012037mbp\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/foundationsofthe012037mbp/foundationsofthe012037mbp_djvu.txt).

<sup>69</sup> Hochman, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Reading Revolution*, 7; and Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North & South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Henry T. Tuckerman, “Literature of Fiction, III. Traits and Influence,” *Appletons’ Journal of Literature, Science and Art* 6, no. 4, November 4, 1871, page 136.

<sup>71</sup> “More Thoughts on the Art of Reading Books,” *The Methodist Review*, July 1892, 8; page 4.

century readers.<sup>72</sup> As in America, reading was often a group activity in Russian households; the poet Boris Sadvskii recalled how, in his late nineteenth-century home, “The entire family gathered at the dining room table for evening tea, viewing the inventive headlines, drawings, and vignettes” of the journal *Sever* (North).<sup>73</sup>

During the years immediately preceding the abolition of serfdom and slavery, both Russians and Americans consumed a great deal of literature pertaining to the topic of slaves, serfs, and their emancipation. In the United States, abolitionists distributed texts that informed readers about the conditions of bondage and the behavior of landowners. Autobiographical slave narratives, often penned by escaped slaves with the help of their editors, were one of the most popular types of writing among American readers. Scholars estimate that one hundred such accounts were published by American and European presses before the Civil War, including *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (1847), which together sold tens of thousands of copies.<sup>74</sup> Russia’s autocratic government prohibited the publication of potentially inflammatory works and enforced this goal through the use of literary censors who excised sensitive material from texts or even banned entire books. Indeed, there are

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<sup>72</sup> Anikst, Baburina, and Chernevich, *Russian Graphic Design*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> B.A. Sadvskii, “Vstrecha s Repinyim, Vospominaniia,” undated (before 1952), RGALI f. 842, o. 1, d. 63, l. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Patricia A. Turner, *Tampered Truths: A Rhetorical Analysis of Antebellum Slave Narratives* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkley, 1985), 1; and William L. Andrews, “An Introduction to the Slave Narrative,” Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>.

fewer than twenty known serf narratives in existence, none of which was published prior to the abolition of serfdom.<sup>75</sup>

In Russia and America, readers removed from estate and plantation life also learned about bondage through fiction. Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly* (1852) was well-known in both countries. In America, the novel was first printed in installments in *The National Era* and subsequently sold 300,000 copies during the first year of its publication in book form.<sup>76</sup> Stowe's anti-slavery text immediately roused passions and spurred debate in both the South and the North. In 1852, the *Southern Literary Messenger* excoriated the "inflammatory publication" whose "representations of Southern slavery" were "calculated not merely to wound and outrage the feelings of Southerners . . . but to . . . disseminate throughout the Union dissensions and hostilities."<sup>77</sup> By contrast, Northern reviews were overwhelmingly positive; for example, New York's *Christian Inquirer* called *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "the book for the times" that showed "the system of slavery. . . with singular truthfulness and remarkable wisdom."<sup>78</sup> These opposing appraisals reveal the extent to which nineteenth-century Americans believed that fictional representations of bondage could influence public perceptions of slavery. Slavery's opponents and supporters feared that literature reinforcing the other side's cause would shift the debate over slavery's future.

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<sup>75</sup> John MacKay recently translated and published four of these narratives in his book *Four Russian Serf Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas F. Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 164; and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, <https://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/utc/>, accessed July 12, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *The Southern Literary Messenger*, December, 1852, page 12.

<sup>78</sup> Review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly*, *Christian Inquirer*, April 10, 1852, page 27.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* made a powerful impression upon educated Russians as well after its initial publication in three different literary journals between 1857 and 1858.<sup>79</sup> Writers Ivan Turgenev and poet Nikolai Nekrasov were particularly moved by the story and saw the parallels between American slavery and Russian serfdom. Nekrasov, editor of *The Contemporary*, which published the text in its entirety, wrote in a letter to Turgenev, "It is noteworthy that this has been most opportune: the [emancipation] question has been very much in the public eye with respect to our own Negroes."<sup>80</sup> Turgenev received his copy of the book from abolitionist Maria Weston Chapman and remarked in his correspondence to her that he was "more than once sadly struck by the applicability of Ms. Stowe's accounts to what [he knew] of similar horrors. . . . Many of the scenes described in the book seem like an exact depiction of equally frightful scenes in Russia."<sup>81</sup>

Ivan Turgenev related to Stowe's descriptions of American slavery through his experience growing up as the son of a serf-owning landowner.<sup>82</sup> Like Stowe, Turgenev helped foster anti-serfdom sentiment among Russian readers through the publication of fictional literature that sympathetically portrayed serfs as individual human beings with distinct desires and emotions. Only a handful of works critiquing serfdom made it past the Russian censors who, Hannah Goldman argues, "immeasurably distorted and impoverished

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<sup>79</sup> John MacKay, *True Songs of Freedom: Uncle Tom's Cabin in Russian Culture and Society* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 26.

<sup>80</sup> A.N. Nikoliukin, ed., *A Russian Discovery of America*, translated by Cynthia Carlile and Julius Katzer, (Moscow: Progress, 1986), originally published in *Vestnik Evropy* 12 (1903): 637-39, cited in MacKay, *True Songs of Freedom*, 26-27.

<sup>81</sup> Nikolai Turgenev, "Russia and the Russians," in *The Liberty Bell: By Friends of Freedom* (Boston: National Anti-Slavery Bazaar, 1853), 210-25, cited in MacKay, *True Songs of Freedom*, 16.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander F. Boyd, *Aspects of the Russian Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), 68-69.

the literature against serfdom.”<sup>83</sup> One such text, Turgenev’s *Notes of a Hunter* (1852), which was published the same year as Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is a collection of twenty-one short stories told from the perspective of a landowner in the Orel province. The nobleman describes his encounters with a range of serfs in differing circumstances and expresses his desire on more than one occasion that their conditions should be improved or that they should live as free men. Although scholars have debated whether Turgenev intended his collection to serve as an anti-serfdom tract, Michael Hanne has persuasively argued that the primary “feature of the work which seems to have so radically shifted the attitudes to serfdom of many of [Turgenev’s] readers . . . is simply the degree of attention which it accords to the serfs and the closeness and detail with which the serfs are observed,” a technique that contradicted “Russian *literary* convention, in which serfs were traditionally treated as mere background figures, or stock comic characters.”<sup>84</sup> As one critic of the late nineteenth century observed, Turgenev “dared to show not only his pity but his affection for the Russian peasant, often narrow-minded, ignorant, or brutal, but good at heart. He undertook to reveal to the Russians this being which they scarcely knew.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, although Turgenev was considerably more restrained in his criticism of serfdom than Stowe in her depiction of slavery, their fictional works served a comparable purpose in bringing the issue of abolition to the forefront of public consciousness in their respective countries.

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<sup>83</sup> Hannah Stern Goldman, “American Slavery and Russian Serfdom: A Study in Fictional Parallels” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1955), 24.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Hanne, *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1994), 51.

<sup>85</sup> Ernest Dupuy, *The Great Masters of Russian Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Nathan Dole (T. G. Cromwell & Company, 1886), 159.

## Nikolai Nekrasov's Sympathetic Poetry

Turgenev's peer, Nikolai Nekrasov, built upon his predecessor's success in evoking empathy for serfs on the eve of abolition. Turgenev humanized the peasantry in his *Notes of a Hunter*, but Nekrasov went further by creating numerous expressive and emotional poems over many years that detailed the hardships of rural life for peasant men, women, and children. Reflecting on Nekrasov's life in an obituary published shortly after his death, *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* (Worldwide Illustration) declared that the poet's central achievement was instigating an "awakening of public consciousness" in 1856, a year of uncertainty when "questions were being raised" about the potential "emancipation of the peasantry."<sup>86</sup> Recently defeated by the British, the French, and the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War (1853-1856), Russian society sought to comprehend "the reasons for [the country's] military loss."<sup>87</sup> The direction of literature of that period "had become predominantly accusatory," and Nekrasov's sharply critical, unsentimental, and realistic poems about the *narod* (folk) "could not have been more in line with public sentiment and were met by the public with rapture."<sup>88</sup> Readers who felt apathetic about the future of serfdom or uninterested in the peasants' fate could not help being moved by poems like "A Forgotten Village" (1855) or "On the Volga" (1860), which detailed the trials of serfdom and forced labor in their various permutations. Indeed, Sigmund S. Birkenmayer claims that Nekrasov, "more than any other Russian poet, made his contemporaries aware of the

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<sup>86</sup> "N.A. Nekrasov," *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, no. 470, December, 1878, page 27.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

existence of the *muzhik* (peasant) and his problems” during the years that preceded and followed the abolition of serfdom.<sup>89</sup>

Nekrasov’s compassion for the peasantry was born of experience; he grew up in the rural town of Greshnevo in the Yaroslavl Province near the Volga River on his family’s estate.<sup>90</sup> As a child, he witnessed his father’s ill treatment of the serfs who resided there and subsequently formed a deeply unfavorable impression of the system.<sup>91</sup> Although Nekrasov was generally reserved in public as an adult, the topic of serfdom never failed to invigorate him. Nekrasov’s nephew, Aleksandr Fedorovich, recollected that when the subject of a conversation turned to serfdom, his uncle typically “became excited and agitated and spoke [about it] strongly and angrily.”<sup>92</sup> Aleksandr Fedorovich also recalled Nekrasov’s respectful attitude toward the peasantry, recounting a memorable occasion in the countryside when he witnessed “peasants from neighboring villages approaching [Nekrasov], the majority of whom were hunters, but who had different conversations [with him], many asking his advice about their own peasant affairs.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, it was Nekrasov’s unique understanding of the peasants’ way of life and his comprehension of their “sufferings of the people,” as he

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<sup>89</sup> Sigmund S. Birkenmayer, “The Peasant Poems of Nikolaj Nekrasov,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 11, no. 2 (1967): 167.

<sup>90</sup> A.E. Golubev, *Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov: biografiia, kriticheskii obzor poezii, sobranie stikhotvorenii, posviashchennykh pamiati poeta, svod statei o N.A. Nekrasove s 1840 goda* (St. Petersburg: Tip. M. Stasiulevicha, 1878), 3; S. Sh., “N.A. Nekrasov,” *Delo* no. 1, 1878, page 48; and D.S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 229.

<sup>91</sup> P.F. Iakubovich, *Nikolai Nekrasov: Ego zhizn' i literaturnaia deiatel'nost'* (Biograficheskaiia biblioteka Florentiia Pavlenkova, 1907), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/j/jakubovich\\_p\\_f/text\\_0020.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/j/jakubovich_p_f/text_0020.shtml) (Section Three).

<sup>92</sup> A.F. Nekrasov, “Moi vospominaniia o N. A. Nekrasove i ego blizkikh,” late nineteenth century, RGALI, f. 338, o. 1, n. 35, d. 92, pages 3-4.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, page 3.



described it, which brought their experiences to life through poetry for readers far removed from Russia's rural villages.<sup>94</sup>

Nekrasov turned to literature at a critical moment in the history of Russia's intellectual development. His future as a poet and editor of one of the nation's most important literary journals, however, was far from certain when he arrived in St. Petersburg in 1838. Although his father wanted him to go into the military, Nekrasov decided to enroll in the university where a childhood friend attended.<sup>95</sup> His father refused to support his academic endeavors, however, and for a period of time Nekrasov lived in abject poverty in Petersburg.<sup>96</sup> Despite his precarious situation, the young Nekrasov published his first collection of poems, *Dreams and Sounds*, in 1840. It was received with mixed reviews, but Nekrasov's first foray into the literary world brought him into contact with Vissarion Belinskii, an influential critic whom Murray Peppard calls the decade's "czar of letters."<sup>97</sup> Belinskii was a "man of the forties" who condemned Russia's intellectual and developmental backwardness and advocated truthful depictions of historical realities in art and literature in order to inform readers' views and effect liberal change.<sup>98</sup> His views influenced many of his peers, including Nekrasov, who applied his ideas to the craft of poetry and to his selection of works as the new editor of the journal *The Contemporary*.<sup>99</sup> After meeting Belinskii,

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<sup>94</sup> Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, 229.

<sup>95</sup> Golubev, *Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> S. Sh., "N.A. Nekrasov," 48.

<sup>97</sup> Murray B. Peppard, *Nikolai Nekrasov* (New York: Twain Publishers, 1967), 27.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>99</sup> Nekrasov became editor of *The Contemporary*, a journal founded by famed poet Aleksandr Pushkin, in 1847.

Nekrasov began to produce verses in the style of Realism that addressed or even criticized the social conditions of mid-nineteenth-century Russia.<sup>100</sup>

During the late 1840s and 1850s, Nekrasov produced three poems that deliberately drew attention to the adversities that Russia's serfs faced in urban centers like St. Petersburg or on isolated rural estates in the vast countryside. In them, he condemned the actions of landlords by criticizing their absenteeism, their irresponsibility and lack of compassion, or their decision to physically abuse their human property. One early untitled and unpublished poem (1848) may reflect an event inspired by Nekrasov's early years in St. Petersburg. Written from the perspective of a resident of the nation's capital city, the poem recounts its narrator's visit to Haymarket Square. Dropping by the trading center one evening, he encounters a young peasant girl being whipped with a knout. Nekrasov focuses not on the unidentified perpetrator of the brutal deed, but instead describes the serf's stoicism: "Not a sound from her breast,/only the whip was whistling, playing.../and to the Muse I said: 'Look!/Your blood sister!'"<sup>101</sup> Through these lines, the reader imagines the crowd that surrounded the woman and hears the deafening silence of that day, broken only by the swish of the scourge as it swung through the air before making contact on the serf's skin. Nekrasov's poem is effective because of its simplicity; his uncomplicated descriptions appeal to the reader's senses and provoke a visceral response to the depicted scene of brutality and oppression. Although the poem was not published until after serfdom's demise, these verses reflect what one of Nekrasov's readers described as the poet's ability to "create discordant

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>101</sup> Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Sovetskii pisatel': 1950), 51.

music and monstrous paintings” that taught audiences to remember that “here, at this very moment, while we are breathing, there are people who are suffocating.”<sup>102</sup>

Several years later, Nekrasov wrote another poem that critiqued the landowning class of which he was a part for the ways in which noblemen neglected their serfs. “A Forgotten Village” (1854) tells the story of an estate where chaos and uncertainty reign. There, an elderly serf named Nenila begs the landlord’s bailiff for fresh wood with which to repair her crumbling hut, but he rejects her simple request. She tells herself that “master will come,” to aid her in her hour of need, but he does not appear.<sup>103</sup> Next, a neighboring usurer claims a substantial slice of the serfs’ land. The peasants protest his unjust actions to no avail and again decide that they must wait for their master to send a surveyor to rectify the situation. Even the social structure of the estate is collapsing; the third stanza explains that although the serf Natasha has “fallen in love with a free cereal farmer,” her romance is opposed by the powers that be. Once again, “repeats the choir, ‘The master will come!’”<sup>104</sup> But the *barin* (nobleman) never arrives and in his absence “Nenila dies . . . the usurer reaps an enormous harvest . . . and Natasha no longer talks deliriously about a wedding.”<sup>105</sup> Finally, the longed-for landlord returns to his estate, but as a corpse lying “in an oaken casket.” He is joined by his son, the estate’s “new master,” who just might turn things around. The elderly peasants mourn their former landlord by singing funereal songs while the new master “wiped away his

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<sup>102</sup> Konstantin Dmitrievich Bal’mont, “Skvoz’ stroi: Pamiati Nekrasova,” February 19, 1903, first published in *Novyi put’* and accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/b/balxmont\\_k\\_d/text\\_1903\\_skvoz\\_stroy.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/b/balxmont_k_d/text_1903_skvoz_stroy.shtml).

<sup>103</sup> Nikolai Nekrasov, “Zabytaia derevnia,” (1855), in Nekrasov, *Sobranie stikhotvorenii*, tom 1 (1854), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/n/nekrasov\\_n\\_a/text\\_0010.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/n/nekrasov_n_a/text_0010.shtml).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

tears,” but instead of staying, the new master “sat down in his carriage – and permanently departed for St. Petersburg.”<sup>106</sup>

The peasants of the “Forgotten Village” represented the thousands of serfs who resided on Russia’s estates in a sort of Purgatory where they were forced to wait indefinitely for the resolution of problems that required landlord permission or intercession. Absenteeism was an exceedingly common phenomenon among wealthy landowners.<sup>107</sup> For example, in an analysis of three districts in the province of Saratov, historian Peter Kolchin discovered that almost seventy percent of estate owners with fewer than 20 serfs lived elsewhere instead of on their rural property.<sup>108</sup> According to Priscilla Roosevelt, many estates were like “isolated islands in a rural vastness” where few landlords would have wished to spend a long, monotonous winter.<sup>109</sup> Even in Nekrasov’s St. Petersburg, the poet’s readers would likely have been members of the absentee landowning families he critiques.

“A Forgotten Village” exposed many of serfdom’s hardships and injustices to nineteenth-century audiences. But one of Nekrasov’s most powerful and evocative condemnations of bonded labor was made manifest in the poem “On the Volga” (1860), which described Russia’s legendary *burlaki*, or barge-haulers. Drawing from memories of his childhood home in Greshnevo, a village located just seven kilometers from the Volga River where he watched the *burlaki* at work, Nekrasov painted a vivid portrait that both presaged

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 59.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Priscilla R. Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate: A Social and Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

and rivaled Il'ia Repin's painting *Barge-Haulers on the Volga* (1870-73).<sup>110</sup> The poem's narrator describes how, "Suddenly, I heard groans,/and my gaze fell upon the shore . . . [where] along the river/a crowd of barge-haulers crawled."<sup>111</sup> In the silence the narrator hears "their unbearably wild/and terribly clear . . . rhythmic funereal cry/and [his] heart trembled within."<sup>112</sup> Here Nekrasov refers to the Volga *burlaki's* work chants which they sang while they performed the difficult task of hauling barges upriver, harnessed together in a unit called an *artel'artel*.<sup>113</sup> In unison, these bonded laborers performed a fearsome, back-breaking task that sapped their strength and even their will to live. Later in the poem, the narrator approaches the workers and converses with them, an event that permanently impresses upon him the reality of their absolute misery and dejection. He recalls the image of one man wearing rags, in "wretched poverty/ bleary face/and, expressing reproach,/a quiet, hopeless gaze."<sup>114</sup> Ultimately, the narrator is transformed by his encounter, describing in the poem's conclusion how "bitterly, bitterly, [he] wept/when in the morning [as he] stood/on the shore of his native river/and for the first time called her/River of Slavery and Anguish."<sup>115</sup> This poem demonstrates how Nekrasov's observation of the Volga barge haulers left a lasting impression on his psyche, one that compelled him to transform images into words that would haunt Russian readers with their painful truth.

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<sup>110</sup> Sigmund S. Birkenmayer, "N.A. Nekrasov: A Glimpse of the Man and the Poet," *Études Slaves et Est-Européennes / Slavic and East-European Studies* 12, no. 4 (1967/68): 189.

<sup>111</sup> Nikolai Nekrasov, "Na Volge," 1860, accessed at <http://www.ilibrary.ru/text/1117/p.1/index.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Vadim Prokhorov, *Russian Folk Songs: Musical Genres and History* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 105.

<sup>114</sup> Nikolai Nekrasov, "Na Volge," accessed at <http://www.ilibrary.ru/text/1117/p.1/index.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. This poem also brings to mind Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1920).

Nineteenth-century critics generally praised the ways in which Nekrasov, known in his day as the “poet of revenge and sorrow,” represented the peasantry in verse.<sup>116</sup> One biographer commented that Nekrasov’s poetry “exhibited a love for the folk with genuine power” and compared him to Turgenev, who also “knew the peasantry and loved them.”<sup>117</sup> But, he claimed, there were important differences between the ways in which writers like Turgenev and Nekrasov portrayed the peasantry and those who took a more ethnographic or experiential approach. For instance, Turgenev “watched the peasantry from the position of a landowner-hunter,” and Nekrasov’s poetry was also “*notes of a hunter*.”<sup>118</sup> By contrast, the critic observed, for Nekrasov much about the peasantry remained “unknown and unrevealed, and therefore he rarely saw in them falseness.”<sup>119</sup> The reviewer concluded that this distinction accounted for the inherently literary quality of Nekrasov’s peasant representations.<sup>120</sup>

Nonetheless, as an early twentieth-century critic reflected, “the peasantry and [their lives] occupy the place in Nekrasov’s poetry” and his most important literary contribution during the 1840s and 1850s was his ability “to tear the cloak of idealization relating to landlord-estate life.”<sup>121</sup> Even after emancipation, the reviewer observed, Nekrasov continued to depict the “spectacle of adversity that the peasantry faced.” Burdened by redemption

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<sup>116</sup> V. Chuiko, “N.A. Nekrasov,” *Pchela* no. 2, January 7, 1878.

<sup>117</sup> S. Sh., “N.A. Nekrasov,” 55-56.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> I. Kubikov, “K 50-letiiu so dnia smerti,” *Krasnaia niva*, no. 1, January 1, 1928, page 2.

payments that effectively bound them to their former masters' land during the 1860s and 1870s, most peasants lived a life of poverty and hardship that was indistinguishable from that of serfdom. In one of his best-known poems, "Who in Russia Lives Well?" (1863-1878), Nekrasov describes the troubles that still plagued the peasant community in spite of their ostensible liberation: bad harvests, alcoholism, and poverty. "Who in Russia Lives Well?" represented a new phase in the evolution of his style; he incorporated peasant dialect and folklore to create what Birkenmayer calls "a poetic but realistic portrayal of Russian life in the post-reform period."<sup>122</sup> Unfortunately, Nekrasov passed away before completing the "Who in Russia Lives Well," a tragedy that befits the poem's subject since the peasantry's post-emancipation fate was similarly unsettled in 1878.

On his deathbed, Nekrasov was deemed Russia's "favorite contemporary poet," a title he earned after consistently producing verses that lamented the social conditions that peasants endured as a result of serfdom and its vestiges.<sup>123</sup> Masses of people joined his funeral procession on December 30, 1878, when his coffin was transported from his St. Petersburg apartment to the Novodevich'eNovodevichy Cemetery.<sup>124</sup> *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* described the impressive event, recounting how "representatives of the sciences, literature, journalism, many young people, pupils not only from institutions of higher education, but also gymnasium, civilian and military schools" attended.<sup>125</sup> Those who led the procession sang plaintive melodies while other followers carried "enormous laurel wreaths"

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<sup>122</sup> Birkenmayer, "The Peasant Poems of Nikolaj Nekrasov," 166.

<sup>123</sup> "N.A. Nekrasov," *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, no. 435, April 30, 1877, page 350.

<sup>124</sup> "N.A. Nekrasov," *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, no. 471, page 46.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

bearing inscriptions like “From Russian women,” “Singer of the people’s suffering,” “Immortal voice of the *narod*,” “Glory to the sympathizer of the people’s misery,” and “To Nekrasov – from students.”<sup>126</sup> These touching engravings show how Nekrasov’s poignant poetry resonated with the young and old, men and women, peasants and educated elites. After the coffin arrived at the church, university professor M.P. Gorchakov delivered a eulogy that characterized Nekrasov as the “poet of the folk” who voiced “the feelings of anguish and the thoughts of the Russian *narod*, connected by his strong hope and robust faith in veracity, goodness, and truth.”<sup>127</sup> Judging by the public response to his death, Gorchakov’s words captured the prevailing spirit of the day.

Two decades after Nekrasov’s death, Russians continued to celebrate their beloved poet through memorial events like that of the “Society of Lovers of Russian Letters” and the “Society for the Aid of Writers and Scholars in Need,” the latter of which put together a “Literary-Musical Evening” in 1897 to commemorate Turgenev and Nekrasov.<sup>128</sup> The program bill reveals that the group read aloud excerpts from Turgenev’s “Notes of a Hunter” and Nekrasov’s poems “Russian Women” and “In the Country,” among other works that they deemed to be significant contributions.<sup>129</sup> A report of a similar event held in 1902 in Nekrasov’s memory describes a packed room that could not contain the “wide circle of

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> “Programma i afishi literaturno-muzykal’nykh vecherov, posviashchennykh pamiati N.A. Nekrasova i stat’i o vecherakh, organizovannykh Literaturnym Fondom v 25-uiu i 60-uiu godovshchiny so dnia smerti N.A. Nekrasova; stat’i o naidennykh ili neopublikovannykh rukopisiakh N.A. Nekrasova,” RGALI, f. 338, o. 2, d. 23.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



worshippers” still drawn to his poetry.<sup>130</sup> Thus, in his lifetime and afterward, Nekrasov succeeded in capturing the attention and admiration of a diverse group of readers. Through his stirring, affecting poetry, he evoked in readers both pity for the downtrodden serfs during the years leading to emancipation and pride in the peasant folk culture that represented Russia’s national heritage.

### **Martha Griffith Browne’s *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1857)**

The United States possessed no poet of slavery equivalent to Nikolai Nekrasov, but Northern citizens learned about the institution during the years preceding the Civil War from a variety of materials that included both fictional works and autobiographical slave narratives. Kimberley Lystar has argued that slave narratives, which targeted white, middle-class Northern readers, were “the most important factor in the growth of the abolition movement.”<sup>131</sup> Ex-slaves often worked with abolitionist editors who transcribed their statements and helped create gripping stories that partially reflected slaves’ historical experiences.<sup>132</sup> Sold as pamphlets for twenty-five cents apiece or in bound form for approximately one dollar, thousands of narratives flooded the market in response to steadily increasing consumer demand during the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>133</sup> According to *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the genre of abolitionist literature exploded in the early 1850s; the journal

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Kimberly Lystar, “Two Female Perspectives on the Slave Family as Described in Harriet Jacobs’ ‘Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl’ and Mattie Griffith’s ‘Autobiography of a Female Slave.’” Master of Arts, University of Ottawa, 1996), 24.

<sup>132</sup> William Andrews aptly calls the slave narrative a “fiction of factual representation.” William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 20.

<sup>133</sup> The real price of a commodity worth one dollar in 1850 would be \$31.30 in 2015. See <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/relativevalue.php>; and Charles H. Nichols, “Who Read the Slave Narratives?” *The Phylon Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1959): 149-150.

enthusiastically proclaimed that “a few years ago there was no anti-slavery literature. . . . Now, every publisher and every press pours out anti-slavery books of every form and description, lectures, novels, tracts, and biographies.”<sup>134</sup> Some of the most popular narratives were printed in multiple editions; these included the autobiographies of Josiah Henson, Solomon Northup, William Wells Brown, and Frederick Douglass.<sup>135</sup> As the volume of abolitionist literature grew, however, slavery’s advocates fought back in an impassioned battle to shape popular opinion.

Pro-slavery Southerners expressly feared the potential impact of Northern anti-slavery literature. At the Commercial Convention of the Southern States, held in Memphis in 1853, a resolution was adopted that championed “the encouragement of a home press” and “the publication of books adapted to the educational wants and social conditions of the States,” particularly those that supported what the *New Englander* called a new “Slave literature.”<sup>136</sup> According to the New Haven-based journal, Southerners hoped to counter Northern abolitionists through the promotion of writing in which “the praises not of Freedom, but of Slavery, are to be sung; the heroic deeds, not of the valiant liberator of nations, but of the successful slave master of the Negro plantation, to be celebrated; the triumphs . . . of him who has most bravely defended the cause of slavery before the tribunal

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<sup>134</sup> This article first appeared in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in 1856, quoted in Lystar, “Two Female Perspectives on the Slave Family as Described in Harriet Jacobs’ ‘Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl’ and Mattie Griffith’s ‘Autobiography of a Female Slave,’” 22.

<sup>135</sup> Nichols, “Who Read the Slave Narratives?” 150.

<sup>136</sup> Review of “The Self Instructor: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Southern Education and to a Diffusion of Knowledge of the Resources and Power of the South, as represented by the Negro, the Rail, and the Press,” *New Englander*, August 1854, 12, page 47.

of the world, to be recorded.”<sup>137</sup> Although the proponents of this resolution did not succeed in their task of creating a slave literature that surpassed that of the North during the pre-emancipation era, their words reveal that they recognized literature’s power to influence attitudes about the possibility of national emancipation.

Fictional slave narratives competed with autobiographical slave narratives as sources of information for readers who knew little about slavery. They have largely been ignored by scholars of fictional abolitionist literature who have focused instead on bestselling works like Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.<sup>138</sup> These stories are worthy of attention because they reveal the ways in which non-slave authors envisaged the experience of slavery or chose to portray it in order to encourage audiences to support the abolitionist cause. A handful of authors, primarily those who despised slavery, crafted imaginary accounts of life in bondage during the pre-emancipation era.<sup>139</sup> Some writers even attempted to pass off their narratives as authentic because, as Laura Browder points out, “The value of a slave narrative rested on its authenticity,” and narratives “written by white abolitionists could quickly be dismissed as propaganda by slaveholders and their sympathizers.”<sup>140</sup> Kentuckian Martha Griffith Browne, however, was initially successful in her effort to fool reviewers with the publication of her

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> One recent and excellent work that examines Martha Griffith Browne’s *Autobiography of a Female Slave* is Laura Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>139</sup> Antebellum fictional slave narratives include Browne’s *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1857), Richard Hildreth, *The Slave, or Memoirs of Archy Moore*, 2 vols. (1836); Jabez Delano Hammond, *Life and Opinion of Julius Melbourn* (1847); Peter Neilson, *Life and Adventures of Zamba, an African Negro King* (1847); and Emily Catharine Pierson, *Jamie Parker, the Fugitive* (1851). William L. Andrews, “Martha Griffith Browne,” Documenting the American South, accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/browne/bio.html>.

<sup>140</sup> Browder, *Slippery Characters*, 20.

*Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1857).<sup>141</sup> Even after Browne's identity was discovered, readers continued to be deeply affected by her descriptions of bondage.

Like Nekrasov, Browne was the child of a planter and an opponent of bonded labor. A native of Kentucky, she inherited six slaves from her father after his death.<sup>142</sup> Desiring to liberate her human property in the 1850s but lacking the funds to support them in freedom, she decided to write her narrative.<sup>143</sup> According to a biographical newspaper article written by abolitionist Lydia Maria Child in 1862, Browne possessed a "generous young soul [that] was filled with such deep abhorrence of slavery."<sup>144</sup> In a letter to Child, Browne described the joy she felt on the day of their liberation, recounting that "it was a blissful moment for me when I placed the deeds of manumission in their hands" and that she did not "expect to experience such a thrill of happiness again."<sup>145</sup> Indeed, the white Southerner appears to have held quite progressive views for her day about both emancipation and racial equality. For instance, Child reported that, in her correspondence, Browne "marvel[ed] at Northern apathy concerning an institution [slavery] whose baneful effects extend[ed] to everybody and

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<sup>141</sup> Even twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars have mistakenly believed that Browne's realistic work is an authentic slave narrative. See Elizabeth Brown Pryor, "An Anomalous Person: The Northern Tutor in Plantation Society, 1773-1860," *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 3 (1981): 388; and William E. Wiethoff, *The Insolent Slave* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>142</sup> Lydia Maria Child, "How a Kentucky Girl Emancipated Her Slaves," *The Tribune*, reprinted in *The Independent*, March 27, 1862, 14, 695; and Lystar, "Two Female Perspectives on the Slave Family as Described in Harriet Jacobs' 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl' and Mattie Griffith's 'Autobiography of a Female Slave,'" 107.

<sup>143</sup> *Autobiography of a Female Slave*'s sales did not cover the cost of their liberation, and she subsequently received funds from the American Anti-Slavery Society to ensure their freedom.

<sup>144</sup> Child, "How a Kentucky Girl Emancipated Her Slaves," 14, 695.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

everything connected to it.”<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, Browne thought it absurd that a free African American “should be robbed of his wages on account of a black skin,” as unjust an action as if it had been “on account of black eyes or black hair,” and lamented that “Northern minds [were] generally so slow to recognize this principle.”<sup>147</sup> Such perspectives were highly unusual for a Southern slaveholder, but Child was quick to point out that Browne’s compassion for African Americans was born from experience. Browne’s “moral sense received no aid from abolitionists,” Child avowed, and she “manifested sympathy with the slaves from her very childhood.”<sup>148</sup>

Browne’s concern for bonded African Americans is evident in her sensitive portrayal of a female slave named Ann, the heroine of *Autobiography of a Female Slave*.<sup>149</sup> While most nineteenth-century slave narratives were composed by men during the first half of the nineteenth century, *Autobiography* illuminated particular aspects of bondage that were unique to enslaved women.<sup>150</sup> Browne writes from the perspective of Ann, who claims that her narrative is “the truthful autobiography of one who has suffered long, long, the pains and trials of slavery.”<sup>151</sup> She introduces herself to readers as the daughter of a white man and “a

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> According to an advertisement in the *Liberator* from 1858, readers could purchase *Autobiography of a Female Slave* for one dollar, one of the four highest-priced works on a list of twenty-five books, tracts, reports, and reviews. “Anti-Slavery Publications,” *Liberator*, April 9, 1858; 28; 15.

<sup>150</sup> Lystar, ““Two Female Perspectives on the Slave Family as Described in Harriet Jacobs’ ‘Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl’ and Mattie Griffith’s ‘Autobiography of a Female Slave.’” 29.

<sup>151</sup> Browne, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, 86.

very bright mulatto woman” from one of Kentucky’s southern counties.<sup>152</sup> As a child, Ann is sold to Mr. Peterkin, a vicious slave owner who uses violence as his preferred means of coercion. While living on his estate, she endures a beating that brings her to the point of death, narrowly avoids being raped by a white slave trader, and witnesses the separation of slave families through the sale and the suicide of a female slave wrongly accused of theft. Ann’s fortunes take a turn for the worse when she moves to Louisville with one of her white mistresses. There, she is imprisoned and sentenced to receive 200 lashes after defending herself from the sexual advances of a white man. After she is sold again to a new owner, Ann witnesses additional tragedies: the suicide of her fiancé and the death of her enslaved mother from physical abuse. Although Ann is ultimately liberated by her new mistress, she concludes her tale by lamenting that she “had out-lived all for which money and freedom were valuable, and . . . cared not how the remainder of [her] days were spent.”<sup>153</sup>

Browne’s *Autobiography* purported to be an authentic tale in several respects: its title, its first-person narrative style, the tracing of the author’s lineage, and the narrator’s decision to geographically ground the story. Like many contemporaneous antebellum slave narratives, *Autobiography of a Female Slave* also contained a plot structure, language, and imagery that were familiar to nineteenth-century readers. Browder argues that abolitionists helped create a “formula for slave autobiographies” evidenced by “styles that typically make up” such accounts, including “the documentary, the sentimental novel, the account of pornographic violence, and the testimony of Christian redemption.”<sup>154</sup> Browne followed many of these

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>154</sup> Browder, *Slippery Characters*, 31, 26.

conventions through her use of emotional language, descriptions of abuse inflicted by slave owners, and the narrator's pronouncements of faith.<sup>155</sup> Her style was so persuasive that several publications did not immediately identify it as a fictional work. In November of 1856, the *Liberator* published the first newspaper review of *Autobiography*, stating that it could not "even surmise the name of its author," while the *New York Evangelist* speculated in December of 1856 that, "though this book bears the title of an Autobiography, it has evidently been put into shape by a more skillful hand than that of the African bondwoman, whose sorrows and sufferings it records."<sup>156</sup> By January of 1857, however, Browne's true identity as a Southern slave owner from Kentucky was finally made known to readers through a new review published by the *Liberator*.<sup>157</sup>

Although *Autobiography* was a work of fiction, readers still found themselves shocked, saddened, or angered by the novel's depiction of the life of an enslaved African American woman. Their passionate reactions were due in large part to what Browder describes as *Autobiography's* "emotional truth," a trait that was "worth more than its lived quality" because it awakened audiences' sensitivities to the experience of slavery through its dramatic storyline and poignant language.<sup>158</sup> For example, in a letter to his wife, abolitionist and *Liberator* editor William Lloyd Garrison offered his initial impressions of the book.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>156</sup> Lystar, "Two Female Perspectives on the Slave Family as Described in Harriet Jacobs' 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl' and Mattie Griffith's 'Autobiography of a Female Slave,'" 101; Browder, *Slippery Characters*, 321; and "Autobiography of a Female Slave: Redfield," *New York Evangelist*, December 11, 1856, 27, 50.

<sup>157</sup> Lystar, "Two Female Perspectives on the Slave Family as Described in Harriet Jacobs' 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl' and Mattie Griffith's 'Autobiography of a Female Slave,'" 102-103.

<sup>158</sup> Browder, *Slippery Characters*, 33.

During a train ride from Boston to New York City in December of 1856, Garrison recorded that he was “entirely absorbed in the perusal of it” and “found it to be a most touching and soul-harrowing description of the unescapable horrors of slavery, surpassing any thing of the kind yet presented to the public.”<sup>159</sup>

A reviewer for the *Louisville Journal* similarly acknowledged the novel’s realism, complimenting Browne’s use of dialect, which he called “far more true to nature than any we have yet seen” and praising her “unusual accuracy of knowledge of the dispositions of our slaves.”<sup>160</sup> But while abolitionist Garrison admitted that his heart was “heavy as lead” by the book’s conclusion, the *Louisville Journal* reviewer found himself enraged.<sup>161</sup> He denounced the tenor of the book as “exceedingly objectionable” and “filled with the foulest abolitionism that has ever been uttered.”<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, the reviewer condemned Browne for selecting “isolated cases of cruelty in the South” to inspire a plotline that supposedly pandered to “the anti-slavery prejudices [in the North and England] which are there epidemic.”<sup>163</sup> Although the *Louisville Journal* reviewer characterized Browne’s narrative as “a total misrepresentation of African slavery in the South,” his words seem intended to mask his

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<sup>159</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, December 17, 1856, reprinted in Walter M. Merrill, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: From Disunion to the Brink of War, 1850-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 415.

<sup>160</sup> Review of *Autobiography of a Female Slave* in the *Louisville Journal*, reprinted in the *Liberator*, January 23, 1857, 27, 4.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.



underlying fear that *Autobiography* was so persuasive that the book would “have a greater run than any of its predecessors.”<sup>164</sup>

These two responses to *Autobiography* demonstrate that slavery’s opponents and defenders similarly recognized the fictional narrative’s ability to influence public opinion of slavery. With the goal of promoting abolitionist sentiment in readers, Browne had employed several literary strategies. First, she constructed and subsequently dismantled stereotypes about African-American slaves through her humanization of black characters. For instance, the slave owner Mr. Peterkin voices the concept, familiar to many readers during the mid-nineteenth century, that African Americans were inherently physically inferior to white Americans. When discussing the topic with his son and a doctor, Mr. Peterkin asserts that “niggers was made to be slaves, and yer kan't change their Creator's design. . . . [and that] a nigger's mind is never half as good as a white man's.”<sup>165</sup> Mr. Peterkin’s claim echoes that of Richard Colfax, who, according to George Frederickson, outlined “all the basic elements of the racist theory of the Negro character” in his pamphlet *Evidence Against the Views of Abolitionists, Consisting of Physical and Moral Proofs of the Natural Inferiority of the Negroes* (1833).<sup>166</sup> In it, Colfax argued that “the Negroes . . . are so inferior as to resemble the brute creation as nearly as they do the white species . . . . *no alteration of their present social condition would be productive of the least benefit to them.*”<sup>167</sup> Nineteenth-century

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Browne, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, 194.

<sup>166</sup> George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 49.

<sup>167</sup> Richard Colfax, *Evidence Against the Views of Abolitionists, Consisting of Physical and Moral Proofs of the Natural Inferiority of the Negroes* (New York: 1833), quoted in Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 49-50.

Americans used this line of reasoning to justify their unwillingness to abolish slavery or to provide free African Americans with particular opportunities and services. Browne, however, criticized politicians who refused to recognize blacks as equal through the voice of Ann, who, when reflecting upon the place of the African American in society, exclaims to the reader, “How unjust it is for the proud statesman – prouder of his snowy complexion than of his stores of knowledge . . . to assert, in the halls of legislation, that the colored race are to the white far inferior in native mind!”<sup>168</sup>

To further advance this argument, Browne created African-American characters whose efforts to receive an education and desire to live as free citizens countered nineteenth-century stereotypes about blacks’ abilities and inclinations to live independently. For instance, Ann read school textbooks and novels in secret as a young slave girl, and when she traveled to Boston for the first time as a free woman, she recounted how she met African Americans who were “finely educated, in the possession of princely talents, occupying good positions, wielding a powerful political influence, and illustrating, in their lives, the oft-disputed fact, that the African intellect is equal to the Caucasian.”<sup>169</sup> Moreover, while in bondage, Ann’s character constantly expresses her hope of being freed from slavery, describing the prospect of liberty as “a star shining through the clouds” and remarking how liberty enabled one to have the “power and privilege to go whithersoever you choose, with no

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<sup>168</sup> Browne, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, 86.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

cowardly fear . . . not shrink and cower before the white man's look, as we poor slaves must do.”<sup>170</sup>

A second way in which Browne humanized African Americans through her narrative was by showing their emotional responses to difficult situations. Some advocates of slavery sought to justify bondage by positing that slaves were unfeeling creatures no different from chattel, a view Ann articulates and rejects when she challenges the reader, “Why are we not all coarse and hard, mere human beasts of burden, with no higher mental or moral conception, than obedience to the will or caprice of our owners?”<sup>171</sup> For example, Browne demonstrates slaves’ capacity to feel pain by recounting several instances when families are torn asunder by traders. As a child, Ann witnesses her mother’s grief when she herself is sold, recounting how the poor woman “gave full vent to her feelings in a long, loud, piteous wail. . . . [giving a] cry of grief, that knell of a breaking heart, [that] rang in my ears for many long and painful days.”<sup>172</sup> Throughout the rest of the story, Ann meets black characters who share with one another the experience of losing beloved family members through the slave trade.<sup>173</sup> In addition, like Nekrasov in his untitled poem about the female serf in Haymarket Square, Browne similarly depicts Ann as experiencing pain by enduring physical abuse. Lystar points out that such examples reminded sympathetic readers of how bodily harm “was a present threat in the lives of all female slaves.”<sup>174</sup> As a young girl, Ann is beaten by Mr.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 36, 38.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>173</sup> For instance, Aunt Polly’s son Jim and Amy’s mother were sold “down river” to the Deep South.

<sup>174</sup> Lystar, “Two Female Perspectives on the Slave Family as Described in Harriet Jacobs’ ‘Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl’ and Mattie Griffith’s ‘Autobiography of a Female Slave,’” 36.

Peterkin until her brain “burned and ached” and “tears and blood bathed [her] face and blinded [her] sight.”<sup>175</sup> As an adult, she receives 200 lashes “upon [her] bare back, each lacerating it to the bone” for resisting the sexual advances of a white man.<sup>176</sup> Browne’s vivid descriptions of Ann’s whippings and her anguished reaction to these abuses showed readers that slaves were sentient beings and the victims of brutality often inflicted by white men.

One final way in which Browne sought to instill abolitionist sentiment in readers through her radical representations of slaves was by urging readers to view African Americans through “colorblind” eyes. The author appears to have possessed very progressive views for her day, when the science of racial difference was a popular topic among scholars.<sup>177</sup> According to historian Mark Smith, white Southerners of the mid-nineteenth century perceived race as an inherent trait identifiable not only through sight, but also through a variety of senses. He argues that slaveholders in particular believed “blacks could always be spotted . . . in terms of smell, sound, taste, and touch.”<sup>178</sup> By contrast, Browne uses the characters’ dialogue to introduce to readers the concept of race as a social construction. For instance, the slave Polly remarks to Ann that “If dey would cut my finger and cut a white woman’s, dey would find de blood ob de very same color,” a statement to which Ann responds, “There is a God above, who disregards color.”<sup>179</sup> Even Mr. Peterkin’s son John, a white character, shares this revolutionary perspective of race and similarly uses Christian

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>177</sup> William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), vii.

<sup>178</sup> See Mark Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 56.

tenets, a tactic of nineteenth-century abolitionists who used Protestantism to discredit slavery, to support his viewpoint. On one occasion, he explains his position on the matter to Ann and another female slave, explaining, "In God's eyes you are equal to a white person. He makes no distinction; your soul is as precious and dear to Him as is that of the fine lady clad in silk and gems. . . . It matters not whether your face be black or your clothes mean."<sup>180</sup> Thus, although proponents of slavery referenced the Old Testament of the Bible to justify bondage, Browne's characters drew from Christianity's egalitarian elements to encourage readers to view African Americans anew.<sup>181</sup>

Through her fictional narrative, Martha Browne succeeded in inspiring both empathy and a desire to alleviate the slaves' suffering in readers. Adopting the persona of a female slave, she sought to convey to readers the privations and adversities bonded black women endured through graphic, vivid descriptions that added new meaning to the style of literary realism similarly employed by Nekrasov in his poetry. But her fiction was not merely informative; it also served as a public call to action, for, according to the *National Era* in a review of her work, "While sympathy at a distance may be well, self-denying devotion and love, in relieving the wretched, in the midst of the darkness and the danger, is still better."<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 112-114.

<sup>181</sup> Paul Finkelman contends that the "largest single body of proslavery literature is based on religious defenses of slavery." The most common argument was that Africans descended from Noah, whose grandson Canaan was relegated to the position of a servant as were his subsequent generations. By contrast, abolitionists often referenced the theology of Christ from the New Testament in their criticisms of slavery's cruelty. See Paul Finkelman, *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South, A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2003), 26-27.

<sup>182</sup> Review of *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, *National Era*, June 11, 1857, vol. XI, no. 545.

### Aleksei Pisemskii's *A Bitter Fate* (1859)

Two years after the publication of *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, tensions grew as a handful of nobles and bureaucrats quietly hammered out the details of an emancipation manifesto that would liberate forty percent of the Russian empire's population. Although educated Russians were unable to debate publicly the merits or disadvantages of serfdom with complete freedom, literature served as a venue for veiled discussion of the most pressing political questions of the day. During the 1840s, liberal members of the intelligentsia, sometimes called "Westernizers," advocated the abolition of serfdom and Russia's modernization in Russia's "thick journals." These "men of the forties" sparred with the Slavophiles, intellectuals who by contrast encouraged reform that adapted Russia's historical institutions for the modern era. Men like Vissarion Belinskii promoted authors like Turgenev and Nekrasov, whose *Notes of a Hunter* and realistic poetry shaped Russians' views of serfdom through their moderate depictions of serfs as a reasoning, emotional people with whom the nobility ought to sympathize. But they were unprepared for Aleksei Pisemskii's play, *A Bitter Fate* (1859), which contained a revolutionary representation of a landowner whose love for his serf transcended class boundaries and who treated her as his equal. The tragedy of the conditions of serfdom might appear to be well-suited to dramatic adaptation, but *A Bitter Fate* is the sole example of realistic Russian drama published during the nineteenth century that focused on the peasantry.<sup>183</sup> A dark composition that offers insight into the difficult choices confronted by bonded laborers beholden to their masters, *A*

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<sup>183</sup> Aleksei Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 9 tomakh*, Tom 9 (Moscow: Pravda, 1959, originally published in 1859) and accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/p/pisemskij\\_a/text\\_0410.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/p/pisemskij_a/text_0410.shtml). Although Lev Tolstoi finished his play *The Power of Darkness* in 1886, it was banned from publication until 1902. See Richard Freeborn, "The Nineteenth Century: The Age of Realism, 1855-80," in Charles A. Moser, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 274.

*Bitter Fate* boldly takes up the uncomfortable subjects of infidelity, love between members of separate estates, personal honor, power, jealousy, and murder. Like Browne's *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, Pisemskii's work challenged readers to consider the deleterious effects of serfdom on peasant families and inspired them to empathize with serfs through his portrayal of the uniquely trying circumstances of captivity.

Born in 1821 to a serf-owning noble family living on an estate in the Kostroma province of Central Russia, Aleksei Pisemskii maintained throughout his life what Charles Moser calls "an elemental coarseness thought typical of the Russian *muzhik*, but quite unexpected in a literary figure of standing."<sup>184</sup> Although this trait was off-putting to many of his more refined peers, it indicates that he may have possessed an ability to comprehend the mentalities of the rural people among whom he lived in childhood. Pisemskii displayed great interest in literature from an early age while studying at the Kostroma gymnasium and later at Moscow University, where he read Russian works as well as French, German, and British books in translation.<sup>185</sup> He also enjoyed the theater and acting.<sup>186</sup> After graduating, Pisemskii gained literary fame by publishing a number of short stories and articles between 1854 and 1856 in journals such as Nekrasov's *Contemporary* and *Notes from the Fatherland*.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Charles A. Moser, *Pisemsky: A Provincial Realist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 37; and R.E. Steussy, "The Bitter Fate of A.F. Pisemsky," *Russian Review* 25, no. 2 (1966): 171, 177.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 2-4; and "Biografiia Pisemskogo Alekseia Feofilaktovicha. Rukopis' neustanovlennogo litsa," undated, RGALI f. 375, o.1, d. 22, l. 2.

<sup>186</sup> B.N. Alzamov claimed that, in a student presentation of Gogol's *The Marriage* in 1844, Pisemskii "interpreted the character [of Podkolesin] better than Shchepkin," the "great comic" who played the role in St. Petersburg's imperial theater at that time. "A.F. Pisemskii," *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, February 7, 1881, no. 630, page 110; and Moser, *Pisemsky: A Provincial Realist*, 5.

<sup>187</sup> "A. F. Pisemskii," *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, page 110.

One of Pisemskii's best works, *A Bitter Fate* was completed over the course of 1859. The drama was initially rejected by censors due to Pisemskii's depiction of peasant violence against a landowner in its original conclusion, but he later altered the ending before submitting it a second time to ensure its publication.<sup>188</sup> Published in *The Library of Reading*, the play was an immediate sensation. In 1860, *Notes from the Fatherland* commented in its joint review of *A Bitter Fate* and Aleksandr Ostrovskii's *The Storm* (1859) that, in the past year, "People had been compelled to discuss [these plays] at great length, and they even managed to divert the pragmatic attention of the Russian reader of current affairs."<sup>189</sup> Three years later, when *A Bitter Fate* appeared on stage in St. Petersburg, *Notes from the Fatherland* praised its originality, declaring that it was a "phenomenon not entirely ordinary in our stage literature."<sup>190</sup>

Pisemskii's new drama both attracted attention and generated discussion because of its surprising plot and radical representation of the peasantry. *A Bitter Fate* tells the story of a tragic love triangle between the serf Ananii, his wife Lizaveta, and their master, landlord Cheglov-Sokovin.<sup>191</sup> Shortly after the play begins, the moralistic, hardworking Ananii returns to his village from business in St. Petersburg and learns of his wife's infidelity with their master. To make matters worse, he discovers that Lizaveta has recently born an illegitimate son. At first, she defends her actions by referencing Russian landowners' tradition of

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<sup>188</sup> Moser, *Pisemsky: A Provincial Realist*, 95-96.

<sup>189</sup> S. Dudyshkin, "Dve novye narodnye dramy," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, tom 128, book 1, page 37.

<sup>190</sup> Unnamed author, "Teatral'naia Khronika," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 1863, kn. 11-12, page 77.

<sup>191</sup> The female protagonist's name, Lizaveta, recalls that of the heroine in Nikolai Karamzin's short story, "Poor Liza," (1792), a peasant girl who commits suicide after sleeping with her master. Ananii Iakovlev's character reminds the reader of another jilted husband, Alexei Karenin, wife of Anna Karenina, whose rigid morality leads him to punish his wife by refusing to let her leave him.



asserting their right to rape female serfs, declaring, “It was not of my own will: there and then they too began to make dictates and commands, how was I to disobey?”<sup>192</sup> But Ananii soon realizes that the truth is more complicated: Lizaveta and Cheglov-Sokovin are in love with one another.

Over the course of the drama, Lizaveta reveals that she has been unhappy during her marriage to Ananii, whom she was effectively forced to marry at a young age. She boldly expresses her desire to leave her husband, declaring to her master, “Let him cut me with a knife or drown me in a river, but I will either live near you or leave God’s earth forever – do as you wish!”<sup>193</sup> In a startling move, however, Cheglov-Sokovin does not exercise his power as a landowner to separate Lizaveta from Ananii. Instead, he invites Ananii to his home to negotiate. Unable to come to an agreement with Cheglov-Sokovin or to convince Lizaveta to stay with him, Ananii does the unthinkable. In a fit of rage, he murders the innocent baby and flees the scene of the crime. In Pisemskii’s new, more hopeful ending, Ananii ultimately turns himself in to the authorities, confesses his deed, and repents before God.<sup>194</sup> In the play’s final scene, before he is sent to prison, Ananii implores his peers, “Once again I bow to the earth: Although I am accursed, do not think badly of me and pray for my sinful soul!”<sup>195</sup>

Journalistic and authorial reviews attest to Russian readers’ differing responses to the way in which Pisemskii represented the peasantry. Several critics praised Pisemskii for what they believed were his accurate representations of serf life; for example, journalist Ivan

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<sup>192</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor’kaia sud’bina*, Act I, Scene IV.

<sup>193</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor’kaia sud’bina*, Act II, Scene II.

<sup>194</sup> According to a diary entry written by the Russian censor (and former serf) Aleksandr Nikitenko, Ananii murdered Cheglov in the original ending.

<sup>195</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor’kaia sud’bina*, Act IV, Scene VIII.

Vasil'evich Pavlov, whom Pisemskii deemed "one of our first connoisseurs of our peasantry [*nashego naroda*]," reportedly gave a "complimentary review of *A Bitter Fate*" to Ivan Turgenev for which Pisemskii was very grateful.<sup>196</sup> In addition, *Notes from the Fatherland* described *A Bitter Fate* as a play that "deserved full attention" not only for its artistic merits, but, "most importantly, for its content."<sup>197</sup> The reviewer approved of the plot's historical nature, set during the era of serfdom, and applauded Pisemskii for "taking and displaying with strength . . . all that is tragic in this way of life, which attests to the talent of the author."<sup>198</sup>

Through its portrayal of the relationship between landowners and serfs, Pisemskii's gripping play made three central literary contributions. First, Pisemskii revealed to readers the unique challenges that female serfs endured within the framework of a restrictive patriarchal system in which they were required to obey their husbands and landlords.<sup>199</sup> Lizaveta is a powerless character whose fate is determined by the men around her. As an impoverished orphan with no security, Lizaveta recounted how she was coerced into marrying Ananii, "carried away in some kind of bridal sleigh as if enchained," an event which made her feel as if she was being "buried into the ground alive."<sup>200</sup> In mid-nineteenth century Russia, forced marriages were not uncommon for female serfs; frequently masters

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<sup>196</sup> Aleksei Pisemskii to Ivan Vasil'evich Pavlov, 1860, RGALI, f. 375, o. 1, d. 10, l. 1.

<sup>197</sup> Unnamed author, "Teatral'naia Khronika," 1863, kn. 11-12, page 77.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Alexandre Avdeev, Alain Blum, Irina Troitskaia and Heather Juby, "Peasant Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Population* 59, no. 6 (2004): 722; and Christine Worobec, *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 13.

<sup>200</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act III, Scene VII; and Act II, Scene II.

compelled them to wed at a young age or even selected their marriage partners.<sup>201</sup> Writing about post-emancipation Russia, Christine Worobec describes how infidelity was considered less acceptable for women than for men, particularly those who spent long periods of time away from their villages.<sup>202</sup> Although male peasants like Ananii could be expected to have extramarital trysts while away on business, women like Lizaveta were required to remain faithful to their husbands during their absence.

After facing sexual pressure from her master, Lizaveta alone suffered the consequences of their liaison by giving birth to his child. The physical presence of a baby effectively exposed her clandestine actions to those around her, provoking scorn from her neighbors and outraging Ananii upon his return. At the mercy of her husband, she fully submits to him, confessing, “My head . . . lies on the block: If you want to, chop it off, or, if you wish, have mercy upon me.”<sup>203</sup> The wounded Ananii warns her that she “hasn’t yet been beaten or tortured, though [she] deserves it,” the milder of several threats that Ananii does not act upon but which reminded nineteenth-century readers of the fact that wife-beating was a regular occurrence in pre-emancipation Russia.<sup>204</sup> Tired of living under Ananii’s rule and afraid of his temper, Lizaveta decides to run away with her child. But her bold moment of courage pushes Ananii to his breaking point, and he consequently murders the child in a fit of rage. Lizaveta loses her mind with grief, her life ruined because she sought to break free from

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<sup>201</sup> Women from the noble and merchant estates also experienced forced marriages. Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, 135; and John Bushnell, “Did Serf Owners Control Serf Marriage? Orlov Serfs and Their Neighbors, 1773-1861,” *Slavic Review* 52, no. 3 (1993): 419.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-205. Worobec describes how, in the post-emancipation period, “It was more usual for a community to punish an adulterous wife than an adulterous husband” (203).

<sup>203</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor’kaia sud’bina*, Act I, Scene IV.

<sup>204</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor’kaia sud’bina*, Act I, Scene IV; and Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture* (Open Book Publishers, 2012), 229.

marital captivity. Like Browne's depiction of a female slave who faced unique obstacles such as attempted sexual abuse, Pisemskii's representation of a subjugated peasant woman represented the many female serfs whose choices were constrained by powerful landlords, oppressive husbands, and strict village standards regarding female behavior.

Through his portrayal of the troubled Ananii, Pisemskii showed readers that male serfs also encountered great difficulties and could display admirable characteristics in the face of adversity. Ananii's personal qualities of reliability, honesty, and faithfulness set him apart from what readers considered to be the stereotypical serf, whom Cheglov-Sokovin's bailiff describes as "some kind of peasant, a scoundrel, a drunkard, [who] has come from Peter without his cross."<sup>205</sup> By contrast, Ananii is a faithful Russian Orthodox believer who refuses to drink and works for months on end in St. Petersburg, returning home with luxurious goods for Lizaveta that are impossible to find in his rural village. Upon learning of his wife's unfaithfulness, Ananii laments that he often thought about Lizaveta during his time in the city, where he, too, might have engaged in unsavory activities. Instead, he explains to his wife, "I didn't want to pay attention to such business, remembering that I am a family man and a Christian."<sup>206</sup> Ananii's sense of honor and affection for his wife prevented him from breaking his marital vows.

The reader might also have been able to sympathize with Ananii's position as a serf who was largely powerless to prevent his master from seducing his wife. A landlord's rape of his female peasants was not an uncommon occurrence in nineteenth-century Russia. Priscilla Roosevelt and Peter Kolchin have even found evidence that some landowners kept serf

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<sup>205</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act II, Scene III.

<sup>206</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act I, Scene IV.

harems within particular buildings on their large estates and engaged in sexual activities there.<sup>207</sup> However, such activities were not openly discussed or portrayed in a negative light in nineteenth-century literature. It is notable that Pisemskii subtly condemns such behavior on the part of the nobility in his play. For instance, he portrays such relations between masters and their female serfs as perennial in a conversation between an old peasant and Cheglov-Sokovin's bailiff, who reminds his compatriot, "We are now serving our third master; we, too have seen a great deal in our era: think of the deceased . . . Aleksei Grigor'ich, [who], if only concerning the female sex, was the very same in all that occurred . . . And in your family there were many of these happenings . . . you haven't yet forgotten that, I suppose."<sup>208</sup> Furthermore, Ananii responds in a remarkable way to his master's attempts to rectify his behavior by paying him off. The serf rejects Cheglov-Sokovin's proposal, replying, "Sir, although I am a simple peasant . . . I have never sold my honor for any sum of money, great or small."<sup>209</sup>

Throughout the majority of the play, Pisemskii's Ananii appears to be a self-respecting man whose sense of morality and personal honor surpass that of his master, a radical representation of a male serf in 1859. Even after Ananii murders Lizaveta's child, when the reader is inclined to view his character with condemnation, Ananii quickly admits his deed to the police, earnestly begs his peers for forgiveness, and goes to jail without resisting. As a result, Pisemskii's peasant protagonist is a complex character toward whom the reader feels a degree of pity in spite of the horrendous crime he commits. It is important

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<sup>207</sup> Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate*, 225-226; and Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, 112.

<sup>208</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act III, Scene VI.

<sup>209</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act II, Scene IV.

to note, however, that not all critics could forgive Ananii or his creator, Pisemskii, for depicting him in such a negative light. For instance, Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov declared that “It was difficult to imagine a more unpleasant and even offensive impression than that which [he felt] while reading this play.”<sup>210</sup> Although Pisemskii purported to “show the public a Russian peasant with strong morals,” it appears that Aksakov could not stomach a plot in which a peasant murdered a child. He viewed Pisemskii’s portrayal of Ananii’s crime and subsequent repentance to be implausible and unnatural, contending that the author did not possess the abilities required to “portray any moral person, and least of all, the Russian peasant.”<sup>211</sup> Writing for *The Contemporary*, author Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin similarly disagreed with Pisemskii’s attempt to portray “folk types,” declaring that his representation of the Russian peasant brought to mind the following words, “A boor, a braggart, an idiot, and a drunkard.”<sup>212</sup> Like Aksakov, a man with whom he diverged politically, he felt deeply offended reading the play, explaining that his “sense of decency [was] trampled to such a point, that it is even possible to think that the author himself is somewhat sorry.”<sup>213</sup> These negative reviews demonstrate that Pisemskii undertook a difficult task by portraying the Russian peasant as a multifaceted figure. Although these two critics seem to have been repulsed by Ananii’s disagreeable actions and personal traits, Ananii’s character possessed numerous admirable qualities as well, making him one of the most developed, human representations of the Russian peasant at the time. Ultimately, Saltykov’s and Aksakov’s

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<sup>210</sup> Konstantin Aksakov, “O drame g. Pisemskogo ‘Gor’kaia sud’bina,’” *Russkaia beseda*, kniga. 19, otdel 5, page 133.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>212</sup> Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, “Peterburgskie teatry: Gor’kaia sud’bina,” *Sovremennik*, 1863, t. 99, kn. 12, section 2, page 95.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

censures reveal the extent to which pro-peasant and anti-serfdom Russians recognized fictional representations' ability to shape public opinion of the peasantry and perhaps even to influence the course of events.

Pisemskii's third and most important contribution to the debate about the morality and viability of serfdom is his discussion and quiet denunciation of several prevailing stereotypes about the peasantry, a strategy that Browne similarly employed in regard to perceptions of enslaved African Americans. Like Browne, Pisemskii challenges planters' perspectives that bondsmen were akin to animals through dialogue between the landlord Cheglov-Sokovin, his bailiff, and his brother-in-law, a member of the landed gentry. The cold-hearted bailiff asserts that "Our people are crude and backward," laughing at how "they are imagined as bears. . . . They walk to work, but run home afterward."<sup>214</sup> Meanwhile, Cheglov-Sokovin's brother-in-law, Zolotilov, contends that "in fact, a peasant woman is a woodblock: even if you behave passionately toward her, she will calmly pick at a mossy wall the entire time. . . . Isn't it like falling in love with a half-animal?"<sup>215</sup> It is quite difficult for the reader to agree with their viewpoints, however, because Pisemskii has created two emotionally complex and sentient peasant characters, Lizaveta and Ananii, who defy these rudimentary and offensive characterizations. Furthermore, Pisemskii encourages readers to view the peasantry through Cheglov-Sokovin's eyes rather than through the eyes of his unlikable bailiff and brother-in-law.

Pisemskii's challenge to readers was a radical one because Cheglov-Sokovin may be the first landowner in Russian literature who purports to be "estate-blind" in his treatment of

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<sup>214</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act II, Scene II.

<sup>215</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act II, Scene I.

the peasantry. In a conversation reminiscent of the white planter John's speech to Ann, Cheglov-Sokovin explains to Lizaveta that it matters not to him "whether [she] was a noble lady, a serf, a merchant woman, or a duchess" and that these categories were equivalent to him in terms of how he loves her.<sup>216</sup> The landlord even treats Lizaveta's wounded husband with great respect. While negotiating Lizaveta's fate, Cheglov-Sokovin tells his serf Ananii to "forget that I am your master, and be completely honest with me."<sup>217</sup> These events demonstrate Cheglov-Sokovin's radically progressive attitude about master-serf relations and may have shocked proponents of serfdom and the estate system that enforced a strict hierarchy in which the peasantry existed on a level far beneath that of the gentry. Cheglov-Sokovin's liberal nature even unnerved Saltykov-Shchedrin, who bestowed upon him the title of a "weak-foolish-liberal-drunk landlord," but speculated that, had Cheglov-Sokovin "lived to see the abolition of serfdom, then perhaps he would have been a mediator and surprised Russia with his humanity."<sup>218</sup> Thus, *A Bitter Fate* ultimately exposed Russia's educated elites to a radically new way of thinking about the peasantry and their relationships with the landowning nobility.

### **Louisa May Alcott's Short Stories**

In the United States, slavery's future could not be resolved through the war of words between Northern abolitionists and proslavery Southerners. Fighting broke out between the Union and the newly formed Confederacy in April of 1861, but the first concrete step in the process of liberation was President Abraham Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation

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<sup>216</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act II, Scene IV.

<sup>217</sup> Pisemskii, *Gor'kaia sud'bina*, Act II, Scene IV.

<sup>218</sup> Saltykov-Shchedrin, "Peterburgskie teatry," *Sovremennik*, 1863, t. 99, kn. 12, section 2, page 101.



Proclamation on September 22, 1862.<sup>219</sup> Part “act of justice,” part “military necessity,” this radical document declared that slaves living in Confederate territory were free.<sup>220</sup>

Furthermore, Lincoln promised those who escaped from bondage the protection of the Union Army, which he commanded to “recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons.”<sup>221</sup> Escaped slaves who flooded Union Army camps were known as “contraband,” the enemy’s former property which now legally belonged to the U.S. government.<sup>222</sup> Caught halfway between bondage and freedom in a sort of wartime Limbo, these runaway slaves were the subject of paintings, articles, and short stories between 1861 and 1865. Another group of people that generated significant public interest were the free African Americans who joined the Union Army, fighting to defend the United States and to secure the freedom of their brethren who remained in the Confederate South.<sup>223</sup> Many textual and visual representations of proud black soldiers produced during the war contrasted sharply with those of oppressed slaves that commonly appeared in autobiographical narratives and the fiction of Stowe, Browne, and others just years before.

Louisa May Alcott was one of the first writers to portray African Americans as black soldiers and as wartime “contraband” in literature. Alcott, once called America’s “Hans Christian Anderson,” is best known for broadly appealing children’s books like *Little Women*

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<sup>219</sup> This document went into effect on January 1, 1863.

<sup>220</sup> President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, accessed at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov).

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> The term “contraband” was used prior to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Congress passed the Act on July 6, 1861, which formally permitted the Army’s practice of protecting escaped slaves. See Michelle Wartman, “Contraband, Runaways, Freeman: New Definitions of Reconstruction Created by the Civil War,” *International Social Science Review* 76, no. ¾ (2001): 122.

<sup>223</sup> Eighty-three percent of 179,000 black soldiers who served in the Union Army were born in the Confederacy or border states. Chulhee Lee, “Socioeconomic Differences in the Health of Black Union Soldiers during the American Civil War,” *Social Science History* 33, no. 4 (2009): 430.

and *Little Men*.<sup>224</sup> A fervent abolitionist, Alcott not only advocated emancipation in her fiction, but also depicted romantic, loving relationships between black and white characters in stories that Sarah Elbert calls “Alcott’s boldest statements for human rights.”<sup>225</sup>

Born to a progressive family in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1832, Alcott became an author who, according to one late nineteenth-century biographer, “scattered among a million of readers . . . the nearly one hundred and fifty thousand volumes of her writings” during her lifetime.<sup>226</sup> She received fan-mail from as far away as St. Petersburg, Russia and Honolulu, Hawai’i, a testament to the reach of her accessible, appealing writing style.<sup>227</sup> Alcott and her family lived through a tumultuous era of American history and witnessed, one newspaper recounted, the “assassination of Lincoln [and] the emancipation of slaves and serfs in America, Russia, and Brazil,” events which “marked the period indelibly on the memory of mankind.”<sup>228</sup> But Alcott was no bystander; rather, she participated in the Civil War by serving as a nurse in Washington, D.C., and sought to shape public opinion toward slaves and freedpeople through short stories like “M.L.” and “My Contraband.”

Alcott’s compassion for African Americans and desire to improve the world around her largely stemmed from her upbringing by parents who strove to instill a sense of Christian morality and duty in their children. Her father Bronson, a founder of the Transcendentalist

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<sup>224</sup> “Kind Words from [Oliver Wendell] Holmes, [Sr.]” *New York Herald*, March 6, 1888, Folder 280, MS Am 800.23. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>225</sup> Sarah Elbert, ed., *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), x.

<sup>226</sup> Reverend Edward S. Towne, “A Concord Hillside,” unknown newspaper clipping, late nineteenth century, Folder 280, MS Am 800.23. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>227</sup> “Letters to the Author of Little Women,” unknown newspaper clipping, late nineteenth century, Folder 281, MS Am 800.23. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>228</sup> “From a Special Correspondent,” “Letter from Cultured Concord,” unknown newspaper clipping, December 12, 1887, Folder 280, MS Am 800.23. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

movement, frequently encouraged the young Louisa to obey her conscience and to “earnestly desire to become daily better and wiser, more kind, gentle, loving, diligent, helpful, serene.”<sup>229</sup> One of her peers recalled how, in her youth, Alcott displayed “the same tenderness of heart . . . which characterized both of her parents” and possessed “intense feeling . . . enthusiasm . . . [and] untiring activity of mind and body.”<sup>230</sup> Alcott herself recorded that, as a child, she was an avid reader who “made experience her teacher” and “got religion from Nature and the example of virtuous parents who sacrificed everything to principle, literally loved their neighbors better than themselves, and cared more for reforms of all sorts than wealth[,] comfort or fame.”<sup>231</sup> These flowering traits of youth bloomed in adulthood, one peer recounted, when Alcott “wholeheartedly identified herself with every good cause, . . . [and] the whole passion of [her] noble nature glowed in defence of ‘all those who are desolate and oppressed.’”<sup>232</sup>

Having grown up in Concord, Massachusetts, a liberal town frequented by anti-slavery advocates like John Brown and Harriet Tubman, Alcott recalled that she “became an Abolitionist at an early age.”<sup>233</sup> The Alcott family participated in several abolitionist

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<sup>229</sup> Bronson Alcott to his daughter Louisa May Alcott, letters on the occasion of her birthdays dated November 29, 1839 and November 29, 1842, MS AM 2114, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>230</sup> Francis T. Russell, undated (likely late nineteenth century), untitled newspaper clipping, Folder 281, MS Am 800.23. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>231</sup> Louisa May Alcott’s notes on herself, entitled “Odds and Ends,” MS Am 1817. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>232</sup> Dorothy Lundt (Evelyn Greenleaf Baker Sutherland) “Miss Alcott: A Few Reminiscences of the Author of ‘Little Women,’” *Evening Transcript*, March 10, 1888, Folder 283, MS Am 800.23, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>233</sup> Madeleine B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott: A Biography* (Lebanon: Northeastern University Press & University Press of New England, 1996, originally published in 1950 by the University of Oklahoma Press), 91, 97; and Louisa May Alcott, “Sketch of Childhood, by Herself,” reprinted in Ednah D. Cheney, *The Life of Louisa May Alcott: Life, Letters, and Journals* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1889), 19.

activities during the 1850s; Bronson fought back against the Fugitive Slave Law by trying to free imprisoned runaway slaves, and the family even sought to fund John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry.<sup>234</sup> As an adult, Alcott claimed that her "greatest pride" was "in the fact that [she] lived to know the brave men and women who did so much for the cause, and that [she] had a very small share in the war which put an end to a great wrong."<sup>235</sup> Of course, Alcott herself contributed to the antislavery movement in a critical way through the publication of several revolutionary short stories featuring African Americans.<sup>236</sup>

The first of several such tales is "M.L.," the fictional account of a romance between Paul, an ex-slave, and Claudia, a white Southern lady from New Orleans.<sup>237</sup> Written in 1860 just one year after Pisemskii's *A Bitter Fate*, "M.L." shares with the Russian drama a plot that centers on forbidden love between two people from entirely separate worlds. But while Pisemskii saw no future for the serf Lizaveta and her master Cheglov-Sokovin, Alcott depicts a couple determined to overcome the prejudicial social condemnation of their interracial marriage, which she calls "a sterner autocrat than the Czar of all Russias."<sup>238</sup> When Claudia first meets Paul, she does not realize that he was once a slave in Cuba. In fact, Alcott deliberately depicts Paul as displaying all the characteristic of a "pale-faced gentleman" who was "devoted to his books and art," made "experience his tutor," and was in sum "a man to

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<sup>234</sup> Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery*, xxi and xxiv.

<sup>235</sup> Alcott was also influenced by Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, putting it on her "List of Books I Like." Journal Entry from 1852, reprinted in Cheney, *The Life of Louisa May Alcott*, 19, 54.

<sup>236</sup> One of Alcott's favorite proverbs was an anti-serfdom Russian peasant saying collected by the nineteenth-century lexicographer Vladimir Dal: "The bird is well enough in a golden cage, but he is better on a green branch." MS Am 1817.35, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>237</sup> Louisa May Alcott, "M.L.," *The Commonwealth*, Vol. 1, Nos. 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25, 1863. Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex and Slavery*, xxxvii, 3.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, and Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery*, xxxix.

command respect and confidence and love.”<sup>239</sup> Little distinguishes Paul from the other men in Southern high society and Claudia, admiring his many positive traits, falls in love.

Halfway through the short story, however, Paul’s identity as a former slave is suddenly exposed before Claudia by one of his enemies. In his revelation to Claudia about his past, Paul explains that although he “tried to become a chattel and be content,” his father “had given [him] his own free instincts, aspirations, and desires” and was unable to “change [his] nature though [he was] to be a slave forever.”<sup>240</sup> In this scene, Alcott emphasizes Paul’s sentience during the five-year period of his life spent in bondage in order to disprove the nineteenth-century stereotype that slaves were akin to animals, a strategy similarly employed by Browne in *Autobiography of a Female Slave*. But Alcott’s representation of slavery contrasts with that of her predecessor in a critical way. While abolitionists like Browne highlighted the misery of slavery through descriptions of physical abuse, Alcott stresses that the experience of bondage has positively shaped Paul’s character. For example, Paul refuses to see himself as a victim of an oppressive system; instead, he explains to Claudia, “God knows they were bitter things to bear, but I am stronger for them now.”<sup>241</sup> When he is finally emancipated, Paul claims to have taken “the rights and duties of a man upon me, feeling their weight and worth, looking proudly on them as a sacred trust won by much suffering, to be used worthily and restored to their bestower richer for my stewardship.”<sup>242</sup> Thus, Alcott’s Paul is a figure who focuses on the opportunities in his future rather than the hardships of his

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 4-7.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 19.

past. His strength of character deeply impresses Claudia, who agrees to marry the former slave and to stand by him forever.

Alcott's taboo romance was rejected by *The Atlantic* in 1860, perhaps because of her endorsement of interracial marriage, but it was ultimately published in *The Commonwealth* in early 1863.<sup>243</sup> About two years after Alcott drafted "M.L.," she decided to support the Union cause by serving as a nurse at the Union Hotel Hospital in Georgetown. When Alcott arrived in Washington, D.C., in December of 1862, she was surprised by the intensity of her new position, recording the following January that she "never began the year in a stranger place . . . alone among strangers, doing painful duties all day long," and "surrounded by 3 or 4 hundred men in all stages of suffering, disease, and death."<sup>244</sup> Nonetheless, she threw herself into her work by dressing wounds, distributing food, cleaning, and writing letters on behalf of the injured soldiers.<sup>245</sup> In fact, she worked so hard that she took ill; as one late nineteenth-century biographer recorded, Alcott was "a veritable Florence Nightingale for courage, tenderness, and helpfulness . . . blessing scores of dying beds with her presence, and laboring until she herself was stricken down with fever."<sup>246</sup>

Severely ill with typhoid fever, Alcott was forced to return to her family's home in Concord where she recovered over the course of several months. Her wartime experiences remained fresh in her mind, however, and she turned them into a short story called "Hospital

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<sup>243</sup> Stern, *Louisa May Alcott: A Biography*, 93.

<sup>244</sup> Louisa May Alcott's Diary, January 1863, MS Am 1130.13, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>245</sup> Louisa May Alcott's Diary, January 4, 1863, MS Am 1130.13, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>246</sup> Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Our Famous Women: An Authorized Record of the Lives and Deeds of Distinguished American Women of Our Times* (Hartford: A. D. Worthington, 1884), 41.

Sketches” for which she earned \$200.<sup>247</sup> Written from the perspective of “Tribulation Periwinkle,” the realistic, albeit sentimental, tale was largely based upon the time Alcott spent working at Union Hotel Hospital. After completing “Hospital Sketches,” Alcott was told that she had finally discovered her “natural style, ‘the blending of the comic & pathetic, & happy description of common things with the under current of sentiment which lends romance.’”<sup>248</sup> Americans were eager to read literature that depicted Civil War soldiers, battles, and other events and they devoured her work. In fact, the public response to “Hospital Sketches” was so great that publisher James Redpath decided to reprint the story in book form in August of 1863.<sup>249</sup> Of the new book’s critical reviews, Louisa’s sister May recorded that “the notices so far have been very flattering and without doubt there will be a good sale for it. Her prospects were never better . . . for she has been so long unknown and yet having so much more talent, than a good many of the popular Atlantic contributors.”<sup>250</sup> A little over decade later, publications like *Hearth and Home* and *St. Nicholas Magazine* confirmed May’s prediction, recounting that “Hospital Sketches” “became at once very popular” and “made [Alcott’s] name known all over the North.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Journal and Account Book, MS Am 1130.13, Houghton Library, Harvard University. “Hospital Sketches” was published by *The Commonwealth* 1, Nos. 38, 39, 41, and 43 (May 22, 29, and June 12, 16, 1863). See Stern, *Louisa May Alcott: A Biography*, 128-130, 335.

<sup>248</sup> Louisa May Alcott’s notes on herself, entitled “Odds and Ends,” MS Am 1817. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>249</sup> “Women of History: Louisa May Alcott, 1832-1888,” *The Daily News*, December 3, 1912, Folder 283, MS Am 800.23. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>250</sup> Diary of Abigail May Alcott, August 23, 1863, Box 4, MS Am 1817, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>251</sup> “Miss Louisa May Alcott,” *Hearth and Home*, January 16, 1875, Vol VIII, No. 3. Page 42; and F.B.S., “Miss Alcott: The Friend of Little Women and Little Men,” clipped article from *St. Nicholas Magazine*, 1877, page 131, Folder 283, MS Am 800.23. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Buoyed by the successful fictionalization of her nursing experiences, Alcott continued to write about topics pertaining to the Civil War in subsequent short stories and articles.<sup>252</sup> However, while the majority of Northern and Southern wartime literature focused on the experiences of white soldiers, Alcott bucked the prevailing trend by turning her attention once again to African-American slave and freedpeople.<sup>253</sup> Sarah Elbert points out that although Alcott's wartime correspondences do not discuss issues of race, she almost certainly met "contraband orderlies" at the Union Hotel hospital and walked on streets "filled with colored and white men, and war nurses, and visitors."<sup>254</sup> These encounters likely inspired Alcott to produce another radical short story, an interracial romance between an ex-slave and a white woman that mirrored "M.L.," entitled "My Contraband."<sup>255</sup>

Alcott drew inspiration for "My Contraband" from her experiences in Washington, D.C., as well as from contemporaneous phenomena such as the increasing enlistment of black soldiers and the growing number of slaves who fled to Union camps.<sup>256</sup> Her story features a relationship between Robert, a black contraband, and Faith, a white nurse, but, unlike "M.L.," their attraction is a tangential event in a dark plot that revolves around the jealous relationship between two brothers of different races and recalls the fratricidal story of Cain and Abel. Serving as an orderly in Faith's hospital, ex-slave Robert meets Ned, his

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<sup>252</sup> "Miss Louisa May Alcott," *Hearth and Home*, January 16, 1875, Vol VIII, No. 3. Page 42.

<sup>253</sup> For an analysis of sentimental representations of the white soldier, see "Chapter Three: The Sentimental Soldier" in Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>254</sup> Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery*, xxxi.

<sup>255</sup> Louisa May Alcott, "My Contraband," or "The Brothers," *Atlantic Monthly* 12, no. 73 (November 1863).

<sup>256</sup> Alcott earned \$50 for the publication of "My Contraband." Journal and Account Book, MS Am 1130.13, Houghton Library, Harvard University.



white half-brother and former master whose father raped Robert's mother. Ned appears to have inherited his father's proclivity for cruelty; years ago he raped Robert's wife, an inhumane deed that motivates Robert to contemplate murdering him in retaliation. Nurse Faith convinces Robert to show mercy and chart for himself a new path by enlisting in the Union army. While fighting bravely at Fort Wagner in the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, an all-black regiment, Robert is struck down by his nemesis, Ned. The former master does not remain victorious, however, because an African-American soldier from Boston takes Robert's place in battle and kills him. Alcott's concluding twist, the murder of a planter by a free black man, represented an act of justice that likely unnerved white readers, particularly those from planter families who feared the prospect of a slave revolt.

"My Contraband" shares important thematic elements with "M.L.," for instance, like Paul, ex-slave Robert has not been weakened by his enslavement. Instead, Alcott describes him as a "strong-limbed and manly" boy who "had the look of one who had never been cowed by abuse or worn with oppressive labor."<sup>257</sup> Like Paul, Robert also prizes his freedom highly; he explains to Faith that he refuses to take his master's surname as his own with a "look and gesture . . . [that] were a more effective declaration of independence than any Fourth-of-July orator could have prepared."<sup>258</sup> Alcott's representation of Robert is wholly unique, however, in its depiction of his position as a contraband. Comparing him to the bat in Aesop's fable, Robert "belonged to neither race; and the pride of one and the helplessness of the other, kept him hovering alone in the twilight."<sup>259</sup> Here, Alcott alludes to the process of

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<sup>257</sup> Louisa May Alcott, "My Contraband," reprinted in Elbert, *Louisa May Alcott on Race, Sex, and Slavery*, 70.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

integration, infrequently discussed in the fictional literature of the day, which was often slow because of persistent racial prejudices and which left men like Robert in a tenuous, ambiguous position. The liberal-minded author unequivocally expressed her support for black liberation and assimilation, however, through her representations of ex-slaves like Robert whom she depicts as serving the Union by “fighting valiantly ‘for God and Governor Andrew.’”<sup>260</sup> As a result of such heroism, Alcott reminds readers, “The manhood of the colored race shines before many eyes that would not see, rings in many ears that would not hear, wins many hearts that would not hitherto believe.”<sup>261</sup>

But the most revolutionary appeal that Alcott makes of readers in her portrayal of African-American slaves is not to sympathize with former slaves for all they endured, but to go a step further by empathizing with them in moments of anger. Indeed, the ex-slave Robert is a flawed, human, character – a would-be murderer of his former master had Faith not dissuaded him. Alcott prompts readers to put themselves in his shoes and to feel his pure rage, asking them through Faith’s internal monologue, “Why should he deny himself that sweet, yet bitter morsel called revenge? How many white men, with all New England’s freedom, culture, Christianity, would not have felt as he felt then?”<sup>262</sup> Like Pisemskii, who invites audiences to forgive the murderous serf Ananii, Alcott urges readers to put themselves in the position of a vengeful black slave and to resist condemning him for his sentiments. Her request was one of the boldest and most radical in nineteenth-century American fictional literature.

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 79.

## **Conclusion**

Through their distinctive and radical literary representations, four writers sought to change the ways in which their readers perceived serfs and slaves on the eve of abolition. Nekrasov and Browne depicted bondsmen as sentient beings in literature that inspired pro-emancipation sentiment and effectively competed with the caricatures that had previously dominated popular culture, particularly in America. By comparison, Pisemskii and Alcott challenged audiences to imagine how serfs and slaves would co-exist after abolition by portraying African Americans and peasants engaged in sincere and loving relationships with society's elites. Furthermore, through their depictions of murderous serfs and slaves, they brought even the most open-minded readers to their emotional limits by asking them to empathize with deeply flawed characters. Ultimately, their works helped audiences envision a post-emancipation era in which the former relationships between masters and bondsmen were a distant memory.

## CHAPTER TWO: SERFDOM AND SLAVERY IN POPULAR HISTORICAL FICTION, 1870s-1900s

Reflecting on the emergence of a “new Southern literature,” an anonymous Southern reviewer in an 1887 issue of *The Evening Post* urged young writers to comprehend “the unique, the unsurpassably rich, [and] the infinitely adaptable materials which it is their peculiar heritage to use.”<sup>263</sup> He argued that the South’s newest generation of authors of fiction and poetry should capitalize upon their unique inheritance: the experience of the Confederacy’s defeat in the Civil War, its pre-emancipation “groupings of figures and races . . . scenes of caste, wealth, indolence, and pride,” which, with other attributes, comprised “a whole world apart—that social world of the old South—unlike all that ever went before or can ever come again!”<sup>264</sup> During the late nineteenth century, Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris fulfilled the anonymous critic’s request by drawing upon the South’s history to produce romantic, widely read stories that described idyllic antebellum plantations where white masters and black slaves lived harmoniously. Together, these authors contributed to a new literary genre that celebrated what the anonymous critic perceived to be the South’s exceptional past.

Twenty-first-century scholars have debated the extent to which the South’s history and idealistic post-war literature are distinctive. K. Stephen Prince supports the idea of a distinctive South, arguing that it was a “social construct” that “served as a cornerstone of

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<sup>263</sup> “A Southerner,” “Literature in the South,” *The Evening Post*, reprinted in *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts*, June 25, 1887, page 182.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

southern (and American) identity.”<sup>265</sup> The idea of Southern exceptionalism was what Prince calls “a lived reality for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans,” or a way of thinking that shaped Northerners’ views of the South and Southerners’ self-conceptions.<sup>266</sup> The notion of the South as an exceptional place with a unique history and culture permeates late nineteenth-century literature and contemporary scholars’ assessments of its defining characteristics. For example, Alan Nolan has argued that the Lost Cause myth that pervaded the works of Page and Harris was an especially “American legend.”<sup>267</sup> David Whirter sees Southern literature itself as playing “a prominent role” in the promotion of the idea of Southern exceptionalism; he contends that it has shaped “successive constructions and reconstructions of ‘the South,’ both as a unique regional culture, and as a privileged locus . . . for understanding the broader modern U.S. culture to which it stands in tense relation.”<sup>268</sup> Laura Edwards similarly considers the South’s position within the broader nation, concluding that “what made the South distinctive was always its comparison to somewhere else.”<sup>269</sup>

The South’s history as a region comprising slave-holding states that seceded from the Union and resisted reintegration following their defeat during the Civil War is certainly rooted in time and place. Its tradition, however, of idealizing the pre-emancipation era in literature is not entirely unique. Although Russia had no comparable civil war and impetus

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<sup>265</sup> K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Alan T. Nolan, “The Anatomy of the Myth,” in Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>268</sup> David McWhirter, “Introduction: Rethinking Southern Studies,” *South Central Review* 22, no. 1 (2005): 1.

<sup>269</sup> Laura F. Edwards, “Southern History as U.S. History,” *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009): 535, cited in Prince, *Stories of the South*, 7; and Alan T. Nolan, “The Anatomy of a Myth,” in Gallagher and Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, 12.

for national reconciliation, its *pomeshchiki* (landowners) similarly mourned their loss of wealth and power after the abolition of serfdom in literature. The *pomeshchiki* differed from Southern planters as *dvorianstvo* (members of the aristocratic estate), but they shared with these Southerners the sense that they were representatives of a privileged, civilized group whose status had been diminished through emancipation. This sentiment helps explain why members of the Russian nobility also produced nostalgic fiction that romanticized serfdom and the relationships that existed between masters and bondsmen during the late nineteenth century. Like Harris and Page, Russian noblemen Grigorii Petrovich Danilevskii, Vsevolod Sergeevich Solov'ev, Evgenii Nikolaevich Opochinin, and Evgenii Andreevich Salias crafted romantic tales about Russia's pre-emancipation era in which paternalistic landlords provided their cherished serfs with a high standard of living.

Producing historical fiction for popular audiences during the late nineteenth century, Russian and American writers from the landowning classes constructed narratives that revised each country's respective history. Their nostalgic tales greatly appealed to educated, middle-class readers who had never experienced bondage. Young Russians and Americans of the 1880s and 1890s comprised a new generation of citizens too young to have witnessed firsthand the past relationships between bonded laborers and landed elites, but they were acutely aware of the new social hierarchies and identities developing around them. As a way of confronting the painful aspects of their inherited national histories, many Americans and Russians embraced the narratives embedded in fictional tales that eulogized serfdom and slavery.

A comparison of these cultural phenomena contributes to the fields of American and Russian history in several ways: First, it illuminates hitherto unknown parallels between the

strategies of authors who deliberately sought to shape national memories of slavery and serfdom through the production of popular literature. *Bellettrists* Danilevskii, Solov'ev, Opochinin, and Salias, several of the most widely read writers in late nineteenth-century Russia, are largely unknown to Western scholars of Russian history, their biographies appearing primarily in English-language encyclopedias or surveys of Russian literature.<sup>270</sup> Even less is known about the content of their short stories and the important role they played in shaping collective memories of serfdom. Second, although the post-emancipation eras in Russia and the United States differed in important ways, the evaluation of their two literary traditions identifies striking correspondences between the ways in which writers from landowning Russian and American families responded to the abolition of serfdom and slavery. Furthermore, this comparison highlights the notable contrast between the emergences of two similar literary traditions from different historical contexts: While racist presumptions defined the late nineteenth-century United States, racial considerations were absent in late imperial Russia.

An analysis of Russian post-emancipation historical fiction also broadens western scholars' understanding of the environment in which better-known fictional works were produced and received in Russia. For instance, historians are familiar with aristocrat Lev Tolstoi, the internationally acclaimed iconoclast whose idealization and personal imitation of

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<sup>270</sup> Late nineteenth-century public library statistics show that Salias was the most widely read writer in the nation, a man whose works surpassed in popularity those of other favored writers including Danilevskii and Solov'ev. See Iurii Beliaev, "Liubimets chitaiushchei Rossii," in *Evgenii Salias, Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh, tom pervyi* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1991), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0020.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0020.shtml). For references to the aforementioned authors in overviews of Russian literature, see Isabel Florence Hapgood, *A Survey of Russian Literature: With Selections* (New York: Chautauqua Press, 1902); Victor Terras, *Handbook of Russian Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); D.S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature from its Beginnings to 1900* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958); and, for fuller treatment, see Dan Ungurianu, *Plotting History: The Russian Historical Novel in the Imperial Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

the peasantry captivated and shocked nineteenth-century Russian readers and critics.

According to biographer Rosamund Bartlett, Tolstoi was a “repentant nobleman, ashamed at his complicity in the immoral institution of serfdom” who saw “the peasants as Russia’s best class, and her future.”<sup>271</sup> He became “a member of the intelligentsia, the peculiarly Russian class of people united by their education and usually critical stance toward their government” whose views were much more extreme than those of the overall Russian population.<sup>272</sup> In this way, Tolstoi became a politicized figure whose outlook mirrored that of the Populists of the 1870s more than the attitudes of his peers. In his historical epic *Voyna i mir* (War and Peace) (1869) and novel *Anna Karenina* (1877), Tolstoi depicted the peasantry as a noble people whom aristocrats ought to emulate, a representation that did not widely resonate among the broader population. A.V. Knowles describes the public’s befuddled response to *Voyna i mir*, arguing that, among other factors, “The idealization of the peasantry . . . proved rather too much . . . for the critics to cope with.”<sup>273</sup> Thus, while scholars of prominent Russian literary figures like Tolstoi have written about the public’s general discomfort with his portrayal of the peasantry, few have discussed the less celebrated but extraordinarily popular representations of serfs in historical fiction that challenged Tolstoi’s narrative. Ultimately, an analysis of the range of works that presented revisionist, idealized accounts of serfdom provides a more complete picture of the late nineteenth-century literary field in Russia.

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<sup>271</sup> Rosamund Bartlett, *Tolstoy: A Russian Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 3.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> A.V. Knowles, “Tolstoy’s Literary Reputation before ‘War and Peace,’” *The Modern Language Review* 72, no. 3 (1977): 628.



## **The Challenges of Assimilation after Emancipation in the United States and Russia**

The abolition of serfdom and slavery freed millions of laborers from bondage, but Russian peasants and African-American freedpeople did not immediately acquire the full benefits of citizenship. In the United States, the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment nullified slave owners' claims to their human property. While millions of emancipated slaves remained on farms where they worked as laborers in a new wage plantation system, receiving paltry compensation for their efforts, tens of thousands of others moved to rapidly growing metropolitan areas across the South.<sup>274</sup> Stephen Kantrowitz points out that freed slaves across the country remained in a precarious position as unprotected residents of an embittered and disunified nation, arguing that "the framers of the [Thirteenth Amendment] did not assume that freedom guaranteed citizenship" and, furthermore, did not "share a clear, common conception of what rights citizenship need respect."<sup>275</sup> Although the hotly debated Fourteenth Amendment was similarly ambiguous, its authors used broad, expansive language to guarantee citizenship to freedpeople, declaring that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside."<sup>276</sup> The amendment was in large part a response to a round of repressive legislation issued by Southern states readmitted to the former Union after 1865. Through these Black Codes, *Harper's Weekly* declared in 1868, the "master class"

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<sup>274</sup> Eric Foner and Joshua Brown, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 82; and Martin Ruef, "The Demise of an Organizational Form: Emancipation and Plantation Agriculture in the American South, 1860–1880," *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 6 (2004): 1369–1370.

<sup>275</sup> Stephen Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829–1889* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 313.

<sup>276</sup> Native Americans were excluded from the Amendment's guarantee of citizenship to those born in the United States. In 1924, Congress offered citizenship to Native Americans through the Indian Citizenship Act. Michael P. Zuckert, "Completing the Constitution: The Fourteenth Amendment and Constitutional Rights," *Publius* 22, no. 2 (1992): 69–70.

effectively “established all of slavery but the name.”<sup>277</sup> White Southern planters “refused to sell land, so that no freedman could acquire a farm, and became of necessity a vagrant; and then the master class made vagrancy a crime, for which a man could be sold to labor,” and “denied the freedmen arms and the right of sitting upon juries.”<sup>278</sup> The Fourteenth Amendment sought to protect black citizens from these state-sponsored injustices at the federal level, but did so with only partial success during the decades that followed.

After emancipation, former slaves exhibited a common yearning that Eric Foner describes as “a desire for independence from white control, for autonomy as individuals and as newly created communities, themselves being transformed by the process of emancipation.”<sup>279</sup> As new citizens of a war-weary nation, African Americans acted upon this deep-rooted impulse in profound ways. One former slave, Irving Lowery, recalled that on the day of his liberation from bondage, his white master called together all the slaves to tell them of their new situation and that “their joy was unspeakable.”<sup>280</sup> Most freedpeople remained on the plantation until January of 1866, when, he recorded, “there was a breaking up, and a separation of the old plantation. Nearly all the slaves left and went out and made contracts with other landlords. A few remained for one year, and then the last one of them pulled out and made their homes elsewhere.”<sup>281</sup> During the forty years that followed, Lowery wrote in an article entitled “Current Incidents of Negro Industrial Achievements,” freedpeople who

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<sup>277</sup> “What Causes Anarchy?” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 19, 1868, page 594.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Foner and Brown, *Forever Free*, 83.

<sup>280</sup> Rev. Irving E. Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days, or A Story Based on Facts* (Columbia: The State Company Printers, 1911), 125, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999, accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/lowery/lowery.html>.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 125.

had “left the old plantation with nothing—absolutely nothing” had made great strides, particularly in the acquisition of property. Lowery claimed that “The figures are almost incredible, but they are said to be based on government authority. . . . [Freedpeople] own 137,000 farms and homes, which consist of 40,000,000 acres.”<sup>282</sup> African-American freedpeople not only acquired farmland and other forms of private property after emancipation but also ran for political office, voted, voiced their opinions through newspaper editorials, established and attended schools, and formed families.

White Americans, particularly those residing in former Confederate states, were discomfited by the presence of African Americans as free men and women in spheres previously restricted to themselves. Ex-slave Henry Clay Bruce recorded that, in some instances, tensions between white and black citizens resulted from exaggerated fears about an increasingly competitive labor market. In his autobiographical narrative, he describes how “The freeing of the American slaves and their partial migration to these states, seeking employment, excited the enmity of the white laborers, particularly the Irish, because at that time they constituted fully seventy-five per cent of the laboring class, and who imagined that the influx of Negro laborers from the South, would divide the labor monopoly which they held.”<sup>283</sup> White Southern planters also vigorously resisted black integration. James L. Roark presents a persuasive analysis of white attitudes toward freed blacks after abolition, arguing that the “master-slave relationship, with its enormous social distance and legally defined stations, allowed close contact, even intimacy, without threatening white status,” but

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>283</sup> For an analysis of nineteenth-century Irish and African-American relations, see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man* (York: P. Anstadt & Sons, 1895), 119; Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1997, accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/bruce/bruce.html>.

emancipation “drastically reduced the social distance between whites and blacks, prompting whites to . . . seek physical separation as a buttress to their own status.”<sup>284</sup> Seeking to reconsolidate their political, economic, and social power, white Southerners planters and laborers alike supported the passage of new segregation laws and laws favoring landlords after 1876 which gradually disenfranchised and segregated black Americans, a concentrated effort that reached its zenith at century’s end with the Supreme Court’s endorsement of the “separate but equal” doctrine. The outcome of this case pointed to the South’s unwillingness—and the nation’s—to protect freedpeople’s civil rights.

These examples suggest that post-emancipation integration was largely incomplete and contested. Whites felt threatened by black progress and unconfident of their position in the new post-emancipation order, a sentiment exacerbated by the influx of millions of immigrants and the coerced assimilation of Native Americans during the late nineteenth century. Susan Mizruchi characterizes the post-bellum era as one in which the United States realized its potential as “the first multicultural modern capitalist society,” a paradoxical place in which diversity was alternately hailed and feared because while some Americans and businesses welcomed new workers, others “aggressively manipulated racial hostility, fanning the flames of nativism, devaluing and excluding through various means blacks and ethnic others, and defending the social Darwinism that legitimated claims of Anglo-Saxon purity.”<sup>285</sup> In this heated environment, Northerners and Southerners found ample grounds in the stories of Page and Harris to justify their resistance to the assimilation of freedpeople.

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<sup>284</sup> James L. Roark, *Masters without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977), 200.

<sup>285</sup> Susan L. Mizruchi, *The Rise of Multicultural America: Economy and Print Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2, 3.

In Russia, Tsar Alexander II's emancipation of the nation's serfs brought similar challenges of assimilation during an era characterized by social reform, geographic expansion, industrialization, and urbanization. After the issuance of the Emancipation Manifesto in 1861, former serfs harbored high hopes about the future and the rights to which they would be entitled, reveling in their new status as liberated subjects. In a rare autobiographical account of his memories of emancipation, ex-serf E.P. Klimenov recorded in 1863 that, upon hearing news of their liberation, "Brothers of the underclass shouted 'Hooray!' 'Hooray!' [while] others said, 'See here, now we will be able to run our own household,' 'Now we ourselves can marry and give away our daughters,' 'At last I will be able to conduct trade on my own!'"<sup>286</sup> His account attests to the enserfed peasants' desire to gain control of different aspects of their lives that ranged from the ability to determine their own economic fate to the right to marry women of their own choosing. Klimenov joyfully expressed his belief that "to everyone a lesson of mercy was given, now to every man personal rights and property rights were secured," positing that the peasants' most precious civil liberties related to their legal rights.<sup>287</sup> He delineated the changes he expected to see, predicting that "peasants in the midst of legal battles in courts will deal with one another judicially" and that the freed serf would be treated as "a subject of his Sovereign like all others."<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> I believe this serf narrative is largely unknown to Russian and Western scholars. E.P. Klimenov, *Prazdnichnye vospominaniia dlia krest'ian, osvobozhdennykh ot krepostnoi zavisimosti Vsemilostiveishim Manifestom 19-go fevralia 1861 goda. Pisal byvshii krestpostnoi* (St. Petersburg: 1863), page 5, Russian National Library Archive.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 7.

Some of Klimenov's predictions were realized during the post-emancipation era when, Jane Burbank argues, the state "reconfigure[d] social relations both in the countryside and in the polity as a whole."<sup>289</sup> After the abolition of serfdom, the tsarist government replaced the two legal systems that governed enserfed and state peasants with one overarching legal code, *The Regulation of the Rural Estate*, which categorized both groups as belonging to *sel'skoe obshchestvo* (rural society).<sup>290</sup> The system granted the peasantry increased control over their affairs by giving authority to regional village communes and townships.<sup>291</sup> Burbank contends that these changes led to "the creation of a very localized court system, based on traditional principles of self-administration and central oversight, but with profound significance for the incorporation of peasants into the legal system and for the orderly, lawful regulation of rural affairs."<sup>292</sup> Through these judicial reforms, emancipated serfs gained important new civil rights such as the ability to testify in court or to serve as judges.

The abolition of serfdom also changed the structure of Russian society by permanently altering both the historic relationships between masters and serfs and the ways in which peasant communities operated within the broader system. David Moon posits that abolition changed "the relationship between peasant society and the ruling and landowning elites" because the "noble landowners were largely removed as intermediaries between the

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<sup>289</sup> Jane Burbank, *Russian Peasants Go to Court: Legal Culture in the Countryside, 1905-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 3, 4.

former seigniorial peasantry and the state.”<sup>293</sup> Consequently, communities of freed serfs became increasingly autonomous during the 1860s and 1870s, when village communes took on a growing responsibility for important functions like the distribution of land, the collection of taxes, and the provision of credit.<sup>294</sup>

At the same time, several aspects of the institutional framework of serfdom remained intact.<sup>295</sup> As in the American South, many former serfs remained upon their landlords’ estates even after they legally became subjects of the Russian nation. Burdened by what one early twentieth-century historian called “crippling” redemption payments for their liberation, the peasants found themselves “in clear ruin,” unable to leave their landlords’ property or to pay the state the required annual amounts.<sup>296</sup> Over ten years after emancipation, in 1873, ex-serf Aleksandr Nikitenko recorded in his diary that although “the condition of the peasants has generally been improving since emancipation. . . . their mode of life is still very unsatisfactory almost everywhere in the empire” due in part to “the meagre land allotments in many provinces and the excessive, disproportionate compensation demanded for them; [and] very high taxes.”<sup>297</sup> With peasants mired in debt and continuing to farm the land of their former masters’ estates, it appeared to some as though serfdom persisted during the years following the tsar’s issuance of the Emancipation Manifesto. Furthermore, as ex-serf E.P.

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<sup>293</sup> David Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930: The World the Peasants Made* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999), 343.

<sup>294</sup> Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixter, *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 98-99.

<sup>295</sup> Moon contends that abolition “left largely unchanged and unchallenged the rural economy and the peasants’ basic units of social organisation, households and communes.” Moon, *The Russian Peasantry*, 343.

<sup>296</sup> Fedor Pavlovich Elenev, “Pervye shagi osvobozhdeniia pomeshchich’ikh krest’ian v Rossii,” *Russkii Arkhiv*, tom 7, March of 1886, page 354.

<sup>297</sup> Aleksandr Nikitenko, *Diary of a Russian Censor*, translated by Helen Saltz Jacobson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 361.

Klimenov acknowledged in 1863, although his fellow peasants, “with inexpressible anticipation, counted the months, days, hours until the emergence of the Manifesto of the Most Merciful,” their new status as liberated peasants could not erase their shared history or collective memory of their former exploited position.<sup>298</sup>

Like the former serfs, Russian landlords also found it difficult to forget the pre-emancipation era, albeit for different reasons. The abolition of serfdom reduced their power and social stature as they slowly lost control over the peasantry and their farmland between 1861 and 1905. On the eve of emancipation, members of the nobility expressed a subdued reaction to the issuance of the Emancipation Manifesto for two reasons: First, they played a role in crafting the terms of the document, and second, they recognized that it was futile to resist the will of a tsar who purportedly declared to his State Council members in January of 1861, “Autocracy established serfdom firmly in Russia, and it is autocracy that must end it.”<sup>299</sup> During the decades that followed emancipation, however, the nobility found themselves in an increasingly weakened position. Abraham Ascher claims that “the most striking manifestation of the nobility’s decline was its loss of land,” citing statistics that reveal landlords sold one-third of their arable property to merchants and peasants between 1861 and 1905.<sup>300</sup> Those that held onto their estates faced a substantial reduction in market prices for crops during the late nineteenth century and were generally, according to Ascher, “unable or unwilling to administer their estates on a capitalist basis” by adopting modern

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<sup>298</sup> Klimenov, *Prazdnichnye vospominaniia dlia krest'ian*, 4.

<sup>299</sup> Nikitenko, *Diary of a Russian Censor*, 219.

<sup>300</sup> Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994), 28.



technology or effectively managing their affairs.<sup>301</sup> In a competitive global economy, the nobility were ineffective stewards and investors.<sup>302</sup>

An examination of a Russian nobleman's memoir illuminates the challenges landowners faced after the abolition of serfdom. In his autobiography, *Recollections: From Serfdom to Bolshevism* (1924), Nikolai Egorovich Vrangeli describes his life growing up on a rural estate in the IamburgskiiYamburgskii district in words that recall those of a white Southern planter speaking about his black mammy.<sup>303</sup> On the family property, he remembers fondly, he "suckled at the breast of a serf nurse [and] grew up in the hands of a serf nanny [who] took the place of [his] deceased mother."<sup>304</sup> Although he acknowledges some of serfdom's negative attributes, Vrangeli espouses a paternalistic view of the institution, claiming, for instance, his father's serfs "lived richly, prospered, and [that] the house servants were well-dressed, well-shod, and well-nourished."<sup>305</sup> Furthermore, he laments the fact that many of his contemporaries do not know what he deems to be the truth about serfdom, condemning those who "judge it completely inaccurately, drawing conclusions not from the aggregate, but from the most extreme events about which they have learned."<sup>306</sup> Ultimately,

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Anatole G. Mazour, "Economic Decline of Landlordism in Russia," *The Historian* 8, no. 2 (1946): 156.

<sup>303</sup> Nikolai Egorovich Vrangeli, *Vospominaniia: Ot krepostnogo prava do bol'shevikov* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), originally published in Berlin in 1924. Vrangeli's memoir, *Recollections: From Serfdom to Bolshevism*, traces Russia's development during the post-emancipation era and recalls his life growing up on a rural estate. Vrangeli's son, Petr Vrangeli, served as a commanding officer of the White Guards during the Russian Civil War (1918-1921). Many members of Vrangeli's family were killed during the war, but others escaped by fleeing the country.

<sup>304</sup> Vrangeli, *Vospominaniia*, 24.

<sup>305</sup> This section appears to be missing from the published book version. Vrangeli, *Vospominaniia*, accessed at <http://www.dk1868.ru/history/VRANG1.htm>.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 23.

Vrangel concludes, “Life under serfdom was not sweet, but it was not as terrible as it is usually written about today.”<sup>307</sup>

The reasons for his nostalgia for the pre-emancipation era become clearer as he describes the impact of the abolition of serfdom on his family’s estate and the relations between the freed serfs and their former masters. Following his graduation from college abroad, Vrangel returned to Russia and found that his home had changed greatly. After their liberation, the youngest generation of the family’s serfs “permanently departed and worked in different places,” but they were supposedly unable to acclimate successfully to their new circumstances.<sup>308</sup> Furthermore, Vrangel was shocked to find the estate in disrepair; buildings had collapsed, logs were rotting in the pond, and paths were overgrown with brush.<sup>309</sup> Vrangel queried his father about the manor, and he responded by explaining that it was “simply impossible to employ the local [peasant] laborers” because they refused to use the new mowing-machine he had purchased in an effort to modernize the farm.<sup>310</sup> Vrangel’s description of the estate and retelling of his conversation indicate that masters and their former bondsmen sustained complicated and uneasy relationships after emancipation. He contends that, while peasants celebrated their newfound freedom, some landlords seeking to maintain productive estates, like Vrangel’s father, chafed at having to pay their workers and at the peasantry’s rejection of their terms of service.

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

Although Vrangeli's father generally supported the liberation of the peasantry, even working alongside former serfs on the district council, he told Vrangeli several anecdotes that further attest to the challenges of the post-emancipation era and the negative reactions of landlords following the abolition of serfdom. Vrangeli's father recounted a story about a "rich and influential landlord who was sentenced to house arrest for beating his servant," a privilege permitted under serfdom but forbidden during the post-emancipation era.<sup>311</sup> Members of the nobility resented their reduced power and a post-emancipation social order in which, as nobleman and anarchist Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin recorded in his memoirs, peasants had lost "all traces of servility" and "talked to their masters as equals talk to equals, as if they had never stood in different relations."<sup>312</sup> Some landlords, like Vrangeli's elderly neighbor who declared in a written complaint that the new order effectively "equated the serf with the nobleman," refused to accept their new social rank.<sup>313</sup> Russian noblemen like Danilevskii, Solov'ev, Salias, and Opochinin, each of whom descended from an aristocratic family, understood landlords' frustration and gave expression to them in fiction that depicted *pomeshchiki* at the height of their power during the pre-emancipation era. These depictions appealed not only to members of the aristocracy, but also to middle-class, non-peasant audiences who were eager to escape from the upheaval of the post-emancipation era and the complexities their modernizing world.

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>312</sup> Prince Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Smith, Elder, 1899), 158.

<sup>313</sup> Vrangeli, *Vospominaniia*, 90.

## Origins of Historical Fiction about Slavery and Serfdom in the United States and Russia

American writers Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris and Russian authors Grigorii Danilevskii, Vsevolod Solov'ev, Evgenii Salias, and Evgenii OPOCHININ succeeded in capturing the public's imagination through historical fiction that built upon and re-interpreted older literary traditions. The sentimental short stories of Page and Harris functioned as a subset of the broader category of Southern plantation literature, which grew in popularity following John Pendleton Kennedy's publication of *The Swallow Barn, or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion*, in 1832.<sup>314</sup> A native of Maryland who summered in present-day West Virginia, Kennedy depicted in his novel a peaceful plantation where African-American slaves faithfully served the paternalistic white masters upon whom they relied.<sup>315</sup> The success of Kennedy's novel encouraged other authors who similarly set their tales in Southern locales. Although the works of James Kirke Paulding, William Alexander Caruthers, and Nathaniel Beverly Tucker did not gain the degree of national recognition that Page and Harris would achieve, they established the conventions of the genre.<sup>316</sup> In subsequent nineteenth-century Southern plantation literature, Kenneth Stampp observes, white authors began to consistently depict black slaves using the archetype of the "Sambo," the "perpetually dependent, irresponsible child," a representation that differed from eighteenth-century depictions of the dangerous, potentially rebellious slave who threatened to

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<sup>314</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy, *The Swallow Barn* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1832).

<sup>315</sup> Alan Henry Rose, "The Image of the Negro in the Pre-Civil-War Novels of John Pendleton Kennedy and William Gilmore Simms," *Journal of American Studies* 4, no. 2 (1971): 218-219.

<sup>316</sup> For more information about antebellum plantation literature, see William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 148-150.

overthrow the established order.<sup>317</sup> Stamppp persuasively contends that a direct link existed between “the appearance of Sambo and the growing moral attack on slavery” in antebellum America; the notion of the helpless, dependent slave “was always one of the proslavery writers' major arguments for keeping the Negro in bondage.”<sup>318</sup> Stamppp’s argument can be similarly applied to post-emancipation plantation literature; indeed, the re-emergence of the Sambo figure in the short stories of Page and Harris coincided with African Americans’ growing independence and success in the fields of politics, business, and education during the 1880s and 1890s. Post-emancipation literature depicting blacks as inferior bolstered white Southerners’ arguments in favor of Jim Crow laws that would restore whites’ political, economic, and societal power.

Alexander McClurg’s 1892 review of Harris’s *On the Plantation* perfectly expresses the prevailing mood among many white Americans during the late nineteenth century.<sup>319</sup> McClurg, a captain of the Eighty-Eighth Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, praises the author’s representations of “the old plantation negro and the old negro house servant,” calling them “very interesting and attractive people” who exhibited “quaint good sense . . . and natural courtesy,” but asks the reader, “Why has the negro of to-day so completely lost the best traits that marked his race at that time?”<sup>320</sup> In answering his own query, he blames the abolition of slavery, which “smit[ed] . . . the victims as well as the oppressors,” African-American freedpeople’s acquisition of the right to vote, and finally, the

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<sup>317</sup> Kenneth M. Stamppp, “Rebels and Sambos: The Search for the Negro's Personality in Slavery,” *The Journal of Southern History* 37 no. 3 (1971): 372.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>319</sup> Alexander McClurg was a bookseller who resided in Chicago, where *The Dial* was headquartered.

<sup>320</sup> Alexander McClurg, “Old-Time Plantation Life,” *The Dial*, June 1892, Vol. XIII., page 46.

freedperson's "effort to seem the peer of the whites," which made him lose "some characteristics of his own which once made his race attractive and lovable."<sup>321</sup> The only solution to the problems of this post-emancipation "period of transition," McClurg concludes, is to hold out hope that "another hundred years may develop the negro of to-day into something much better than now seems probable."<sup>322</sup> Thus, American readers like McClurg found themselves drawn to the literature of Page and Harris because these authors created appealing representations of blacks as servile, contended slaves. Writing in dialect and incorporating elements of African-American folklore and culture, Page and Harris crafted authentic portrayals of slaves that helped convince readers of the veracity of their underlying message about white superiority. Readers who had never experienced slavery firsthand but who resented black progress during the post-emancipation era preferred the visions promoted by Page and Harris and empathized with the white planters of the antebellum South.

In Russia, the earliest works of historical fiction include Nikolai Gogol's *Taras Bulba* (1835) and Aleksandr Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* (1836).<sup>323</sup> Although few notable novels appeared during the 1850s and early 1860s, the publication of Lev Tolstoi's groundbreaking epic *War and Peace* (1869), set during the War of 1812, ushered in a new era in

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> These authors were likely influenced by authors of the Romantic tradition, including Sir Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo. Russian readers also became increasingly interested in their national history thanks to the appearance of Nikolai Karamzin's groundbreaking twelve-volume set, *Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo* (History of the Russian State) (1818-1829). See Ungurianu, *Plotting History*, 14. For an analysis of literature's influence in nineteenth-century Russia, see A.I. Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu i drugie raboty po istoricheskoi sotsiologii russkoi literatury* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2009).

which historical fiction became increasingly popular.<sup>324</sup> Considered by some commentators to be second-rate writers whose works fell far short of Tolstoi, authors like Danilevskii, Solov'ev, and Salias produced novels and short stories during the second half of the nineteenth century that attracted thousands of Russian readers who expressed renewed interest in their past and national culture.

The resurgence in nationalist enthusiasm was fueled by Russia's rout in the Crimean War (1853-1856) and by the upheaval produced by Tsar Alexander II's numerous legislative initiatives during the era of Great Reforms.<sup>325</sup> Olga Maiorova argues that Russia stood at the threshold of a new age, a moment when "the crescendo of self-criticism and the search for developmental models" came together and "began to evolve into full-fledged attempts to redefine the nation."<sup>326</sup> The efforts of statesmen, intellectuals, and artists to articulate what it meant to be "Russian," however, were complicated by the Empire's expansion to encompass territory in the Caucasus and Central Asia between 1860 and 1890.<sup>327</sup> Now "operating in a composite imperial terrain," historian Laura Engelstein posits, Russian men and women strove to understand how they could best "construct a sense of national pride in relation to a state that included a mix of cultures, languages, and traditions."<sup>328</sup> Evidence of the public's growing interest in Russia's diverse peoples can be seen in new magazine articles like *Niva's* "Narody Rossii" (Peoples of Russia) series and in the popularity of events like the Moscow

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<sup>324</sup> Ungurianu, *Plotting History*, 5.

<sup>325</sup> Olga Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>328</sup> Laura Engelstein, *Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 11.

Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867, attended by 86,000 people, which depicted different ethnographic groups through a series of displays featuring costumed mannequins.<sup>329</sup> Through these initiatives and others, organizers deliberately sought to emphasize the dominance of the “Great Russian” people over the Empire’s newest minority groups.<sup>330</sup>

Nationalism also emerged as a central theme in the art, music, and literature of the era. Dan Ungurianu points to the contributions of composers Modest Musorgskii and Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov, artists like Il’ia Repin and Grigorii Miasoedov, and Russian Revivalist architects as additional evidence of the creative class’s fascination with Russia’s cultural heritage.<sup>331</sup> Literature proved to be one of the most fruitful areas for historical reflection. Ungurianu has found that, between 1870 and 1890, 160 new books of historical fiction were published, an occurrence that sociologist Nikolai Mikhailovskii described as akin to “blini churned out in massive quantities during Shrovetide.”<sup>332</sup> The explosion of fictional works that idealized and glorified Russia’s history appalled many literary critics, who deplored their simplistic, frivolous nature, but, as in the United States, the public enjoyed reading dramatized interpretations of their country’s past. For instance, readers devoured Salias’s fictional tales of heroic princes and princesses, tsars and the nobility, and, in the words of an

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<sup>329</sup> Nathaniel Knight, *The Empire on Display: Ethnographic Exhibition and the Conceptualization of Human Diversity in Post-Emancipation Russia* (Washington, D.C.: The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, 2001), iii, 25; and N. Kalashnikova, “Russia’s First Ethnographic Exhibition,” in *European Slavs and the Peoples of Russia: In Commemoration of the 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Ethnographic Exhibition Held in 1867* (St. Petersburg, Slavia, 2008), 11.

<sup>330</sup> While striving to show off the Empire’s diversity, exhibition organizers simultaneously struggled to emphasize their view that the Russian people remained “the undisputed master ethnicity of the Empire.” Thirty years later, when Tsar Alexander III founded the Russian Ethnographic Museum (1895), the institution’s curator grappled with the same problem of embracing diversity while displaying Russian ethnic dominance. Knight, *The Empire on Display*, 20; and “Collections,” Russian Ethnographic Museum, accessed at <http://eng.ethnomuseum.ru/node/38>.

<sup>331</sup> Ungurianu, *Plotting History*, 136.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.



early twentieth-century Russian encyclopedia article about Salias, stories that included representations of serfs as “‘faithful servants,’ the slaves of their masters.”<sup>333</sup> His contemporaries, Danilevskii, Solov’ev, and Opochinin, pursued a similar literary strategy by penning stories that romanticized life for the peasantry under serfdom. They depicted fond, brotherly relations between masters and their loyal retainers or portrayed the serfs as a group of people that received ample support and care from their landlords in return for their faithful work. Like the African Americans of Page’s and Harris’s tales, Russia’s bonded laborers of late nineteenth-century historical fiction preferred life under serfdom to liberty.

### **Biographical Connections between Page, Harris, Salias, Danilevskii, Opochinin, and Solov’ev**

The most popular late nineteenth-century authors of historical fiction have in common several important biographical features. Each of the six aforementioned authors came from the landowning class, a fact that may partly account for their interest in portraying positive relations between masters and bondsmen during the pre-emancipation era. In the United States, Thomas Nelson Page was born in 1853 on a plantation constructed by slaves in Hanover County, Virginia, where as a child he witnessed the Union and Confederate armies trudging up and down the path leading to Richmond.<sup>334</sup> Both Thomas and his younger brother, Rosewell, fondly recalled the family’s relationship to their black slaves.<sup>335</sup> In an autobiographical account of his childhood written for Page’s daughter Evelyn, Rosewell

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<sup>333</sup> A. Kokorev, “Salias-de-Tournemir,” *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, v. 11 (Moscow, 1929-1939), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0010.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0010.shtml).

<sup>334</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, “Recollections and Reflections,” 3, in Box 17, Thomas Nelson Page Papers, 1739-1927 and undated bulk, 1885-1920. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University; and C.W. Coleman, Jr., “The Homes of Some Southern Authors, IV, V, VI,” *The Chautauquan*, March 1888, page 8.

<sup>335</sup> Page, “Recollections and Reflections,” 14.

recorded that he and his siblings frequently visited four slave children in “the backyard where they lived” and with whom he “liked very much to play.”<sup>336</sup>

As an adult, Thomas Nelson Page similarly portrayed the family’s relationship with their slaves as one of affection and mutual respect. In his essay, “The Old-Time Negro,” Page asserted that the “relation between masters and servants was one of close personal acquaintance and friendliness, beginning at the cradle and scarcely ending at the grave.”<sup>337</sup> Of all the slaves on a plantation, Page declared, a mammy was “the closest intimate of the family,” a maternal figure only understood by those “who were rocked on her generous bosom, slept on her bed, fed at her table, were directed and controlled by her, watched by her unsleeping eye, and led by her precept in the way of truth, justice, and humanity.”<sup>338</sup> However, Page’s insistence that mammies and their young charges always maintained affectionate ties was more than sentimental musing; as Micki McElya points out, white Southerners who “shared memories of mammy or claimed some affinity with a mammy figure were necessarily claiming a part of that class legacy and status.”<sup>339</sup> Thus, Page deliberately referenced his family’s members of the slave-owning class; by doing so, he sought to establish his authority as an elite, educated white Southerner whose account of

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<sup>336</sup> Rosewell Page was five years younger than Thomas. Rosewell Page, “When I was a Little Boy,” edited by Harriet Holman (Coconut Grove, FL: Field Research Projects, 1970), 1, 24, 25. Box 14, Thomas Nelson Page Papers, 1739-1927 and undated bulk, 1885-1920. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>337</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, “The Old-Time Negro,” in *The Old South: Essays Social and Political* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 307.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 313, 314.

<sup>339</sup> Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 44-45.

black-white relations could be trusted by Northern middle-class readers lacking firsthand experience with slavery.

Page also wrote in dialect to further provide his short stories with a veneer of authenticity. This aspect of his work thrilled audiences, particularly during public gatherings when Page read aloud to his enthusiastic fans. After Page narrated the short story “Unc’ Edinburgh’s Drownd’n,” to audiences in Macon, Georgia, one reporter claimed that “Mr. Page’s dialect was as it should have been from a native Virginian, simply perfect.”<sup>340</sup> The journalist recounted that, as Page told of an African-American freedman’s “devotion to his dashing young master in a strain that touched every heart,” he revealed to listeners “the amusing weakness of the negro with that fidelity to nature which distinguishes the genuine artist.”<sup>341</sup> Such episodes help explain how Page gained enormous popularity among readers by positioning himself as a Southern gentleman and reliable raconteur through his ostensible familiarity with black speech. Indeed, another critic noted, Page’s works, “while intensely Southern, are broad in their view and national in their feeling,” winning him friends and fans in the North and South alike.<sup>342</sup> Thus, having successfully cultivated a reputation as a dependable storyteller, Page wrote fictionalized accounts of slavery during the 1880s and 1890s that effectively promoted a narrative that idealized pre-emancipation race relations and helped achieve the goal of national reconciliation.

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<sup>340</sup> “Two Southern Humorists. Their Appearance at the Author's Readings in New York,” *The Macon Telegraph*, December 29, 1887, page 4.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> “The Plantation Edition of Thomas Nelson Page,” *The Book Buyer*, page 210, approximately 1908, Box 17, Thomas Nelson Page Papers, 1739-1927 and undated bulk, 1885-1920. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Like Page, Joel Chandler Harris came from an elite, white Southern family. Born in 1848 in Eatonton, Georgia, Harris had a somewhat unusual upbringing after his father, an Irish day-laborer, left his mother, Mary Harris, shortly after his birth.<sup>343</sup> Abandoned by her lover, Mary was aided by friends and members of her family, which Julia Collier Harris describes as “a prominent one in middle Georgia” with “well-known connections in that part of the State.”<sup>344</sup> Her son, Joel, received a private school education and grew up in relative comfort with his devoted mother.<sup>345</sup> In 1862, Harris, who took his mother’s last name, responded to a job advertisement for a printing apprenticeship at a local paper called *The Countryman*.<sup>346</sup> In a biographical article for *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, Harris recounted his experiences working at *The Countryman*, which was housed at one of several plantations scattered across the countryside. There, Harris recalled, he listened to the stories of local African-American slaves and “absorbed the stories, songs, and myths” without knowledge of their future “literary value.”<sup>347</sup> “Uncle” George Terrell, a slave who later served as the model for Harris’s black storyteller, “Uncle Remus,” was one of several men and women who imparted to the teenage boy many of the tales that would later bring him worldwide acclaim.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Julia Collier Harris, *The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 4, 7.

<sup>344</sup> Julia Collier Harris was Joel Chandler Harris’s daughter-in-law. *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>346</sup> Joel Chandler Harris, “An Accidental Author,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, April of 1886, page 37.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>348</sup> President Theodore Roosevelt was a great admirer of Harris, inviting him to the White House in the winter of 1902. “Joel Chandler Harris,” in *Greater Pittsburg Magazine*, page 2, undated, in Series 4 Printed Materials about Harris, Folder 3, Joel Chandler Harris Papers Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; and “‘Uncle’ George Terrell, Photograph, 1880s, Joel Chandler Harris Papers Collection,

Like Page, a lawyer who wrote historical fiction, Harris maintained dual careers as a journalist and author. After creating the popular character of “Uncle Remus” for a newspaper column in the *Atlanta Constitution*, where he served as an associate editor, Harris began writing fiction on a part-time basis.<sup>349</sup> His first volume of stories, told from the perspective of a black freedman named “Uncle Remus” to a white boy, brought him immediate renown and set him up for a lengthy career as an author of repackaged African-American folk tales written in black dialect.<sup>350</sup> Harris also shared idealistic memories of black-white relations from the antebellum era that mirrored those of Page, a testament to their common vision of the past. In his fictionalized memoir, *On the Plantation* (1909), he recorded that, as an apprentice living on the estate, “The negro women looked after him with almost motherly care, and pursued him with kindness, while the men were always ready to contribute to his pleasure.”<sup>351</sup> After the abolition of slavery, Harris remembered that the youngest generation of laborers abandoned the estate while older workers stayed on “in their accustomed places,” a statement that recalls the post-emancipation experiences of the Russian nobleman Vrangeli.<sup>352</sup>

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Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, accessed December 8, 2015, Atlanta Rail Corridor Archive, <http://atlrailcorridorarchive.org/items/show/272>.

<sup>349</sup> R. Bruce Bickley, “Joel Chandler Harris (1845-1908),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, July 18, 2002, accessed online on December 8, 2015, at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/joel-chandler-harris-1845-1908>.

<sup>350</sup> Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings—The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881).

<sup>351</sup> Harris attributed his good treatment in part to his friend, “Mink,” a fugitive slave who hid in the woods nearby and who encouraged the other plantation slaves to be kind to him. Joel Chandler Harris, *On the Plantation* (New York: D. Appleton, 1909), 33.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

Harris's nostalgic depictions of the pre-emancipation South, presented to readers in *On the Plantation* and in more than 185 "Uncle Remus" folk tales, resonated with Northern and Southern readers in multiple ways. Page, who felt "every nerve and sense tingling and delighted as [he] used to do when [he] was a little boy" upon first reading *Uncle Remus*, argued that above all else its "masterly setting and narration" appealed most to readers.<sup>353</sup> While reading Uncle Remus's folk tales, Page believed that audiences were "translated bodily to the old man's fireside in his cabin," a testament to Harris's skill in "preserv[ing] the folk-lore . . . in its verisimilitude of coloring, tone, and substance" and genius in "reproduc[ing] the Southern civilization which is the 'setting' he has employed for his characters."<sup>354</sup> But Harris gave the acquaintances of his youth primary credit for his fictional material, explaining to author Ambrose Bierce in 1896, "Even the Remus business is not my own, but is composed of stories originally told to me by negroes."<sup>355</sup>

Like Page, Harris created an idealized version of the antebellum South for readers, but he did so by retelling black folk tales through the voice of a docile character whom Andrew Carnegie called "the Slave in his most attractive form, the storyteller of his Master's children."<sup>356</sup> Through his representation of a harmless, submissive freedman, Uncle Remus, Harris captured the imagination of white readers, stimulated public interest in black culture at

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<sup>353</sup> Thomas Nelson Page to Joel Chandler Harris, December 28, 1883, Thomas Nelson Page Correspondence, Joel Chandler Harris Papers Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; and Thomas Nelson Page, "Literature in the South since the War," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, December of 1891, American Periodicals, page 740.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Joel Chandler Harris to Ambrose Bierce, July 16, 1896, Atlanta, GA, Bierce-Harris Correspondence, Joel Chandler Harris Papers Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

<sup>356</sup> Andrew Carnegie to Joel Chandler Harris, March 19, 1907, Carnegie-Harris Correspondence, Joel Chandler Harris Papers Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

a time when racial tensions remained high, and tacitly reinforced whites' belief that freedpeople ought not to challenge their societal position.

Russian authors Salias, Danilevskii, Solov'ev, and Opochinin similarly came from the Russian landowning estate. Salias, the most popular writer of the group, was born in 1841 to a French count and his Russian wife, who was a member of the aristocratic Sukhovo-Kobyliny family.<sup>357</sup> Like Harris, Salias was primarily raised by his mother, a writer who published under the *nom de plume* Evgeniia Tur, after his wayward father spent the family's money and was subsequently kicked out of Russia for taking part in a duel.<sup>358</sup> In addition, Salias also came to producing historical fiction through journalism after working for the *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* (St. Petersburg Gazette) during the 1870s.<sup>359</sup> A prolific writer, Salias produced countless short stories and novels published in journals like *Niva* (Grain Field), *Ogonek* (Little Flame), *Russkii vestnik* (Russian Messenger), and *Istoricheskii vestnik* (Historical Messenger) during the late 1870s and 1880s.<sup>360</sup> In novels like *Na Moskve* (In Moscow), *Arakcheevskii synok* (Arakcheev's Son), and *Peterburgskoe deistvo* (The Petersburg Act), Salias described the relations between serfs and the masters they faithfully served.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Kokorev, "Salias-de-Tournemir," accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0010.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0010.shtml).

<sup>358</sup> For an analysis of Tur's writing, see Jehanne Gheith, *Finding the Middle Ground: Krestovskii, Tur, and the Power of Ambivalence in Nineteenth-Century Russian Women's Prose* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 35. Beliaev, ed., *Evgenii Salias*, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0020.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0020.shtml)

<sup>359</sup> Beliaev, ed., *Evgenii Salias*, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0020.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0020.shtml).

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid. *Na Moskve* and *Peterburgskoe deistvo* were published in 1880, while *Arakcheevskii synok* appeared in 1888.

Grigorii Danilevskii, Vsevolod Solov'ev, and Evgenii Opochinin similarly descended from elite Slavic families and created literature that appealed to a mass readership.

Danilevskii (1829-1890) was born to a Ukrainian landowner, while Solov'ev (1849-1903) descended from an old Ukrainian-Polish family comprising famous intellectuals and writers.<sup>362</sup> Opochinin (1858-1928) was a member of an ancient but impoverished noble family from the province of Yaroslavl who, after completing his studies in Kiev, moved in 1879 to St. Petersburg where he helped run the Museum of Antiquities from 1879 to 1883.<sup>363</sup> All three men were involved in journalism throughout their literary careers; Danilevskii and Opochinin edited the newspaper *Pravitel'stvennyi vestnik* (Governmental Messenger) during the 1870s-1890s, while Solov'ev edited the journal *Sever* (North) from 1888-1891.<sup>364</sup>

Danilevskii's most famous works included *Mirovich* and *Kniazhna Tarakanova* (Princess Tarakanova), while Solov'ev's most popular stories and novels included his chronicle of four generations: *Sergei Gorbatov* (Sergei Gorbatov), *Volter'ianets* (The Voltairean), *Staryi dom* (Old House), *Izgnannik* (Outcast), and *Poslednie Gorbatovy* (The Last Gorbatovs).<sup>365</sup> A prolific writer, Opochinin wrote numerous short stories, essays, and books in which he attempted to recreate the domestic atmosphere of bygone days or to disseminate to mass

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<sup>362</sup> P.A. Nikolaev, *Russkie pisateli* (1800-1917), G-K (Moscow: Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia, 1992), 80, 741.

<sup>363</sup> Nikolaev, *Russkie pisateli* (M-P), 441.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.; "Grigorii Petrovich Danilevskii (nekrolog)," *Istoricheskii vestnik*, tom 43. no. 1, 1891, page 209; and S. A. Vasil'eva, *Belletristika Vs. S. Solov'eva* (Tver': Tverskoi gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2009), 15.

<sup>365</sup> Danilevskii's *Mirovich* was published in 1879 and *Kniazhna Tarakanova* appeared in 1883. Solov'ev's *Kniazhna Ostrozhskaia* was published in 1876, and his chronicles appeared between 1881 and 1886. "Grigorii Petrovich Danilevskii (6 dekabria 1890g)," *Niva*, December 15, 1890, no. 50, page 1279.



audiences the folk traditions of the Russian peasantry, as did Joel Chandler Harris.<sup>366</sup> Some of his most famous works included *Ocherki starorusskogo byta* (Sketches of Old Russian Everyday Life), his collection of short stories entitled *Russkii okhotnichii rasskaz* (Russian Hunting Story), and the countless tales of historical fiction he published biweekly in the journal *Moskovskii listok* during the early twentieth century.<sup>367</sup>

The historical fiction of Salias, Danilevskii, Solov'ev, and Opochinin comprised what V.A. Viktorovich called a “second wave” of retrospective works that captivated the public imagination.<sup>368</sup> Artisans, tradesmen, students, and members of the intelligentsia were united as readers of late nineteenth-century historical fiction because of their fascination with Russia's past. Speaking of Solov'ev, Viktorovich argued that readers were drawn to the author's use of engaging plots and histrionic elements, features of his writing that were representative of the broader genre of historical fiction.<sup>369</sup> According to S.F. Gorianskaia's study of the reading habits of the workers, employees, and students who visited two public libraries in St. Petersburg, Solov'ev ranked in the top ten most widely read authors.<sup>370</sup> However, Salias surpassed Solov'ev and Danilevskii in popularity; his works were checked

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<sup>366</sup> Nikolaev, *Russkie pisateli* (P-M), 441; and Liana Gavrilova, “K 150-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Evgeniia Opochinina – pisatel'ia, zhurnalista i kolleksionera,” May 15, 2008, *Anfas-Profil*, no. 171 (17), accessed at [http://www.anfas-news.ru.postman.ru/news/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=1625](http://www.anfas-news.ru.postman.ru/news/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=1625) on January 6, 2016.

<sup>367</sup> Nikolaev, *Russkie pisateli* (P-M), 441-442

<sup>368</sup> Vasil'eva, *Belletristika Vs. S. Solov'eva*, 17.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 16. See S.F. Gorianskaia, *Pervye besplatnye gorodskie chital'ni v St. Peterburge (Organizatsiia ikh i itogi deiatel'nosti za 1888 god)*.

out from the library of St. Petersburg with even greater frequency.<sup>371</sup> Russians even preferred Salias to playwrights Aleksei Pisemskii and Aleksandr Ostrovskii, British novelist Charles Dickens, and even Fedor Dostoevskii.<sup>372</sup> Although some critics contended that Salias was merely a “slavish imitator” of Russian intellectual giant Lev Tolstoi, the public nonetheless devoured his works.<sup>373</sup>

Like Harris and Page, Salias, Danilevskii, Solov’ev, and Opochinin achieved literary success by establishing their reputations as reliable chroniclers of a pre-emancipation era. Solov’ev recorded that one of his central goals at the beginning of his literary career was to “acquaint the widest possible readership with the different interesting epochs of bygone Russian life, depicting them as they appeared to [him] through the free, unbiased study of historical materials.”<sup>374</sup> In spite of this professed goal, however, critics were generally aware of the liberties that belletrists of historical fiction took in order to craft the most engaging stories. For instance, P.P. Sokal’skii, a nineteenth-century folklorist considering the place of Danilevskii’s *Mirovich* among similar works, commented that readers of historical fiction typically grappled with a controversial question: “Is it necessary for a novelist to strictly adhere to historical facts, or is he free to use his own imagination when crafting historical dramas and novels?”<sup>375</sup> Although nineteenth-century literary critics would have answered

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<sup>371</sup> Lyubov Mankov, “Le Comte de Salhias-Tournemire (1840-1908), un Alexandre Dumas russe,” *Sciences en Russie* 2 (1997), accessed at <http://www.tournemire.net/salias.htm>; and Beliaev, ed., *Evgenii Salias*, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0020.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0020.shtml).

<sup>372</sup> Beliaev, ed., *Evgenii Salias*, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0020.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0020.shtml).

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Aleksandr Alekseevich Izmailov, *Sviatochnye rasskazy* (St. Petersburg: N.O. Merts, 1904), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/i/izmajlow\\_a\\_a/text\\_1904\\_v\\_s\\_soloviev\\_oldorfo.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/i/izmajlow_a_a/text_1904_v_s_soloviev_oldorfo.shtml).

<sup>375</sup> Petr Petrovich Sokal’skii, “Mirovich,” *Russkaia mysl’*, no. 11, June 10, 1880, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/sokalxskij\\_p\\_p/text\\_1880\\_mirovich\\_oldorfo.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/sokalxskij_p_p/text_1880_mirovich_oldorfo.shtml).

Sokal'skii's query in different ways, most readers accepted the belletrists' decision to combine history and fiction to produce entertaining literature.

As in the United States, personal experience burnished an author's reputation and gave his historical fiction an additional layer of authenticity. As one biographer wrote in 1890 of Salias, "It goes without saying that the author had the opportunity to closely observe serfdom and . . . its foundational relations," knowledge that "gave him the opportunity to create extraordinarily lively, energetic, vivid pictures of life during the era of serfdom."<sup>376</sup> As descendants of noble families or children who grew up on rural estates, Salias, Danilevskii, and Solov'ev appeared to possess special knowledge about the conditions of serfdom and the dynamics between masters and their peasants. Romanticized as they were, representations of faithful serfs and benevolent *pomeshchiki* appealed to readers who were attracted to idealized visions of the pre-emancipation era. Like the diverse American readers who looked to the antebellum South for an escape from the complicated racial tensions of the late nineteenth-century, Russians of differing estates turned toward the historical fiction that provided a welcome diversion from the post-emancipation realities of a new generation of peasants that demanded to be paid for their labor, asserted themselves in local political councils or judicial courts, or abandoned the estates of their former masters to compete for factory jobs in growing urban centers.

### **Representations of Serfdom and Slavery in American and Russian Historical Fiction**

Page, Harris, Salias, Danilevskii, Solov'ev, and Opochinin employed three similar literary strategies in their representations of serfdom, slavery, and the relationships between masters and bondsmen. First, to convince readers that serfdom and slavery were paternalistic

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<sup>376</sup> A.I. Vvedenskii, "'Graf' Evgenii Andreevich Salias," *Istoricheskii vestnik* no. 8, 1890, 393.

institutions essential to the bondsmen's survival, these authors emphasized the abundant resources that African Americans and peasants enjoyed in their descriptions of the pre-emancipation era. In particular, Page, Harris, and Opochinin subtly politicized these accounts by contrasting them with what they described as the abject poverty that freed slaves and peasants faced as liberated, rootless individuals. Page, Harris, Salias, Danilevskii, Solov'ev, and Opochinin also characterized fictional bondsmen as grateful for the material benefits of their societal position or freedpeople as yearning to return to the pre-emancipation era. In their stories, freed serfs and peasants speak with gratitude about their kind masters and, if liberated, fondly recall their days of servitude. Finally, these authors portrayed pre-emancipation relationships between masters and bondsmen as intimate, comfortable, and trusting. Masters, serfs, and slaves form maternal or fraternal bonds in youth; black and peasant mammies nurse their young masters; and serf and slave children play alongside their young masters like brothers. Together, these representational strategies enabled Russian and American authors to craft nostalgic images of serfdom and slavery that convinced late nineteenth-century readers of the merits of pre-emancipation systems of servitude and the social relationships that defined them.

Solov'ev, Danilevskii, and Page correspondingly created noble, peasant, or African-American characters who describe serfdom and slavery as beneficial institutions that provided material benefits for the enslaved or enserfed. In *Staryi dom* (Old House) (1883), the second novel in a four-part series about the Gorbatov family, Solov'ev describes the institution of serfdom from the perspective of nobleman Boris Gorbatov. While visiting his parents' vast estate during the early 1820s, Boris gazes admiringly at his surroundings and praises his mother Tat'iana's work as its manager. He observes admiringly how the *barynia*

(landowner's wife) "continued by herself, as always, to take the lead in managing all aspects of the enormous property."<sup>377</sup> Promoting a paternalistic view of serfdom, Boris declares that his mother is "the benefactress of the thousands of peasant souls that belonged to her and her husband," calling Tat'iana "a true tsarina of her little state."<sup>378</sup> Instead of treating her human property cruelly, Boris's mother makes herself "accessible to all, rather than exciting fear in others" and as a consequence, "all [the serfs] came to her, unafraid, with their needs, illnesses and sorrows, for a long time knowing that the mistress Tat'iana would help everyone who approached her."<sup>379</sup> Like Tat'iana, the landlord of the estate was also held in high esteem by serfs who "never spoke an evil word against him"; instead, "all exclaimed, 'Without a doubt, he is a kind, good master who couldn't even scare a goose!'"<sup>380</sup> Boris's description of his parents' magnanimity gave nineteenth-century readers the impression that most serfs were well cared for by compassionate landowners. Serfdom provided these peasants with a home, a community, and masters who provided them with material and emotional support in times of want.

Like Solov'ev, Grigorii Danilevskii similarly characterizes serfdom as a protective, stabilizing institution that benefited Russia's peasantry. In his thrilling novel *Kniazhna Tarakanova* (1883), Danilevskii recounts the intriguing story of Elizaveta Alekseevna Tarakanova's attempts to win the Russian throne by pretending to be the daughter of Empress Elizabeth and her lover, Count Alexei Razumovskii. In one noteworthy passage,

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<sup>377</sup> Vsevolod Solov'ev, *Staryi dom* (1883), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/solowxew\\_w\\_s/text\\_1883\\_stary\\_dom.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/solowxew_w_s/text_1883_stary_dom.shtml).

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

Count Alexei Grigor'evich Orlov, one of Elizabeth's aides, speaks with his serf, Terent'ich Kabanov, about conditions in an area near the imperial capital of St. Petersburg during the 1770s. Danilevskii depicts Terent'ich as an elegant man who wears clothing "in the latest fashion" and speaks eloquently thanks to his privileged upbringing. He writes that Terent'ich, a literate serf, wears a "kaftan . . . slippers with pewter buckles," and pulls his hair back into a powdered plait.<sup>381</sup> Conversing with his master over a glass of expensive wine, Terent'ich reminds Orlov that he resides on a beautiful estate characterized by "cheerful places, abundant fields . . . forests, and dark groves, [where] the serfs are *khlebopashtsy* (ploughmen), not impoverished peasants, thanks to your grace."<sup>382</sup> In this passage, Danilevskii depicts Terent'ich as a servant whose material needs have been met throughout his life. Dressed in luxurious clothing, well-fed, and highly educated, Terent'ich's life has been one of comfort and satisfaction. Like that of Solov'ev's Boris Gorbatov, Terent'ich's description of Orlov's estate also gives readers the impression that all serfs who reside there live happily and contentedly, appreciative of their master's beneficence over the years. Finally, Danilevskii depicts Terent'ich as Orlov's peer and confidante, a testament to the ostensibly close relations that existed between masters and serfs prior to abolition. Together, these details create a scene that reassures readers by presenting serfdom to be a balanced system that ensured the physical wellbeing of laborers thanks to paternalistic *pomeshchiki*.

Thomas Nelson Page also represented slavery in favorable terms through the voice of a bondsman. In his story, "Marse Chan: A Tale of Old Virginia," published in *The Century* in 1884, Page relates an encounter between the narrator, a white Southerner, and a black

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<sup>381</sup> Grigorii Danilevskii, *Kniazhna Tarakanova* (1883), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/d/danilevskij\\_g\\_p/text\\_0050.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/d/danilevskij_g_p/text_0050.shtml).

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

freedperson named Sam in 1872. Sam resides near the “once splendid mansions, now fast falling to decay,” of pre-emancipation Virginia where he attended his master, “Marse Chan.”<sup>383</sup> The faithful former slave regales the narrator with a bit of personal antebellum history, recounting his days as the “body-servant” to Marse Chan.<sup>384</sup> Like Terent’ich, Sam maintains a close relationship with his master throughout their lives, even carrying Marse Chan’s body from a Civil War battlefield after he suffers a mortal wound.<sup>385</sup> Page’s protagonist plays a literary role comparable to that of Danilevskii’s friendly serf Terent’ich: He serves as a reliable source who assures readers that slaves thrived on plantations during the pre-emancipation era.

According to Sam, all the slaves on the plantation “loved ole marster . . . aldo' dey did step aroun' right peart when ole marster was lookin' at 'em.”<sup>386</sup> As willing servants, Page’s African-American characters both adored and feared the man who cared for their needs, submitting to him like children to a father. Sam warmly recollects that “dem wuz good ole times,” when “niggers didn' hed nothin' 't all to do—jes' hed to 'ten' to de feedin' an' cleanin' de hosses, an' doin' what de marster tell 'em to do; an' when dey wuz sick, dey had things sont 'em out de house, an' de same doctor come to see 'em whar 'ten' to de white folks when dey wuz po'ly.”<sup>387</sup> With few responsibilities, light chores, and good medical care, the slaves

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<sup>383</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, “Marse Chan: A Tale of Old Virginia,” in *In Ole Virginia, or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895, originally published in 1887), 1, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003, accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/pageolevir/page.html>, page 1.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

of Page's historical fiction were satisfied with their lot. Perhaps most importantly, Page notes through the voice of Sam, "dyar warn' no trouble nor nothin'," a veiled reference to the tumultuous post-emancipation racial tensions that characterized the world in which his readers lived.<sup>388</sup> Indeed, Page's representation of slavery as a positive force that guaranteed slaves a good quality of life caused several Northern critics to acknowledge some of the positive attributes of the pre-emancipation era. A reviewer from *Lippincott's Magazine* observed that, "oddly enough, the celebrant" of Page's stories about "the glories of the old régime in Virginia just before and during the war, which is now receding far enough into history to bring out all its romantic, tender, and chivalrous side . . . is in most cases the negro slave whose emancipation was effected by the war," while a critic for Delaware's *Wilmington News* praised *Marse Chan and Other Stories* as "simple and direct in composition, genuine and accurate in narration," sympathetically presenting "the domestic life of the old slave period in its most attractive and alluring aspects."<sup>389</sup> Thus, Page's promotion of the idea that life for African Americans had diminished in quality following their emancipation even gained some traction among discerning Northern critics and furthered the reconciliationist cause.

Page, Harris, and Opochinin also promoted romanticized histories of slavery by creating characters who, as former bondsmen, had experienced servitude, tasted freedom, and either longed to return to bondage or faltered outside of the protective care of servitude. For instance, Harris portrayed slavery as an institution with a stable structure that provided

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Excerpts of reviews of *In Ole Virginia: Marse Chan, and Other Stories*, collected by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887, in "Miscellaneous Printed Material; Circulars, etc.," in Box 17, Thomas Nelson Page Papers, 1739-1927, and undated bulk, 1885-1920. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.



African Americans with comfortable, safe lives in his story “Free Joe and the Rest of the World” (1887).<sup>390</sup> In the short story, Harris contrasts the experiences of a free ex-slave, Joe, with those of his enslaved peers living in the town of Hillsborough, Georgia, in 1850. While the slaves on neighboring plantations “laughed loudly day by day . . . Free Joe rarely laughed,” and while his peers “sang at their work and danced at their frolics . . . no one ever heard Free Joe sing or saw him dance.”<sup>391</sup>

Instead of living a carefree life within the confines of an ostensibly paternalistic system that met African Americans’ needs and provided them with the work that became their life’s purpose, Harris describes Joe as “a black atom, drifting hither and thither without an owner, blown about by all the winds of circumstance, and given over to shiftlessness.”<sup>392</sup> To ensure that nineteenth-century readers harbored no doubts about the disadvantages of the former slave’s status, Harris emphasizes that Joe “realized the fact that though he was free he was more helpless than any slave” because, “having no owner, every man was his master.”<sup>393</sup> Harris’s representation of the destitute freed African American deeply moved readers like Theodore Roosevelt, who told Harris in a letter that he doubted there was “a more genuinely pathetic tale in all our literature than ‘Free Joe.’”<sup>394</sup> Indeed, the reader is meant to pity the freed black man, agreeing with the Georgian slaves who, rather than “envy[ing] him his

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<sup>390</sup> Joel Chandler Harris, “Free Joe and the Rest of the World,” in *Free Joe and Other Georgian Sketches* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998, accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/harrisj/harris.html>.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>394</sup> Theodore Roosevelt to Joel Chandler Harris, October 12, 1901, Washington, D.C., Roosevelt-Harris Correspondence, Joel Chandler Harris Papers Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

freedom,” viewed him as “an exile . . . openly despised him, and lost no opportunity to treat him with contumely.”<sup>395</sup> But, as Roosevelt aptly noted, stories like “Free Joe” were more than art; rather, they served an important political purpose as well. Harris’s work was, in Roosevelt’s words, “an addition to the forces that tell for decency, and above all for the blotting out of sectional antagonism.”<sup>396</sup> By whitewashing slavery’s negative characteristics, Harris sought to promote reconciliation between Southerners who defended the institution and those who helped bring about its demise during the Civil War.

Like Harris, Page also created wretched African-American characters who struggled to survive outside of slavery. In his short story “Ole ‘Stracted,” published in *In Ole Virginia*, the reader meets a family of black freedpeople living in a run-down cabin located on an uncultivated field. The mother sang “a dirge-like hymn” while she daydreamed about “what they would do when the big crop on their land should be all in, and the last payment made on the house . . . not reflecting that the sum they had paid on the property had never . . . amounted in any one year to more than a few dollars over the rent charged for the place.”<sup>397</sup> Here, Page references the oppressive system of sharecropping that kept freedpeople in poverty for decades following emancipation in order to bolster his claim that African Americans were economically better off as slaves. As the story continues, Page introduces readers to Ole ‘Stracted, a freedperson who gives voice to Page’s perspective through the articulation of his desire to be re-enslaved.

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<sup>395</sup> Harris, *Free Joe and the Rest of the World*, 8.

<sup>396</sup> Theodore Roosevelt to Joel Chandler Harris, October 12, 1901, Washington, D.C., Roosevelt-Harris Correspondence, Joel Chandler Harris Papers Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

<sup>397</sup> Page, *In Ole Virginia*, 141, 144.

Ole 'Stracted is a mysterious, aged African American who lives in a "ruinous little hut which had been the old man's abode since his sudden appearance in the neighborhood a few years after the war."<sup>398</sup> His neighbors, including the aforementioned family of sharecroppers, know little about him except for the story he constantly repeats, that "he had been sold by some one other than his master from that plantation . . . and that his master was coming in the summer to buy him back and take him home, and would bring him his wife and child when he came."<sup>399</sup> On his deathbed, Ole 'Stracted reveals that he grew up on a plantation alongside his white master, whom he loved dearly. After running into hard times, Ole 'Stracted's master lost his property, but he promised to buy him back. During the forty years that ensued, a length of time possessing Biblical significance as a period of personal trial, Ole 'Stracted "wucked night an' day . . . to save dat money [\$1,200] for marster."<sup>400</sup> Living in poverty, he patiently awaits his master's return until the day of his death in the miserable cabin, when "his Master had at last come for him . . . [and] Ole 'Stracted had indeed gone home."<sup>401</sup> "Ole 'Stracted" is one of Page's most politicized short stories because it criticizes post-war conditions to support the notion that African Americans were better suited to slavery than liberty. Without the protection of their masters, Page's fictional literature contends, freed slaves were taken advantage of by greedy carpet baggers and poor white sharecroppers. Some, like Ole 'Stracted, would lament their liberty until the day they died.

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 161.

Russian readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were also familiar with the concept of the faithful emancipated serf. Evgenii Opochinin created a memorable character that is strikingly similar to Ole 'Stracted in his short story, "Poseldniaia 'dusha,"" (The Last 'Soul') in 1905.<sup>402</sup> The title of this remarkable story is a play on words because serfs were called "souls," a term denoting the unit of measurement used by tax assessors. "The Last 'Soul'" describes the life of Tikhon, an emancipated peasant who waits patiently for his former master to visit him in his village every autumn. As the weather turns cold each year, Tikhon looks expectantly for the "prematurely bent figure" of Il'ia Vasil'evich Trubitsyn, and for Tikhon, "once [his] serf, [Trubitsyn] was still his *barin* (master)."<sup>403</sup> Impoverished and landless, like the "marster" of Page's story "Ole 'Stracted," Il'ia Trubitsyn "lived here and there among former acquaintances" but went on his way when he began "running low on half-penny earnings and offerings of goodwill."<sup>404</sup> Tikhon always looked forward to the arrival of his former master who would stay with him until spring came. In preparation, he "slaughtered his young lamb, sifted oat flour for *blini* (pancakes) . . . while his wife Dar'ia . . . well aware of the customs of the nobility, decocted a bite of mushrooms for the *barin* and boiled raspberry jam."<sup>405</sup> Tikhon did not consider these acts to be a form of charity, and his master likewise "found it to be perfectly natural on the part of the serf."<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Evgenii Opochinin, "Posledniaia 'dusha,'" Supplement to the *Moskovskii listok*, October 9, 1905, pages 2-10.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, when neighboring peasants asked him why he “knowingly fed a stranger,” Tikhon always replied, “After all, he is our *gospodin* (lord), our *pomeshchik*!”<sup>407</sup>

During the master’s penultimate visit, he and Tikhon sit in the peasant’s *izba* (hut) where they recall “the old days [as] vanished images from long ago were resurrected before their eyes and their former lives, forgotten and buried, rose as if awakened.”<sup>408</sup> As the men speak, they often look up at the gilded portraits of Trubitsyn’s parents and grandfather that hang on the walls, pictures that Tikhon had procured from the estate sale of his master’s property.<sup>409</sup> In one striking passage, when Trubitsyn asks Tikhon why he does not complain or seek revenge against his family for the trials he endured as a serf, he responds by explaining that time had passed, and all had been forgotten.<sup>410</sup> Their dialogue recalls the reconciliationist language of American writers for whom the goal of national reunion took precedence over the acknowledgment of slavery’s harsh realities.<sup>411</sup> In this scene, Opochinin correspondingly glosses over the animosities and estate barriers that persisted between the aristocracy and the peasantry during the decades that followed the abolition of serfdom in Russia and the years preceding the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Nonetheless, Tikhon’s story ends on a poignant note akin to that of Ole ‘Stracted. Il’ia Trubitsyn departs as usual when spring arrives, taking as a gift the bank note that Tikhon had saved, much like the

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> David Blight posits that Northern and Southern writers alike flooded national periodicals with “sentimental reconciliationist literature,” producing a new genre of American literature and altering the nation’s collective memory of the Civil War era. See David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War and American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 217.

hardworking former slave who hoarded his money in anticipation of his master's return. During Trubitsyn's next visit the following winter, however, Tikhon took ill after chopping wood in the forest on a cold day and, like Christ, died on the third day of his illness. The former serf's master wept over his grave, waving away Dar'ia and the other peasants who tried to comfort him, exclaiming, "Ah! You do not understand. After all, he was my last soul!"<sup>412</sup>

The striking parallels between Opochinin's "The Last Soul" and Page's "Ole 'Stracted" show that Russian and American writers from the landowning classes portrayed former bondsmen in comparable ways. Both Tikhon and Ole 'Stracted loyally serve their masters throughout their lives, refusing to let the abolition of serfdom and slavery diminish their devotion. Each character also makes meaningful material sacrifices to support their former masters even in their own poverty. Finally, both Page and Opochinin depict the relationships between masters and former bondsmen as intimate, a calculated decision that moderated perceptions of forced labor by shifting the focus from state-enforced coercion to that of interpersonal ties.

Like Page and Opochinin, Harris and Salias produced novels and short stories that emphasized the familial connections between serfs, slaves, and their masters during the pre-emancipation era. One way in which these Russian and American writers achieved their goal of underscoring relational closeness was by employing the rhetorical strategy of substituting the words "serf" and "slave" with that of "servant." For instance, in Salias's *Peterburgskoe deistvo* (1880) and *Arakcheevskii synok* (1889), the author uses variations of the word "servant" to describe enserfed peasants, including "sluga," "sluzhitel'," and "dvornia."

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

Meanwhile, Joel Chandler Harris describes the character “Free Joe” as the former “body-servant” of a white Southerner named Major Frampton, while Thomas Nelson Page repeatedly refers to slaves as “servants” or “body-servants” in “Marse Chan,” “Ole ‘Stracted,” and “Polly: A Christmas Recollection.” By doing so, these Russian and American writers sought to create a more compassionate picture of slavery and serfdom for post-emancipation readers.

Page and Salias also characterized specific types of relationships between masters and bondsmen as warm and affectionate; these included the brotherly relations between masters and bondsmen who played together as children and the maternal ties between mammies and their young charges. For example, in Page’s short story “Unc Edinburg’s Drowndin: A Plantation Echo,” the freedman “Unc Edinburg” of eastern Virginia recounts to a white narrator the history of his service to his former master, “Marse George.”<sup>413</sup> The two grew up together on the same property, where Unc Edinburg was “born on a Sat’day in de Christmas, an [Marse George] wuz born in de new year on a Chuesday.”<sup>414</sup> Like twin brothers, Unc Edinburg and Marse George even shared the same mammy, who “nussed [both boys] . . . at one breast.”<sup>415</sup> Throughout the remainder of their lives, both men remain faithful to one another. Unc Edinburg follows Marse George to college and Marse George repays his enduring loyalty by rescuing him from drowning in a raging river.

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<sup>413</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, “Unc Edinburg: A Plantation Echo,” in *In Ole Virginia, or Marse Chan and Other Stories*, 39.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*

Solov'ev describes a similar relationship between the nobleman Boris Gorbatov and the serf dwarf Stepan in *Staryi dom*.<sup>416</sup> When Boris returns to his family's estate during the early 1820s, he is greeted by his devoted "body-servant," whom he has known throughout his life.<sup>417</sup> During their impassioned conversation about events that have transpired in Boris's absence, Boris thanks Stepan for knowing his habits and preferences so well, reminding him, "We have been together since childhood—we were even born on the same day."<sup>418</sup> Reflecting further on Stepan's role in his life, Boris thinks to himself about how the dwarf "was neither servant nor lowly person, but a respected, beloved friend in their household" with whom Boris shared "the best memories of his childhood."<sup>419</sup> During the remainder of the scene, Stepan expresses his mutual affection to Boris, pledging to "forever inseparably serve," his "one and only *gospodin* (lord)," the man for whom he would "lay down his life."<sup>420</sup> Their dialogue concludes with a moment of familial affection when the two distinctive figures, "the rich and well-known *barin* . . . and the serf slave, in a shared burst of passion, hugged one another like brothers."<sup>421</sup> Despite the gulf that separated the nobility from the peasantry, Solov'ev characterizes Boris's and Stepan's relationship as one that

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<sup>416</sup> In Europe's royal courts of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, dwarf servants or slaves were a common sight. These individuals were a source of entertainment for members of the nobility. See Janet Ravenscroft, "Invisible Friends: Questioning the Representation of the Court Dwarf in Hapsburg Spain," in Waltraud Ernst, *Histories of the Normal and the Abnormal: Social and Cultural Histories of Norms and Normativity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32-34.

<sup>417</sup> Solov'ev, *Staryi dom*, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/solowxew\\_w\\_s/text\\_1883\\_stary\\_dom.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/solowxew_w_s/text_1883_stary_dom.shtml).

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.



transcends social boundaries. Like Page, Solov'ev represents the relationship between masters and their male bondsmen as defined by mutual affection and fidelity.

By comparison, Salias emphasizes not brotherly ties, but the maternal association between female serf nurses and their white charges. He idealizes the connection between the *mamka*, the Russian equivalent of the black mammy, and her infant master by portraying the relationship as that which exists between a mother and her own child. In a passage from *Arakcheevskii synok*, Salias recounts the changing dynamics between Shumskii, an aristocrat, and the serf nurse of his childhood, Avdot'ia. Salias describes her as “a woman of about fifty years of age, dressed as a simple *dvorovaia* (yard/servant) woman in a colorful cotton dress and with a kerchief tied around her head.”<sup>422</sup> As time passed, Avdot'ia, “a very intelligent woman . . . observed and realized that the master was weary of her ‘foolish love,’ and reluctantly tried to be more reserved by not annoying him with fawning words and nicknames, like she had done before.”<sup>423</sup> With each passing year, however, the “coldness in relations between the former nurse and her nursling grew” and Avdot'ia “grieved and sometimes wept, seeing that her nursing had completely stopped loving her.”<sup>424</sup> Her master now “no longer made any distinction between his former *mamka* and his father's other serfs,” a fact that caused Avdot'ia great sadness, although she tells herself that “all of the people of the ‘noble estate’ shun their nurses when they become adults and ‘go out into the wild.’”<sup>425</sup> Salias's sentimental description of Avdot'ia's grief and internal thoughts reveal to the reader the depth of her devotion to the careless Shumskii. Although her former master no longer

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<sup>422</sup> Evgenii Salias, *Arakcheevskii synok* (1889), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/s/salias\\_e\\_a/text\\_0100.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/salias_e_a/text_0100.shtml).

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

cares for her, the constant maternal affection she maintains for him is no less powerful than that of the devoted Tikhon, Ole ‘Stracted, or Unc Edinburg.

Harris also depicts the loyal mammy figure in his short story “Mom Bi: Her Friends and Her Enemies,” published in the collection *Balaam and His Master* (1891).<sup>426</sup> The tale takes place in the “aristocratic” town of Fairleigh, South Carolina, where a white gentleman, Judge Waynecroft, maintains “a most charming household, in which simplicity lent grace to dignity.”<sup>427</sup> One of his slaves is a middle-aged African-American woman known as “Mom Bi,” who fascinates Judge Waynecroft’s neighbors because of her unusual appearance and outspokenness. Harris describes her as a powerful “black Amazon” with a unique affliction: Her “left arm was bent and withered, and she carried it in front of her and across her body, as one would hold an infant.”<sup>428</sup> This inherently maternal feature serves to soften Harris’s overall description of a slave whose “whole appearance was aggressive” and who gave viewers the impression that she was “a queer combination of tyrant and servant, of virago and mammy.”<sup>429</sup>

Mom Bi’s character is sterner than the emotional mammy who appears in Salias’s *Arakcheevskii synok*, but she is no less loyal to her master and his family. Harris characterizes Mom Bi as “an old family servant,” using a term that denies her position as a bondswoman, who was “ready enough to quarrel with each and every member of her master’s family” about household affairs, but who also remained “ready to defend the entire

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<sup>426</sup> Joel Chandler Harris, *Balaam and His Master and Other Sketches and Stories* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891).

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 170, 172.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 172

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 172, 174.

household against any and all comers.”<sup>430</sup> Indeed, the entire family relied upon her; Harris writes that “her master and mistress appreciated and respected her, and the children loved her.”<sup>431</sup> The author whitewashes the nature of bondage, however, by assuring readers that Mom Bi was more akin to a family member than a slave, declaring that “whatever effect slavery may have had on other negroes, or negroes in general, it is certain that Mom Bi’s spirit remained unbroken.”<sup>432</sup> Here, Harris deliberately emphasizes the fact that Mom Bi exerts her authority in confrontations against white and black people alike in an effort to obscure the true nature of the mammy figure’s historical societal position. Even a woman like Mom Bi who verbally rebelled nonetheless did so within the confines of the domestic sphere where she remained an enslaved woman.

## **Conclusion**

An analysis of the historical fiction generated by authors from American and Russian landowning families reveals that they depicted serfs and slaves in strikingly similar ways. In both the United States and Russia, stories that misrepresented the histories of bondage resonated with readers that may have been discomfited by post-emancipation societal changes, particularly the shifting power dynamics that saw former bondsmen acquiring new rights and elites losing land and power. By whitewashing the dark legacies of two widespread systems of servitude, six Russian and American writers presented historical narratives that educated readers found appealing. A comparison of the two literary traditions ultimately reveals that the romanticization of the pre-emancipation era in Southern literature

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 173, 174.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 173.

was not a phenomenon unique to the post-emancipation United States and sheds additional light on the competing representations of the peasantry that saturated historical fiction in late nineteenth-century Russia.

### **CHAPTER THREE: ‘AND IS IT NOT A NOBLE WORK?’ SERFS, SLAVES, PEASANTS, AND FREEDPEOPLE IN RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN NATIONAL ART, 1861-1905**

“And is not the thought of a grand national art sufficiently glorious to incite us to struggle on through all present trials and discomfitures in order to finally compass so great a blessing?” While cannon fire echoed across the fields near Virginia’s Bull Run in July of 1861, *New York Monthly Magazine* urged readers to focus on securing a united future for their country through painting.<sup>433</sup> Even as war divided the North and South, the publication accurately predicted that “American art will arise from out of this political chaos . . . and soar aloft on the expanded wing of the American eagle.”<sup>434</sup> The U.S. Civil War altered the country and inspired American artists to paint “national” works depicting wartime events and the conflict’s aftermath. The abolition of slavery, one of the most significant consequences of the war, resulted in the incorporation of millions of freedpeople into the national polity as citizens. After emancipation, Northern and Southern artists alike tried to make sense of America’s legacy of bondage in genre paintings of African Americans that sparked debate and discussion among audiences across the country as they sought to comprehend their new national identity.

Meanwhile, in Russia, events in 1861 simultaneously heralded enormous societal transformation and encouraged the development of a new kind of Russian national art. On February 19, 1861, Tsar Alexander II liberated 23 million serfs from bondage and introduced

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<sup>433</sup> Unknown author, “American Art,” *New York Monthly Magazine*, July 1861; 58, 1.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

a host of additional reforms. The political decision to emancipate a large proportion of the population occurred at a critical moment in Russia's cultural history when many artists chafed against the prescripts of aesthetic convention that encouraged the mimicry of European traditions in painting. Katia Dianina argues that "a remarkable transformation took place . . . [when] art became a familiar marker of national belonging" due to the introduction of public art exhibitions and their widespread coverage in newspapers.<sup>435</sup> As in the United States, post-emancipation artists grappled with questions pertaining to peasant assimilation and other related societal changes through genre paintings that focused on contemporary and historical Russian topics. Like the African-American slaves, Russia's serfs figured prominently in numerous works during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Between 1861 and 1905, American and Russian artists created hundreds of oil paintings, a prestigious form of creative expression supported by grand institutions like the New York Academy of Design and St. Petersburg's Academy of Arts, which depicted former bondsmen in a variety of scenes. Their compositions differed significantly from pre-emancipation works that often presented slavery and serfdom through a classical, formal lens that marginalized bondsmen. Paintings that exemplify this genre include Edward Beyer's *Bellevue, The Lewis Homestead* (1855) and Marie Adrian Persac's *St. John, St. Martin Parish* (1861), two American paintings that glorified grand plantation homes but diminished the role of enslaved laborers who, in Persac's painting, appear as specks toiling in the fields. Guided by Sentimentalism and Romanticism, Russia's Alexei Venetsianov similarly produced idyllic scenes of rural life; in his works, docile serfs clad in sumptuous traditional dress rest in the sun or stroll barefoot through the fields as they obediently complete their

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<sup>435</sup> Katia Dianina, *When Art Makes News: Writing Culture and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), 12.

fieldwork.<sup>436</sup> Such idealized and paternalistic representations of plantation and estate life belied the hardships of serfdom and slavery and denied bondsmen agency.

By contrast, post-emancipation paintings portray slaves, freedpeople, serfs, and peasants in a broader range of situations that revealed to viewers the complexity of their experiences. In these works, serfs and slaves await their sale with apprehension and disgust while freedpeople and peasants confront their former masters, learn to read and write, or serve in the military. Many images from this era depicted close-knit families and communities in which former bondsmen sing, pray, dance, celebrate marriages, mourn deaths, and share folk tales. But while many post-emancipation artists presented flattering portraits of former bondsmen, others depicted them as lazy and dissolute, representations that seemed to question the benefits of abolition. These compositions collectively served as important visual sources that shaped nineteenth-century viewers' conceptions of freedpeople and peasants as well as their popular attitudes about the absorption process during the decades that followed the abolition of serfdom and slavery. Furthermore, these paintings played a critical role in molding Russians' and Americans' sense of national identity as the two countries reconstructed their societies during an era of substantial political and social reform.

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<sup>436</sup> For example, see Alexei Venetsianov, *Harvest. Summer* (1827) and *In the Ploughed Field. Spring* (1820s). Vladimir Kruglov, "The Peasantry in Russian Painting," in *The World of the Peasantry in Russian Art* (St. Petersburg: State Russian Museum, Palace Editions, 2005), 33-35.

## Serfs, Peasants, Slaves, and Freedpeople in Russian and American Paintings

This chapter examines the parallel and contrasting ways in which Russian and American artists represented former bondsmen in paintings between 1861 and 1905. Immediately after abolition, Nikolai Nevrev and Thomas Satterwhite Noble reflected on the twin legacies of serfdom and slavery in bold, controversial paintings that sharply criticized landowners in scenes depicting the sale of serfs and slaves.<sup>437</sup> During the decades that followed, however, other Russian and American artists created nostalgic paintings that idealized servitude and portrayed former bondsmen as loyal to their previous masters.<sup>438</sup> Such discordant representations suggest that artists possessed differing views of serfdom and slavery and strove to shape audiences' historical memories through conflicting scenes that depicted masters as callous or clement and bondsmen as faithful or defiant.

Artists also chose to depict African-American freedpeople or Russian peasants as enlisted or conscripted soldiers during wartime. After the Confederacy's defeat in the Civil War, Northern painters Thomas Waterman Wood and Edward Lamson Henry portrayed African-American military service as a noble, liberating endeavor that freed former slaves from bondage and legitimized their claims to citizenship.<sup>439</sup> In Russia, however, painters like Il'ia Repin, Konstantin Savitskii, and Nikolai Pimonenko portrayed military conscription as a

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<sup>437</sup> Nikolai Nevrev, *Bargaining. A Scene of Serf Life. From the Recent Past* (1866); and Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *The Price of Blood* (1868).

<sup>438</sup> Grigorii Miasoedov, *Congratulation of the Betrothed in the House of the Landlord* (1861); William D. Washington, *The Burial of Latané* (1864); Carl Lemokh, *Summer (with Congratulations)* (1890); and Carl Guthertz, *I Promised the Missus' I'd Bring Him Home or Faithful Unto Death* (1904).

<sup>439</sup> Thomas Waterman Wood, *A Bit of War History: The Contraband, the Recruit, and the Veteran* (1866); and Edward Lamson Henry, *A Presentation of the Colors to the First Colored Regiment of New York by the Ladies of the City in front of the Old Union League Club, Union Square, New York City in 1864* (1868).



fate comparable to enslavement for the peasantry.<sup>440</sup> They did so even after the enactment of the Universal Conscription Act in 1874, a fact that attests to the enduring memory of an era when the peasantry bore the brunt of military service.

A third common theme in Russian and American depictions of freedpeople and peasants is that of agriculture; artists created numerous scenes in which former bondsmen labored in fields of wheat, corn, and cotton. Russian compositions of this type typically showed serene, lush landscapes where peasants happily engaged in labor that was well suited to their abilities.<sup>441</sup> Such representations encouraged in Russian audiences a sense of national pride in the peasantry's traditional way of life and reflected the ideological sentiments espoused by Slavophiles and proponents of the Populist movement. By contrast, American portrayals of African Americans completing fieldwork, such as Winslow Homer's *The Cotton Pickers* (1876) and Thomas Anshutz's *The Way They Live* (1879), criticized the continued confinement of free African Americans to Southern farms due in part to ineffective post-war economic and social reforms. In a notable exception to this trend, South Carolinian William Aiken Walker suggested that African Americans could not survive outside of the plantation setting in paintings of impoverished, slovenly African Americans that belittled their physical and intellectual capabilities.<sup>442</sup> Ultimately, the consistency of Russian painters' depictions of agricultural labor and the diversity of comparable American representations attest to the prominent position of the peasants' agrarian tradition in Russia's national

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<sup>440</sup> See Il'ia Repin, *Seeing off a Recruit* (1879); Konstantin Savitskii, *To War* (1888); and Nikolai Pimonenko, *Seeing off the Recruits* (before 1912).

<sup>441</sup> See Konstantin Makovskii, *Peasant Lunch during Harvest* (1871); Mikhail Klodt, *Ploughing* (1872); and Grigorii Miasoedov, *The Road in the Rye* (1881), *Harvest Time (Scythers)* (1887), and *The Sower* (1888).

<sup>442</sup> For example, see William Aiken Walker, *The Cotton Field* (1880s), *Cotton Pickers* (late nineteenth century), *Sharecroppers in the Deep South* (late nineteenth century), and *I'll Stick to Cotton As Long As It Sticks to Me* (1886).

identity and to both greater ideological conflict and freedom of expression in the United States.

Artists also expressed their fascination with traditional peasant culture in depictions of rituals and ceremonies in works that celebrated traditional aspects of Russia's national heritage. Weddings, holidays, dances, and religious processions were among the most commonly painted scenes during the second half of the nineteenth century in works by Vasilii Maksimov, Illarion Prianishnikov, Il'ia Repin, Andrei Riabushkin, and others.<sup>443</sup> Like the Russian ethnographers who concurrently traveled to villages to transcribe peasant folk songs, these artists journeyed across the countryside with brushes and paint boxes to record the peasants' disappearing way of life as former serfs left their cohesive communities to pursue job opportunities in expanding cities. Paintings like Maksimov's *The Arrival of a Magician at a Peasant Wedding* (1875) and Repin's *Procession of the Cross in Kursk Province* (1883) particularly thrilled urban audiences who, increasingly removed from rural life, delighted in seeing the historic customs of Russia's rural folk (*narod*) in large-scale, dramatic paintings. Like their Russian peers, American artists also captured scenes of freedpeople practicing their musical and religious traditions in respectful illustrations that explained a way of life that was largely unfamiliar to many white Americans.<sup>444</sup> But while depictions of peasant rituals situated the former serfs within Russia's historical narrative, portrayals of African-American traditions positioned ex-slaves as exotic outsiders rather than

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<sup>443</sup> Vasilii Maksimov, *The Arrival of a Magician at a Peasant Wedding* (1875); Il'ia Repin, *Evening Party* (1881), *Procession of the Cross in Kursk Province* (1883); Illarion Prianishnikov, *Resurrection Day in the North* (1887) and *Procession* (1893); and Andrei Riabushkin, *Peasant Wedding in the Tambovskii Province* (1880), *Divination at Yuletide* (1881), and *Awaiting Newlyweds in Novgorod Province* (1891).

<sup>444</sup> For example, see Eastman Johnson, *Fiddling His Way* (1866); Frank Buchser, *Guitar Player* (1867); Winslow Homer, *Dressing for Carnival* (1877); Thomas Eakins, *The Dancing Lesson (Negro Boy Dancing)* (1878); and George Fuller, *Negro Funeral, Alabama* (1881).

as representatives of America's cultural heritage, a contrast due partly to racial differences in the American case.

Two additional shared themes in Russian and American depictions of peasants and freedpeople relate to educational and economic progress after emancipation. First, artists in both countries created numerous scenes pertaining to the literacy of the former bondsmen. Russian painters took audiences inside rural schoolhouses where earnest children struggled to read or learn arithmetic, while American painters typically connected literacy with Christianity in scenes showing African-American adults and children reading the Bible.<sup>445</sup> Both Russian and American artists also expressed doubt about the students' advancement in paintings depicting ambivalent pupils or teachers who appeared to lack interest in the education process.<sup>446</sup> Second, in their consideration of increased peasant and African-American migration to urban areas during the late nineteenth century, Russian and American artists offered pessimistic assessments of how the former bondsmen fared outside of traditional agrarian settings. Former bondsmen in these paintings frequently met unfortunate ends after leaving the countryside; for instance, a woman weeps over the body of her deceased husband in Sergei Ivanov's *On the Road: The Death of a Migrant* (1889). Unemployed urban African Americans lounge on cotton bales by the waterfront in William Aiken Walker's *Where Canal Meets the Levee* (late nineteenth century) and listless peasants doze in the mud by a ferry port in Sergei Vinogradov's *Without Work (Waiting for the Ferry)* (1888). Together, these diverse representations suggest that some artists harbored mixed

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<sup>445</sup> Eastman Johnson, *The Lord is My Shepherd* (1863); Winslow Homer, *Sunday Morning in Virginia* (1877); Thomas Waterman Wood, *Sunday Morning* (1877); Vladimir Makovskii, *In a Village School* (1883); and Nikolai Bogdanov-Bel'skii, *Mental Calculation, In Public School of S.A. Rachinskii* (1895), and *At the Doors of a School* (1897).

<sup>446</sup> Vladimir Makovskii, *Arrival of the Teacher in the Village* (1897); Aleksei Stepanov, *Arrival of the Teacher* (1889); and Edward Lamson Henry, *Kept In* (1888).

feelings about the abolition of serfdom and slavery and encouraged audiences to consider whether emancipation had benefited the former bondsmen.

At a historical moment when art played a critical role by informing the public about figures, events, and trends, Russian and American artists created genre paintings which employed a language of visual representation that transmitted meaning through pictorial storytelling. Art historian John Berger contends that images have the unique capacity to describe history to viewers because they are “more precise and richer than literature.”<sup>447</sup> As an art form, the oil painting in particular has the “special ability to render the tangibility, the texture, the lustre, the solidity of what it depicts,” making an image seem especially real to the viewer.<sup>448</sup> However, paintings cannot be simply treated as “documentary evidence” of an occurrence; rather, “every image embodies a way of seeing” and “the painter’s way of seeing is reconstituted by the marks he makes on the canvas or paper.”<sup>449</sup> Therefore, it is essential for scholars to discern the nuances of an artist’s perspective as they strive to retell or reimagine events and situations by placing their works in historical context.

Artists often take on the role of a narrator, a chronicler who, in the words of Hayden White, “wish[es] to give to real events the form of a story” but encounters methodological challenges when striving to achieve historical accuracy.<sup>450</sup> It is the task of the narrator to select or arrange historical moments to construct a coherent tale that transmits essential information to the audience. Consider the unique obstacles confronting the artist who strives

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<sup>447</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 10-11.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>450</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 4.

to tell a historical account through a painting largely devoid of text. He must acknowledge this single image's limitations that restrict the temporal and spatial information he hopes to deliver. For example, how might an artist refer to the conditions leading to a particular event or phenomenon that simultaneously occurred elsewhere through the literal reproduction of a scene he has witnessed? In order to tell a deeper, richer story, the artist does not simply recreate a particular moment in time. Instead, he adds objects, alters figures' positions, and modifies contextual elements to construct a snapshot of life that contains visual evidence alluding to circumstances that preceded or coincided with it.

Gazing at late nineteenth-century Russian and American paintings of serfs, slaves, peasants, and freedpeople, viewers saw images that whispered a thousand clues; clothing suggested the economic status of its central figures, body language revealed the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, facial expressions hinted at underlying emotion, and objects symbolized aspects of the past, present, or future. Even natural elements like "sunsets, autumn foliage, [or] thunderstorms" portended future tragedies or referenced past occurrences.<sup>451</sup> Consequently, it is essential to examine each artist's techniques to discern his paintings' "hidden messages" in order to detect what Theodore Rabb calls "complex implications of symbols, mental patterns, and cultural structures" that conveyed meaning to nineteenth-century audiences.<sup>452</sup> By analyzing paintings' layouts and content, one can strive to identify artists' communications to viewers.

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<sup>451</sup> Steven Conn and Andrew Walker, "The History in the Art: Painting the Civil War," in "Terrain of Freedom: American Art and the Civil War," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 27, no. 1, (2001):74.

<sup>452</sup> Robert I. Rothberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2.

In order to better understand artists' perspectives, I have looked beyond their paintings and into the memoirs, correspondence, and other personal papers of Russian painters Abram Arkhipov, Ivan Kramskoi, Filipp Maliavin, Vasilii Maksimov, Il'ia Repin, and arts patron Pavel Tret'iakov which are housed in the archives of the Russian State Tret'iakov Gallery. In addition, I studied the artist and object files of American painters Thomas Anshutz, Carl Guthertz, Winslow Homer, Eastman Johnson, William Aiken Walker, and Thomas Waterman Wood at the Metropolitan Museum of American Art. To glean information about the ways in which critics and audiences interpreted their paintings, I scrutinized reviews in Russian journals *Pchela* (Bee), *Niva* (Grainfield), *Novoe vremya* (New Time), *Novyi mir* (New World), and *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* (Worldwide Illustration) as well as American newspapers and journals including the *New York Times*, *New York Monthly Magazine*, *The Galaxy*, and *The Independent*. Finally, I have placed paintings within the proper historical context of their creation and exhibition in order to properly interpret artists' viewpoints and audiences' responses.

### **Russian Artists' Depictions of Serfs and Peasants**

The movement to paint Russia's folk, the peasantry, coincided with the emancipation of the serfs. Prior to this pivotal moment in the history of Russian art, many of the nation's most famous painters received their training at the Imperial Academy of Arts. Restructured by Catherine the Great in 1764 and located in St. Petersburg, the Academy was a conservative, state-sponsored institution that educated students in the European tradition.<sup>453</sup> For instance, during the nineteenth century, the Academy encouraged scholars to create neo-classical scenes inspired by Roman or Greek mythology and generally limited students'

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<sup>453</sup> Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art: The State and Society, The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3-4.

thematic choices for their works of art.<sup>454</sup> According to one early twentieth century account of the guiding philosophies of the era, “All Russian, folk, [and] popular [subjects were] considered unworthy of art, [and] the relationship of art to life was professed to be blasphemy, unworthy of the vocation of the artist.”<sup>455</sup> In spite of students’ nascent interest in painting more diverse subjects, the Academy’s administration, “abiding by these old-fashioned judgments, led the young artists on this well-worn road, silencing and crushing original talent in the young men.”<sup>456</sup> During the mid-nineteenth-century, the Academy successfully stifled dissent among students from diverse backgrounds who, for the most part, continued to paint scenes inspired by the Bible or by Greek and Roman history and culture.

Significant opposition to the mimicking of European artistic traditions arose during the 1850s, when Westernizers debated with Slavophiles about whether Russia should follow Europe’s path of development or return to Russia’s traditional institutions. In journals, heated discussions among members of the intelligentsia about politics, economics, and society also influenced the public’s ideas about literature, art, and culture. Of particular importance was activist Nikolai Chernyshevskii, author of the influential book *The Aesthetic Relationship of Art to Reality*.<sup>457</sup> In it, Chernyshevskii encourages artists to create works that explore the tangible world around them rather than illustrate ideals, arguing that “Reality is reproduced in art not in order to eliminate flaws, not because reality as such is not sufficiently beautiful,

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<sup>454</sup> "Stat'ia G.N. Iakovleva, V. Sekadkova, bibliograficheskii ukazatel' literatury, sostavlennyi Litvinovym V.V. i Kramskim I.N.," OR GTG, f. 16, o. 1, d. 422, l. 7, published in 1908.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> David Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 23.

but precisely because it is beautiful.”<sup>458</sup> Indeed, Chernyshevskii continues, the central purpose of art is to “reproduce phenomena of real life that are of interest to man” and “to explain life” to audiences by calling “attention to an object . . . in order to explain its significance, or to enable people to understand life better.”<sup>459</sup>

Ultimately, public discussion among intellectuals about works by Chernyshevskii and others led to increasingly widespread changes in attitudes toward Russian art. For instance, in a scathing critique of an exhibit held in St. Petersburg in 1859, a reviewer for the liberal journal *Sovremennik* (The Contemporary), edited by Nikolai Nekrasov, lambasted the lack of originality in contemporary Russian paintings, contending that Russia’s artists “must proceed along the path traveled by European art, but not repeat it” because they possess “a different nationality, a different history, [and] different geographical conditions.” Speaking about one hackneyed painting, the reviewer despaired, “Why, we have seen all this a thousand times before, not only these circumstances and these costumes, but also these groups and these people!” After criticizing Russia’s artists for simply imitating their European peers, the reviewer encouraged the next generation of painters to focus on the study of the human condition and to seek inspiration in the “history and movement of contemporary society, not moribund sentimentalism, life, not the world of fairytales . . . [in order to become] modern artists!”<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Nikolai Chernyshevskii, *The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality*, originally published in 1855 and reprinted in *Russian Philosophy Volume II: The Nihilists, The Populists, Critics of Religion and Culture* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books 1969), 17.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>460</sup> Mikhail Larionovich Mikhailov, “Khudozhestvennaia vystavka v Peterburge,” *Sovremennik* 76 (July 1859), 105-115.



Just four years after the publication of *Sovremennik's* review, a group of ambitious young artists at the Imperial Academy answered the journal's call for change. Led by Ivan Kramskoi (1837-1887), fourteen students vigorously protested the institution's constricting adherence to European subjects by withdrawing from the Academy. The catalyst for their secession was a gold medal competition in which contestants were required to create paintings relating to one of two themes.<sup>461</sup> The students initially petitioned for the freedom to choose their own subject matter for the competition in October of 1863, but the Academy rejected their request.<sup>462</sup> On November 9, 1863, the young artists gathered in the Academy's Council Hall to learn about the official historical themes for the competition.<sup>463</sup> In a letter to photographer Mikhail Tulinov, Kramskoi excitedly recounted the tense confrontation between faculty and defiant students: "One of us, by the name of Kramskoi, breaks away and offers the following: 'We request consent before the persons of the Council to say a few words' (silence, and the gazes of all pierced the speaker)." The students petitioned the Academy to "liberate [them] from participating in the competition," but their request was refused and the group decided to disenroll from the institution. Even at the moment of their exodus, however, the pupils were full of hope as they planned their next steps; Kramskoi recorded four days later that many of his compatriots had already "decided to hold on and to collectively form an artistic association . . . [in which they would] work together and live

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<sup>461</sup> The two themes were "The Liberation of the Serfs" and "The Feast of the Gods at Valhalla." Richard Stites, *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 418.

<sup>462</sup> Evgeny Steiner, "Pursuing Independence: Kramskoi and the Peredvizhniki vs. the Academy of Arts," *Russian Review* 70, no. 2 (2011): 256.

<sup>463</sup> The students protested the topic, which was derived from a Norse mythological tale that Kramskoi later described as "nonsense."

together.”<sup>464</sup> The “Revolt of the Fourteen” ultimately altered the trajectory of Russia’s artistic development.

Kramskoi and his peers formed the St. Petersburg Artel of Artists, an organization that thrived during the next decade by accepting commissions for paintings and by mending its relationship with the Academy, where the Artel’s members even exhibited their works.<sup>465</sup> In 1871, however, four members of the Artel and like-minded artists from St. Petersburg and Moscow including Kramskoi, Grigorii Miasoedov (1834-1911), and Illarion Prianishnikov (1840-1894) founded the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions. The new cooperative differed significantly from its predecessor because, as David Jackson contends, the Society “realised Kramskoy’s dream of an independent artistic organization which, unlike the Artel, was professionally administered and attracted mass popularity.”<sup>466</sup> Many of the Society’s prolific members, often referred to as “The Wanderers,” espoused what Elizabeth Valkenier calls “morally motivated critical realism” and desired to paint authentic scenes of Russian life that often focused on its common people.<sup>467</sup> Their central aim, however, was not to reproduce scenes they had witnessed but to interpret particular moments or events and to explain their greater meaning through art. In the words of one Russian nineteenth-century critic, the Realist painter “is not a photographic camera; he does not copy nature, but recreates it. [He

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<sup>464</sup> “Pis’mo Kramskogo Ivana Nikolaevicha k Tulinovu Mikhailu Borisovichu,” November 13, 1863, RGALI f. 783, o. 2, d. 3, n. 219, eg. xp. 3, l. 1-3.

<sup>465</sup> Steiner, “Pursuing Independence,” 258-9.

<sup>466</sup> Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting*, 27.

<sup>467</sup> Elizabeth K. Valkenier, “The Peredvizhniki and the Spirit of the 1860s,” *Russian Review* 34, no. 3 (1975): 247.

brings] into it the personal element of his feelings and thoughts.”<sup>468</sup> Moreover, paintings in the style of Russian Realism did not embellish nature or mankind, but contained components of idealism because painters sought to capture “the highest truth — a truth that is only a manifestation of the laws governing the world.”<sup>469</sup>

The Wanderers wished to make the genre paintings that typified Realist art more accessible to the Russian populace by holding exhibitions in cities and villages across the empire and by taking advantage of new technologies that permitted the replication and distribution of their artwork. In the Society’s founding statutes, members proclaimed that the organization’s central goals were to ensure that residents of the provinces had “the opportunity to become acquainted with Russian art and to keep track of its successes” and to cultivate “a love of art in society.”<sup>470</sup> The Society remained true to these aspects of its mission during the fifty-two years of its existence, holding forty-eight separate mobile exhibitions in towns all over the nation. Russian audiences also became familiar with members’ most popular works by viewing them on collectible postcards or in illustrated journals like *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* and *Niva* where they were frequently reprinted as engravings and widely distributed.

Some of the most beloved artists of the Society of Traveling Exhibitions include Vasilii Maksimov, Il’ia Repin, Abram Arkhipov, and Filipp Maliavin. Each of these artists evinced a particular interest in painting scenes from Russian peasant life that celebrated their emancipation from serfdom, explored their traditions, fulminated against the conditions that

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<sup>468</sup> Untitled clipping from *Khudozhestvennye novosti*, April 1, 1887. no. 7, tom. 5, “Gazetnye vyrezki o Kramskom I. N.,” OR GTG f. 16, o. 1, d. 430, l. 54.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> “Ustav Tovarishchestva Peredvizhnykh Khudozhestvennykh Vystavok,” accessed at <http://tphv.ru/ustav.php>.

kept them in poverty, or humanized them by showing the range of their emotions and experiences. Although several Wanderers came from noble families, the aforementioned painters were born into the peasant estate, a fact that helps explain their special attention to this segment of Russian society. Two such artists, Maksimov and Repin, depicted the peasantry with an exquisite sensitivity that revealed their deep understanding of village life.

The son of a state-owned peasant, Maksimov was born in the village of Lopino, near Staraia Ladoga. Described by a friend as “homely, pock-marked, with an enormous head of white curly hair . . . [and] the face of a clever *muzhik*,” Maksimov left the countryside to receive training in icon painting (1855-1862) and to study at the Imperial Academy of Arts in cosmopolitan St. Petersburg between 1863 and 1866.<sup>471</sup> As a member of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions, he excelled in creating intimate domestic scenes of cluttered, cozy huts where peasant families shared stories, engaged in age-old rituals, and battled poverty.<sup>472</sup> Maksimov’s paintings could be sentimental but were never saccharine; he viewed the peasantry with clear eyes, drew from personal experience, and frequently returned to the countryside for inspiration. According to one friend, Maksimov “engaged [his peasant models] continually in long conversations” and the peasants greatly respected his realist work, telling him, “You are ours . . . and when you paint, it is not for fun.”<sup>473</sup> Maksimov’s admiration for the peasantry was evident not only in his paintings but also in his deeds, which evoked admiration in the very people he loved to paint. At his wintertime funeral near

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<sup>471</sup> “Vospominaniia M.V. Iamshchikovoi-Altaevoi o khudozhnike V.M. Maksimove,” May 30, 1940, OR GTG f. 81, o. 1, d. 24, l. 2.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Vasilii Maksimov, *Grandmother’s Tales* (1867), *The Arrival of a Magician at a Peasant Wedding* (1875), and *Sick Husband* (1881).

<sup>473</sup> “Biografiia V.M. Maksimova, sostav. M.V. Iamshchikovoi-Altaevoi,” OR GTG, f. 81, o. 1, d. 22, l. 9.

Staraia Ladoga, a group of peasant mourners risked their lives to ensure that Maksimov received a proper burial by pulling the artist's body on a wooden sledge across the thin ice of the Volkhov River, "lead[ing] their artist to his final sanctuary."<sup>474</sup> Remembering Maksimov posthumously, Repin declared that Maksimov was "the flint of the Wanderers, the most indestructible stone of its foundation — inconceivable without Russia, inseparable from his people."<sup>475</sup>

Like Maksimov, Il'ia Repin (1844-1930) was also born to a peasant family, but in the village of Chuhuiv (presently Ukraine).<sup>476</sup> First trained as an apprentice to icon painter I.M. Bunakov (1857-1859), Repin made his way to St. Petersburg where he studied at the Imperial Academy of Arts for about six years.<sup>477</sup> Icon painting shops provided peasants the unique opportunity to obtain access to education in the arts at a time when rural schools were scarce.<sup>478</sup> According to one critic, Repin was a man who "devoted his entire energy to furthering the cause of national artistic expression"; he joined the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions in 1878 and became its "dominant figure," presenting "an enthralled public" with numerous paintings in the Realist style that were hailed by audiences as "the evangel of actuality or greeted as an incomparable evocation of the past."<sup>479</sup> In spite of his fame, Repin was a modest man; one friend declared that "humility appeared to be a fundamental and

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<sup>474</sup> "Vospominaniia M.V. Iamshchikovoï-Altaevoi o khudozhnike V.M. Maksimove," May 30, 1940, OR GTG f. 81, o. 1, d. 24, l. 51.

<sup>475</sup> "Vstupitelnaia stat'ia I.E. Repina Khudozhnik-narodnik k avtobiograficheskim zapiskam Maksimova," 1913, OR GTG, f. 81, o. 1, d. 17, l. 1.

<sup>476</sup> "Pis'ma Repina I.E. k Isaevu Petru Fedorovichu," October 19, 1876, RGALI, f. 842, o. 4, d. 7, l. 1.

<sup>477</sup> Christian Brinton, "Russia's Greatest Painter: Il'ia Repin," *Scribner's Magazine* 40, no. 5, 1906, 518.

<sup>478</sup> The peasantry's access to icon painting workshops helps explain their outsized contribution to the arts rather than literature in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 518.

uncontrived trait in Repin's character."<sup>480</sup> The artist's diverse compositions spanned a host of subjects, but his most famous paintings depicted peasant suffering. Excursions to the Volga River inspired Repin's *Barge Haulers on the Volga* (1872-1873), a painting that critic Vladimir Stasov described as a "glorious artistic creation" through its depiction of men engaging in inhumane labor commonly assigned to Russian serfs before 1861.<sup>481</sup> Several years later, Repin's composition *Seeing off a Recruit* (1879) captured the tragedy of military conscription, an emotionally devastating event that separated male peasants from their parents, wives, and children for years on end. In the words of his former student, Repin's empathetic works earned him a preeminent place in Russian culture as "the most beloved artist of [Russia's] working people."<sup>482</sup> His peasant roots and personal encounters "with grief and need" led him to produce "works that served his native people" and ultimately made his name "the national pride of the Russian folk."<sup>483</sup>

During the late nineteenth century, Wanderer Abram Arkhipov (1862-1930) and Repin's protégé Filipp Maliavin (1869-1940) began experimenting with new artistic techniques to produce joyous, festive paintings of peasants. Born to a peasant family in Ryazan Province, the confident young Arkhipov arrived at the Moscow School of Painting in 1877 with his father, who, according to one observer, was "dressed completely like a rural

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<sup>480</sup> Sadovskii V.A., "'Vstrecha s Repinym,' Vospominaniia." Undated, RGALI, f. 842, o. 4, d. 63, l. 4.

<sup>481</sup> Thanks to advancements in printing technology, this painting was reproduced and widely distributed, reaching thousands of Russians. Vladimir Stasov, "Il'ia Efimovich Repin," *Pchela* no. 3, January 19, 1875, 41.

<sup>482</sup> I.C. Goriushkina-Sorokopudova, "Vospominaniia o Repine," early twentieth century, OT GTG f. 50, o. 1, d. 412, l. 3.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

villager.”<sup>484</sup> He joined the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions in 1891 and subsequently produced numerous paintings of the peasantry whom Arkhipov “so loved,” according to one acquaintance, in part because of his awareness of the abuse his father endured as a serf.<sup>485</sup> Arkhipov’s compositions often depicted the *narod* laboring or relaxing *en plein air* in works like *On the Oka River* (1889) and *Easter (Before Mass)* (1892). His works are unsentimental and typically devoid of a storyline; rather, they appear as sun-filled snapshots of peasant life.<sup>486</sup> Peers praised Arkhipov’s ability to see joy in the simple aspects of life, a trait that ultimately enabled him to “add to the cultural achievements of mankind” through paintings that celebrated Russia’s people.<sup>487</sup>

Like Arkhipov, Filipp Maliavin was similarly inspired by his peasant upbringing to create vibrant, wild paintings of the folk. Born in Kazanki, Maliavin recalled with fondness the sound of pealing church bells and the sight of onion domes in the countryside.<sup>488</sup> After receiving early artistic training in icon painting, he studied under Il’ia Repin at the Imperial Academy of Arts between 1894 and 1899. Completing school after the peak of Russian Realism’s popularity, Maliavin experimented with abstract techniques to create swirling

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<sup>484</sup> Arkhipov was also wearing traditional attire; the observer noticed he had on a long peasant coat. “Vospominaniia khudozhnika V.A. Lukina o A.E. Arkhipove,” May 14, 1927, OR GTG f. 47, o. 1, d. 12, l. 1.

<sup>485</sup> Arkhipov’s lifelong affection for the *narod* may even have contributed to his decision to sell his work to arts patron Pavel Tretyakov rather than to the tsar at an exhibition. “Al’bom pamiati Abrama Efimovicha Arkhipova s avtograficheskimi zapisiami khudozhnikov,” 1931, OR GTG fond 47, o. 1, d. 15, l. 3.

<sup>486</sup> Tatiana Lykova, ed., *The State Tret’iakov Gallery* (Moscow: ScanRus Publishing House, 2012), 234.

<sup>487</sup> “Al’bom pamiati Abrama Efimovicha Arkhipova s avtograficheskimi zapisiami khudozhnikov,” 1931, OR GTG fond 47, o. 1, d. 15, l. 1, 3.

<sup>488</sup> “Vospominaniia F.A. Maliavina i soprovoditel’naia zapiska O.A. Zhivovoi,” undated, OR GTG, f. 41, o. 1, d. 25, l. 2.

scenes of peasants singing, dancing, and laughing in a blur of color.<sup>489</sup> He unambiguously celebrated peasant culture and progress through kinetic paintings filled with life and activity, earning himself a place as one of Russia's most prominent early twentieth-century artists.<sup>490</sup>

Together, the intellectuals and peasants who united to form the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions ushered in a new era of artistic production and creativity in Russia. For the first time in the nation's lengthy history, its artists turned the nation's attention to the customs and daily lives of the common people: the peasantry. The Wanderers helped humanize the *narod* for a range of citizens who were either unfamiliar with the practices of former serfs or who previously viewed them as property. Ultimately, the Society's dedication to disseminating its artwork through mobile exhibitions, engraving, and photographic reproduction ensured that the widest possible audiences viewed and processed their representations.

### **American Artists' Depictions of African-American Slaves and Freedpeople**

The nineteenth century was a period of national soul-searching for artists who strove to comprehend the American character; indeed, art historian Barbara Novak argues that "It was the nineteenth century when American artistic identity was vigorously formed."<sup>491</sup>

Audiences swelled with pride when viewing grand historical works like Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851) and urban dwellers thrilled to see what remained of the American wilderness in the stunning landscape paintings of Thomas Cole, Frederick Church, and other Hudson River School artists of the mid-nineteenth century. Like their

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<sup>489</sup> See Maliavin, *Laughter* (1898) and *Whirlwind* (1906).

<sup>490</sup> "Pis'mo Iaremicha Stepana Petrovicha k Maliavinu Filippu Andreevichu," October 3, 1912, OR GTG, f. 41, o. 1, d. 21, l. 1.

<sup>491</sup> Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 10.



Russian peers, many antebellum American intellectuals and critics lauded paintings that depicted historical and mythological themes, but they considered genre paintings to be a less sophisticated art form.<sup>492</sup> During the first half of the nineteenth century, these compositions typically showed quotidian scenes of common people going about their daily lives that either conveyed moral lessons to viewers through a story or gently ridiculed the depicted subjects.<sup>493</sup> Early genre paintings served another important purpose by helping viewers comprehend their nation's growing demographic diversity and interconnectedness; according to art historian Elizabeth Johns, early genre paintings "drew on generalizations about social groups that developed during periods of intense change" to create recognizable visual representations of different people.<sup>494</sup> Consequently, early nineteenth century audiences living in an era of urbanization, geographic expansion, and immigration slowly began to appreciate paintings that explained their evolving communities and the fluctuating world around them.

The U.S. Civil War transformed Americans' collective sense of national identity as it divided and then reunified under new conditions its states and diverse peoples. In 1861, *New York Monthly Magazine* promoted national art as a balm to heal the fresh wounds of disunion, arguing that "never was there a time in the annals of our country when art held a more important position than it now does."<sup>495</sup> The author distinguishes between different

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<sup>492</sup> Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>493</sup> David M. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 205.

<sup>494</sup> Such "types" included New England farmers, merchants, the urban poor, or African-American laborers. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 7, 12.

<sup>495</sup> Unknown author, "American Art," *New York Monthly Magazine* July 1861; 58, 1.

forms of art, praising genre painting and urging American artists to “be National! . . . [and] depend upon your own identity for immortality” rather than to mimic their European peers. Calling national art “the wholesome food for the aggregate want of individuals expressed as one grand whole,” the author asks the reader, “And is it not a noble work, this catering for the aesthetic food to satisfy the craving . . . ineradicable in the hearts of men?”<sup>496</sup> This straightforward question had no simple answer, however, when it came to visual representations of America’s new, diverse citizenry.

After the abolition of slavery, some American artists became captivated by the lives of African-American freedpeople, who now legally possessed many of the same rights as their former masters. Unlike the Wanderers, however, artists who depicted African Americans had no equivalent to the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions, whose members were devoted to populist topics.<sup>497</sup> Instead, American painters independently decided to represent African Americans in distinct ways according to their individual perspectives and experiences. Two artists who created complex, thoughtful portraits of former slaves that encouraged audiences to assess the effects of emancipation include Winslow Homer (1836-1910) and Eastman Johnson (1824-1906). Homer learned to capture the details of a scene under the threat of cannon fire while working as an artist-correspondent for *Harper’s Weekly* during the Civil War. The New Englander’s time on Virginia’s battlefields and apprenticeship at Boston-based Bufford’s Lithography Shop during the height of the abolitionist movement likely stoked his interest in African Americans and inspired his post-

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Most American artists who painted African Americans were white men of Northern or Southern birth. Many of these men exhibited their work at institutions like New York’s National Academy of Design, an organization comparable to the Russian Imperial Academy of Arts.

war journeys to Virginia where he painted the upturned lives of freedpeople.<sup>498</sup> In compositions like *The Cotton Pickers* (1876) and *Dressing for Carnival* (1877), Homer displayed a distinctive style that moved audiences, particularly through his representations of African Americans.<sup>499</sup> Indeed, one critic declared in 1880 that Homer “shows his originality in nothing so much as in his manner of painting negroes” and that his talent surpassed that of the creators of “pitiable caricatures of negroes” that filled the pages of late nineteenth-century American illustrated magazines.”<sup>500</sup> As a storyteller, Homer continuously strove to create paintings of freedpeople that struck viewers as true to life, an artistic decision that ultimately made him “one of the few artists who ha[d] the boldness and originality to make something out of the negro for artistic purposes.”<sup>501</sup>

Eastman Johnson, one of Homer’s peers, similarly displayed what one nineteenth-century critic called “decided individuality and independence in choice and treatment of subject,” especially in his humanistic paintings of middling Americans.<sup>502</sup> Like Homer, Johnson was born in the North and also worked at Bufford’s Lithography Shop.<sup>503</sup> Trained in Europe, Johnson returned to the United States during the mid-1850s, where, according to one critic, he “found inspiration in American subjects, which he portrayed to the end of his

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<sup>498</sup> Peter H. Wood and Karen C.C. Dalton, *Winslow Homer’s Images of Blacks: The Civil War and Reconstruction Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 16.

<sup>499</sup> Unfortunately, scholars know of no existing correspondence from Homer during his time in Virginia. Mary Ann Cato, “Winslow Homer’s Visits to Virginia during Reconstruction,” *American Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (1980): 12.

<sup>500</sup> “Artists and Their Work: Pictures in the Academy,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1880, 5.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> United States Centennial Commission, “International Exhibition, 1876” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880), 29.

<sup>503</sup> Eastman Johnson was born in Lovell, Maine, in 1824.

career.”<sup>504</sup> A particular topic of interest for Johnson was African-American life; he composed numerous genre paintings featuring slaves and freedpeople throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Johnson’s complicated and at times ambiguous works of art such as *Negro Life at the South* (1859), *Fiddling His Way* (1866), and *The Old Stagecoach* (1871) triggered intense debate among critics who strove to comprehend the artist’s underlying messages about slavery and freedom.<sup>505</sup> Johnson’s thought-provoking works were sometimes displayed alongside those of Homer at events like the American Centennial Exhibition and institutions such as the National Academy of Design, which the *New York Times* described as essential in fostering “the cultivation of a taste for art” among the American populace.<sup>506</sup>

Although Russian painters, often subject to censorship, were notably quieter on the subject of Russian serfdom, two American painters who unequivocally condemned the institution of slavery and lauded freedpeople’s achievements were Thomas Satterwhite Noble (1835-1907) and Thomas Waterman Wood (1823-1903). A native of Lexington, Kentucky, Noble was acquainted with the harsh realities of bondage as a consequence of witnessing African American slaves performing manual labor on his father’s hemp farm.<sup>507</sup> His abhorrence of slavery and his decision to compose poignant, emotional paintings that denounced the sale of human beings may stem from his personal encounters with the men and women on his father’s estate. In his youth, Noble was exposed to black folk traditions

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<sup>504</sup> *The Boy Lincoln: Eastman Johnson, 1824 -1906* (Boston: H.K. Turner Co., 1909), 2.

<sup>505</sup> John Davis, “Eastman Johnson’s *Negro Life at the South* and Urban Slavery in Washington, D.C.,” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 1 (1998): 67.

<sup>506</sup> “The Academy of Design,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1874.

<sup>507</sup> Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 125-126.

while visiting slaves' cabins and listening to ghost stories until, he remembered, "night had settled over . . . and the way back to the house seemed long and dark."<sup>508</sup>

In early adulthood, after Noble trained in France under Thomas Couture in the late 1850s and served as a Confederate soldier during the Civil War, he made his way to New York City and produced eight paintings containing representations of African-American slaves.<sup>509</sup> His dramatic scenes of slave auctions and attempted escapes stunned audiences with their brutal authenticity. For instance, one reviewer pronounced that Noble's work *The Modern Medea* (1867), a graphic depiction of a fugitive slave's desperate attempt to murder her own children to keep them from bondage, "illustrated one of the horrors of the institution of Slavery as it formerly existed, and produced a vigorous and interesting work, although it is on a repulsive subject."<sup>510</sup> In fact, numerous critics disapproved of Noble's topical selection; for example, a reviewer from the *St. Louis Times* argued that audiences must "question the propriety of the subject" when considering Noble's *The Last Sale of Slaves* (1870), a portrayal of slave auction at a St. Louis courthouse.<sup>511</sup> Such statements testify to some audiences' discomfort with Noble's stark depictions of slavery and the rarity of such representations in American art during the 1860s.

Another opponent of slavery, Vermont native Thomas Waterman Wood was a genre painter interested in quotidian scenes who, according to one contemporary, "forcibly

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<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> Couture's works reveal his abiding interest in depicting the impoverished and the oppressed, a characteristic he may have passed on to his student, Noble. Ibid., 130 and Leslie Furth, "'The Modern Medea' and Race Matters: Thomas Satterwhite Noble's 'Margaret Garner,'" *American Art* 12, no. 2 (1998): 37, 46.

<sup>510</sup> *The Modern Medea* exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1867. "The Modern Medea," *Harper's Weekly*, May 18, 1867, 318.

<sup>511</sup> Alfred Jingle, "Fine Arts. Noble's 'Last Sale,'" *St. Louis Times*, August 12, 1866, quoted in Boime, *The Art of Exclusion*, 135.

represent[ed] the humble life of the poor with pathos and humor.”<sup>512</sup> Wood’s portraits of African-American freedpeople undeniably praise their post-emancipation achievements. In *A Bit of War History: The Contraband, Recruit, and Veteran* (1865-1866), arguably Wood’s most famous series of paintings, the artist celebrates the military service of a former slave who sacrifices his body for his new country by serving as a Union soldier. Other paintings depicted freedpeople as integrated members of society. For example, a watercolor entitled *American Citizens (To the Polls)* (1867) shows three men standing in line on equal footing to cast their ballots on Election Day.<sup>513</sup> The third man is an African American whose eagerness to vote is palpable; he stands with arms outstretched, as if to hug the man in front of him. Paintings like these countered the denigrating cartoons in printed media that mocked African Americans and served as important visual examples of harmonious post-emancipation relationships between black and white citizens.

Although late nineteenth-century artists like Homer, Johnson, Noble, and Wood created dignified representations of African Americans, painter William Aiken Walker (1838-1921) produced degrading, cartoonish portrayals of freedpeople that differed markedly from those of his peers. Information about Walker’s youth is sparse, but scholars know that the artist was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and spent time honing his craft in Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida.<sup>514</sup> He painted several works on commission

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<sup>512</sup> “Thomas W. Wood,” in S.G.W. Benjamin, *Our American Artists* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., Publishers, 1879), unpaginated.

<sup>513</sup> The other two white voters represent an Irishman and a Dutchman. See Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710-1940* (San Francisco and Washington, D.C.: Bedford Arts, Publishers and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990), 50.

<sup>514</sup> “Exhibition of Southern Genre Paintings by William Aiken Walker,” (New York: Bland Gallery, Inc., 1940), Frick Art Reference Library Collection.

and sold hundreds of collectible, souvenir-size pictures.<sup>515</sup> Although Walker's technique was arguably less sophisticated than that of his peers, his works appeared at national and international exhibitions including the Annual Exhibition of the Artists' Association of New Orleans, Chicago's Columbian Exposition (1893), and the St. Louis World's Fair (1903).<sup>516</sup> Currier and Ives's lithographic reproductions of *The Levee, New Orleans* and *A Cotton Plantation on the Mississippi* also circulated widely in 1884. Walker's name was known all across the South during his lifetime because, in the words of one collector, Walker was an artist of "no parallel among American genre painters as a visual recorder and preserver of life in the rural South during the post-Civil War period."<sup>517</sup>

Walker's folksy, stereotypical depictions of freedpeople clad in rags as they toiled on plantations or wandered through cities appealed to some audiences but discomfited others. In 1884, a *Daily Picayune* critic praised Walker's "drawings of the Negro in his native cotton and cane field . . . with all the half pathetic ruggedness of costume and love of gay colors that render the darkey such good artistic material for one who has the skill." A year later, however, another *Daily Picayune* critic lambasted Walker's simplistic "negro character sketches," characterizing them as "homely . . . seemingly uninteresting, and often

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<sup>515</sup> Cynthia Seibels, *The Sunny South: The Life and Art of William Aiken Walker* (Spartanburg: Saraland Press, 1995), 83, 92.

<sup>516</sup> August P. Trovaioli and Roulhac B. Toledano, *William Aiken Walker: Southern Genre Painter* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University and Pelican Publishing Company, 2008), 113.

<sup>517</sup> "Artist Receives Late Recognition," *Charleston, S.C. Post*, January 24, 1941, clipping from the William Aiken Walker files at the Watson Library Archives at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Trovaioli and Toledano, *William Aiken Walker*, 3.

repulsive.”<sup>518</sup> These reviews suggest that audiences interpreted Walker’s paintings in different ways during the 1880s, when Americans held divided views about freedpeople.

Painters like Walker, Homer, Johnson, Noble, and Wood presented a wide range of representations of African-American slaves and freedpeople to post-bellum audiences that stimulated debate and elicited criticism. Although American artists’ depictions were arguably less sentimental and idealized than those of the Wanderers, most U.S. painters shared with their Russian counterparts the goal of humanizing the former bondsmen and employed analogous strategies to do so. In order to fully assess the connections and disjunctures between the ways in which American and Russian artists portrayed slaves, freedpeople, serfs, and peasants, however, it is necessary to look more closely at representations in individual works of art. Thus, the second half of this chapter examines Russian and American paintings that fall into six distinct thematic categories: relationships between masters and bondsmen, peasants and freedpeople in the military, post-emancipation agricultural labor, religion and rituals, education, and urban migration. A deeper comparison of these works of art reveals startling similarities and differences between the ways in which artists and audiences imagined and represented the former bondsmen during the forty years that followed the abolition of serfdom and slavery.

### **Visualizing Serfdom and Slavery: Relationships between Masters and Bondsmen**

Russian and American artists sought to shape the public’s memory of serfdom and slavery immediately after emancipation by offering diverse representations of each institution. American painter Thomas Satterwhite Noble and Russian painter Nikolai Nevrev

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<sup>518</sup> “Seebold’s Art Gallery. A New Orleans Exhibition of Oil Paintings,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, November 30, 1884, and “Art Talk. The Brush and Pencil in New Orleans,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, July 26, 1885, quoted in Seibels, *The Sunny South*, 113-114.



(1830-1904) both condemned the sale of serfs and slaves in works that portrayed landowners as heartless and bondsmen as defiant.<sup>519</sup> A pair of astonishingly similar paintings created just two years apart, Nevrev's *Bargaining. A Scene of Serf Life. From the Recent Past* (1866) and Noble's *The Price of Blood* (1868), each bring the viewer into a private home where a wealthy landowner reclines in his robe and slippers.<sup>520</sup> [See Figures 1 and 2.] Both masters dispassionately bargain with traders over the price of their human property, a female serf and a male slave. Neither Nevrev nor Noble depicts the bondspersons as weak; rather, the serf stands with arms crossed as she glares at her master while the slave, hand on one hip, looks into the distance with disgust.<sup>521</sup> Their compositions were two of the most direct denunciations of slavery and its facilitators out of the hundreds of genre paintings produced during the mid-to-late nineteenth century.<sup>522</sup>

More frequently, however, artists employed an oblique approach to the controversial topics of slavery and serfdom that avoided the assigning of blame for the maltreatment of bondsmen. American painters Thomas Waterman Wood, Thomas Moran, Eastman Johnson, and Theodor Kaufmann created dramatic scenes that told harrowing stories of slaves' attempted escapes from bondage, while Russian painters Boris Kustodiev and Grigorii Miasoedov portrayed the long-awaited moment of the serfs' liberation when they heard the

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<sup>519</sup> Nikolai Nevrev joined the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions in 1881.

<sup>520</sup> Many thanks to Maurie McInnis for referring me to Noble's painting. For more background on the paintings, see Yelena Nesterova, *The Itinerants: The Masters of Russian Realism, Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (St. Petersburg: Aurora Art Publishers, 1996), 37-38, and Boime, *The Art of Exclusion*, 147-148.

<sup>521</sup> The young slave is the illegitimate son of the landowner, a fact referred to by the painting's title, *The Price of Blood*.

<sup>522</sup> One critic alludes to the painting's controversial reception; he contends that although the composition won first prize from the Moscow Society of Art Lovers, an organization supported by future Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions patron Pavel Tret'iakov, hardly any reviews appeared in the press. In addition, the painting was supposed to be sent to an artistic exhibition in Vienna, but its content was deemed to be too "uncomfortable." A.P., "Nikolai Vasil'evich Nevrev," *Pchela* 5 (March 28, 1878): 15.

Emancipation Manifesto read aloud for the first time. First, Wood delicately alluded to the historical pattern of slaves' northward flight from Southern plantations in *A Southern Cornfield* (1861), a painting that depicts a male slave offering cool water from a gourd to a line of slaves that vanishes into the shadows of tall green corn stalks.<sup>523</sup> During the next two years, Moran, Johnson, and Kaufmann completed similarly sympathetic compositions portraying slave families escaping from bondage to liberty on horseback or on foot, journeying through stygian swamps, forests, and fields as they fled toward freedom's light.<sup>524</sup> As the Civil War raged on, these artists sought to evoke compassion in audiences without explicitly criticizing slave owners by humanizing the bondsmen who risked their lives to attain a better future for themselves and their children.

By contrast, Russian painters did not focus on the subject of flight, a difficult task for bonded peasants residing in a vast empire where serfdom was legal and for whom escape to its distant borderlands, where law enforcement lagged, posed a challenge.<sup>525</sup> Instead, Miasoedov and Kustodiev painted scenes that depicted serfs as passive recipients of freedom after learning of the state's decision to liberate them.<sup>526</sup> In one of Miasoedov's most famous

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<sup>523</sup> Due to its shape and function, the gourd symbolized the Big Dipper, a constellation that served as a navigational guide for runaways making the journey northward. Eleanor Jones Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian American Art Museum; and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 182.

<sup>524</sup> See Thomas Waterman Wood, *A Southern Cornfield* (1861), Thomas Moran, *Slave Hunt, Dismal Swamp, Virginia* (1862), Eastman Johnson, *A Ride for Liberty: The Fugitive Slaves* (1862), and Theodor Kaufmann, *On to Liberty* (1867).

<sup>525</sup> The notion of liberation from bondage through escape did not figure prominently in peasants' autobiographical narratives or folk traditions; instead, many serfs believed that emancipation would come through legal avenues. Scholar John MacKay posits that serfs thought liberation would be "linked to the category of the *state*", for example, through a "hypothetical meeting with the Tsar." John MacKay, "'And Hold the Bondman Still': Biogeography and Utopia in Slave and Serf Narratives," *Biography*, 25 no. 1, (2002): 118.

<sup>526</sup> Kustodiev was not a member of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions, which was founded in his youth, but he studied under Il'ia Repin in St. Petersburg (1896-1903).

paintings, *Reading the Manifesto of 1861* (1874), a group of illiterate male peasants raptly listen to a peasant child who covertly reads aloud from a copy of the Emancipation Manifesto amid the hay bales of a darkened barn.<sup>527</sup> Kustodiev's *Reading of the Manifesto (Emancipation of the Peasants)* (1907), which was painted more than forty years after emancipation, presented a more humorous view of emancipation in which a male official reads aloud the Manifesto from the steps of a country estate to a colorful group of peasants while a woman, presumably a relative of the estate owner, histrionically weeps behind a column. In both of these works, Miasoedov and Kustodiev portray the serfs as passive recipients of the gift of liberty which has been bestowed upon them by the state. By contrast, each of the aforementioned American paintings portrays slaves as central actors in the drama of liberation who exercise agency by making the grim decision to risk their lives by running away. These representational differences demonstrate important distinctions between the ways in which Russians and Americans viewed the bondsmen's respective roles in bringing about their liberation.<sup>528</sup>

Although a number of artists criticized the institutions of slavery and serfdom, others created nostalgic paintings that idealized relationships between masters and bondsmen. More than a decade before he completed *Reading the Manifesto of 1861*, Miasoedov, the son of a poor landowner, produced the idealistic *Congratulation of the Betrothed in the Landlord's House* (1861). In this sentimental painting, a throng of peasants spills into the parlor of their master's manor bringing foodstuffs and merriment to celebrate the engagement of a young

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<sup>527</sup> "Rukopis' Kovalenko A.I. – Ivan Miasoedov, Zhizn' v tvorchestve i bor'be," OR GTG, f. 133, o. 1, d. 187., l. 1.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Russian artists also faced unique censorial challenges which might have made it difficult to paint a scene of peasant flight or rebellion.

peasant couple. The scene is one of domestic bliss; the bride-to-be kisses her groom in a felicitous gesture of goodwill as their owners look on in delight.<sup>529</sup> Wanderer Carl Lemokh (1841-1910) created a comparable scene in *Summer (with Congratulations)* (1890) [see Figure 3], a painting in which barefoot peasant children stand nervously on the threshold of an estate home. The little girls carry bouquets of wildflowers and a young boy holds a large basket of fresh eggs, all gifts for their landowner and his family on an unnamed occasion. These saccharine tableaux offered viewers rosy sketches of master-peasant relations where both groups cheerfully celebrated one another's milestones or holidays.

Russian compositions depicting contented, loyal serfs and peasants mirror American paintings of African-American slaves who faithfully served their masters. Such works were typically produced by American artists who drew inspiration from the Lost Cause mythology, a set of beliefs that comforted defeated Southerners after the Civil War. A central component of the mythology was a revisionist account of antebellum master-slave relations in which African Americans cherished their owners and did not desire to be free. One representative painting that visualizes this concept is William D. Washington's *The Burial of Latané* (1864), which depicts the Virginia funeral of Confederate captain William Latané. A group of weeping white Southern women and African-American slaves surrounds his coffin, collectively mourning his death. This mawkish image was exceedingly popular among white

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<sup>529</sup> Miasoedov exhibited this painting at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg in 1861 and earned a gold medal. *The World of the Peasantry in Russian Art*, 131.

Southerners not only during the war but also in post-emancipation decades when Virginian families even hung copies of the painting's engraving on their parlor walls.<sup>530</sup>

American artists continued to draw inspiration from the Lost Cause myth nearly half a century later, when Tennessean Carl Guthertz (1844-1907) produced *I Promised the Missus' I'd Bring Him Home or Faithful Unto Death* (1904) [see Figure 4].<sup>531</sup> Like Washington, Guthertz used wartime imagery to illustrate the notion of black loyalty; his painting featured a strong black slave carrying home to his white mistress the corpse of a Confederate soldier, his master. Ultimately, maudlin representations of African-American slaves like those of Guthertz and Washington bolstered Southerners' claims that antebellum plantation owners treated their devoted slaves well and that African-American freedpeople would be better off if they had never been liberated from bondage.

### **Fearing Conscription or Fighting for Freedom: Peasants and Freedpeople in the Military**

A second common theme in Russian and American images of former serfs and slaves is that of military service; however, while Russian artists consistently depicted peasant conscription as a kind of enslavement thanks to the harsh terms of service, American painters portrayed soldiering as an opportunity for African Americans to earn or exercise their freedom. This stark discrepancy between representations comes from differences between the two nations' martial histories. In nineteenth-century Russia, the tsarist government primarily

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<sup>530</sup> "Original Found in N.J. of 'Burial of Latané,'" *Richmond News-Leader*, February 2, 1939, clipping from the William D. Washington files at the Watson Library Archive of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art*, 14.

<sup>531</sup> Guthertz helped smuggle contraband for the Confederate army during the Civil War. According to one reviewer, he combatted postwar change through his art by "pulling the mantle of the past over the rapidly advancing age of industrialization" during the late nineteenth century. See exhibition catalogue "Carl Guthertz: Designs for Memphis 1873-1877," copyrighted by Joseph S. Czestochowski, Jr., 1974, from the Carl Guthertz files at the Watson Library Archive at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

selected recruits from the peasant estate to form its standing army.<sup>532</sup> Male peasants dreaded being called to service for the standard term of twenty to twenty-five years, a period that nearly matched the average peasant's life-span of twenty-seven years.<sup>533</sup> Permanently separated from their families, soldiers faced disease, malnutrition, and the prospect of death during battle. Evidence of peasant attitudes toward recruitment appear in myriad nineteenth-century *soldatskie pesni* (soldier songs) in which they characterize military service as bondage. For instance, in one illustrative song recorded in the Voronezh *oblast* (region), a peasant sings, "My sorrow is great,/ my legs do not move from grief . . . / Your sweet one is in slavery (v nevole), / in military conscription."<sup>534</sup> Composing a majority of the total population, peasants also continued to comprise an outsized proportion of the army even after War Minister Dmitrii Miliutin enacted the Universal Conscription Act of 1874, an important step in reforming Russia's military after the abolition of serfdom.<sup>535</sup> Likely aware of the disproportionate burden peasant soldiers and their families continued to bear during the second half of the nineteenth century, numerous members of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions depicted scenes of recruitment in paintings.

Russian painters from the peasant estate like Il'ia Repin especially comprehended the trauma of military conscription as well as the peasantry's abiding aversion to recruitment even after the state's military reforms. Repin's heart-breaking work, *Seeing off a Recruit* (1879) [see Figure 5], portrays a young male peasant bidding farewell to his bereaved wife

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<sup>532</sup> Elise Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 9-11.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> V.Ia. Propp, *Narodnye liricheskie pesni* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961), 445.

<sup>535</sup> William C. Fuller, Jr., *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 11.

and children in a courtyard (*dvor*) located in the village of Bykovo.<sup>536</sup> Repin designed the scene in such a way that the viewer's eyes are drawn toward the empty rural horizon where the painting's planes converge, perhaps in an attempt to convey the feelings of infinity and finality that enveloped the gloomy recruit and his family. In 1880, the popular magazine *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* reprinted Repin's painting, which was also displayed in the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions' eighth show, and added a short story to bring the image to life. The fictional tale describes how the family of a conscripted peasant responded to the government's unwelcome call: "Mikita was hooked! . . . Matrona, his mother, wailed loudly: what would life be like for Mikita as a soldier, such need, there would be such hunger and cold to endure on campaigns. . . . Woe settled over the family."<sup>537</sup> Together, Repin's painting and *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia's* short story likely evoked pity and increased support for Miliutin's policies in audiences who, through these sympathetic representations, began to better understand the peasantry's plight.

Two later works echoed and expanded upon the themes contained in Repin's *Seeing off a Recruit*.<sup>538</sup> Konstantin Savitskii's *To War* (1888), featured in the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions' sixteenth show, is a sprawling, lively work depicting a chaotic scene at a smoke-filled train station where several recruits prepare to depart. At the center of the painting, two recruits lead a fellow peasant to the train, but he gazes back in utter terror at his grief-stricken wife who desperately extends her hand toward him. The peasant's forced

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<sup>536</sup> Repin drew inspiration for this painting from the recruitments that occurred for the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). *The World of the Peasantry in Russian Art*, 141.

<sup>537</sup> Ar. Eval'd, "Provody novobrantsa: k kartine I.E. Repina," *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* 617, November 1, 1880, 337-338.

<sup>538</sup> Savitskii studied at the Imperial Academy of Arts during the 1860s and early 1870s, joining the Wanderers in 1891.

march to war is like that of a prisoner to his execution; his fate has been determined but this fact does not mitigate the horror of what awaits him. Nikolai Pimonenko's (1862-1912) *Seeing off the Recruits* (before 1912) also portrays a conscripted peasant's train station departure. The poses are recognizable; a wife weeps into her husband's chest while children stand around them, but Pimonenko presents the event from a more impressionistic perspective. The anguished peasants' faces are indistinguishable blurs of color, a technique which gives the viewer the sense that the very surface of the painting is damp from the grey mist and violet smoke hanging in the air. Thus, Pimonenko reimagined a tableau now familiar to audiences by placing particular emphasis on the melancholic atmosphere and by universalizing the peasants' experiences through their anonymity.

Russian artists' depictions of peasant military service differed significantly from those of American painters, who often portrayed soldiering as a patriotic, heroic endeavor. The Civil War possessed special meaning for African-American slaves, whose futures as free men and women largely depended upon the conflict's outcome. The Union Army did not formally recruit black soldiers prior to 1863, but after the U.S. government formed the Bureau for Colored Troops in May of that year, tens of thousands of African Americans enlisted. Of the 179,000 who served during the Civil War, 146,000 hailed from Confederate states or from border states, a fact that attests in part to African Americans' desire to eliminate slavery.<sup>539</sup> Two artists whose works lauded African Americans' wartime contributions were Edward Lamson Henry (1841-1919) and Thomas Waterman Wood. Henry's composition, *A Presentation of the Colors to the First Colored Regiment of New York by the Ladies of the City in front of the Old Union League Club, Union Square, New*

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<sup>539</sup> Chulhee Lee, "Socioeconomic Differences in the Health of Black Union Soldiers during the American Civil War," *Social Science History* 33, no. 4 (2009): 430.



*York City in 1864* (1868) was one of the first to celebrate African-American military service on a large scale. Henry borrows from modes of representation used in grand historical paintings of the early nineteenth century to create a magnificent scene that applauds the formation of the 20<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry, a regiment solely composed of black soldiers.<sup>540</sup> Crowds of New Yorkers surround the blue-uniformed soldiers in support of their efforts while nearly a dozen outsized American flags decorate grandstands or wave in the bright sunlight from atop the buildings in Union Square. This patriotic panorama placed African Americans at the center of the North's effort to preserve the Union.

By contrast, Thomas Waterman Wood praised black military service in a more intimate set of paintings inspired by his observations in wartime Tennessee. Wood's triptych, *A Bit of War History: The Contraband, the Recruit, and the Veteran* (1866) [see Figure 6], tells the story of a former slave who enlisted in the Union army during the Civil War. In the first painting, the cheerful man brims with naïve optimism upon arriving at the Provost Marshal's office. After donning the bright blue uniform in the second scene, however, the man becomes stoic, suddenly aware of the challenges ahead. Now a soldier, he stands upright with his hand proudly on his hip and his rifle against his shoulder, looking thoughtfully into the distance.<sup>541</sup> The third painting offers a sober conclusion to the former slave's story; in his faded and tattered uniform, the soldier leans on crutches and his remaining leg, heroically saluting the viewer.

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<sup>540</sup> Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art*, 203.

<sup>541</sup> One contemporary review noted that "nothing could well be better than the quiet self-conceit developed in every line of Sambo's face, after he has donned Uncle Sam's uniform." "National Academy of Design," *The New York Leader*, May 11, 1867, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Object Files for Thomas Waterman Wood's *A Bit of War History*.

These radical compositions appealed to many Northern viewers; in one testament to their popularity, *Harper's Weekly* declared that the triptych was “among the most finished and impressive of the paintings on exhibition at the National Academy [in 1867],” calling them “admirable works” that told a “thrilling story” to audiences about a former slave’s journey from bondage to freedom.<sup>542</sup> The *New York Evening Post* criticized Wood’s technical skills but conceded that the paintings’ “best qualities consist in the clearness with which they tell their story, and the evident sympathy of the artist with his subject.”<sup>543</sup> The triptych continued to fascinate viewers throughout the late nineteenth century; after the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired the works in 1884, one critic noted that they continued to “attract much attention” from museumgoers.<sup>544</sup> Indeed, Wood’s painting represented freedpeople in a new light by highlighting their service and bodily sacrifice for a nation that had so often mistreated them. Through their paintings of noble black soldiers, Wood and Henry encouraged American audiences to view African Americans as fellow citizens rather than the cause of the war and as partners in the fight to preserve the Union. Their representations of military service as an emancipating effort contrasted sharply with depictions of enchaining peasant conscription.

### **Joy in Suffering? Depictions of Agricultural Laborers in the Post-Emancipation Era**

The abolition of serfdom (1861) and slavery (1865) produced post-emancipation conditions for peasants and freedpeople that overlapped in important ways. In Russia, serfs were legally freed from bondage but required to pay enormous redemption payments for the

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<sup>542</sup> “The Contraband, Recruit, and Veteran,” *Harper's Weekly*, May 4, 1867, 284.

<sup>543</sup> “The Academy of Design,” *New York Evening Post*, May 2, 1867, page 1, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Object Files for Thomas Waterman Wood’s *A Bit of War History*.

<sup>544</sup> Frank Weitenkampf, “Fine Arts: The Negro in Art,” *The Independent*, August 26, 1897, 9.

communal right to work the land. As a result, post-emancipation peasant agricultural labor during the 1870s and 1880s looked very similar to that of serfdom. African-American freedpeople faced analogous challenges in the United States, where many former slaves were initially unable to purchase their own land.<sup>545</sup> Thousands of families in the U.S. South participated in the system of sharecropping, renting land from white farmers and giving up part of their annual harvest in a cycle that kept many freedpeople, like the Russian peasantry, mired in poverty.

Despite these similar circumstances, Russian and American artists depicted peasant and African-American labor in starkly different ways that indicate divergent perceptions of agriculture's role in the national historical narrative. While Russian painters Konstantin Makovskii, Mikhail Klodt (1833-1902), and Grigorii Miasoedov created lush, colorful scenes of peasants working in verdant fields, American painters Winslow Homer and Thomas Anshutz produced portraits of African-American laborers that subtly criticized their working conditions and lack of economic advancement after emancipation. Like his American peers, artist William Aiken Walker portrayed agricultural labor as an inferior occupation, but suggested through his disparaging representations of African Americans that freedpeople were well-suited to this type of work.

Landscape painter Konstantin Makovskii (1839-1915), a founding member of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions, created an idyllic agrarian scene in *Peasant Lunch during Harvest* (1871). Under a cloudless azure sky, several peasant families cook their midday meal around a campfire in the green grasses. Dressed in traditional rural attire, female peasants feed their plump-cheeked children in a picture of communal unity and

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<sup>545</sup> Out of 4 million freed slaves, 30,000 African Americans in the U.S. South owned land in 1870.

economic stability. Golden wheat fields wave in the breeze behind the close-knit group, a sign of the land's fecundity and the Russian peasantry's fertility. Painted a year later in 1872, Mikhail Klodt's *Ploughing* similarly represents agricultural labor as a noble endeavor. Here, a single female peasant in a red headscarf and blue *sarafan* (pinafore), the traditional colors of the garments worn by the Virgin Mary as illustrated in Russian icons, stands erect as she looks across a vast, recently ploughed field. The deep grooves of the upturned earth are rich and black, contrasting sharply with the green grass and bright blue sky. A symbol of purity and fertility, the female peasant seems to assure viewers that Russia's future will be secured through the preservation of its traditional agrarian way of life.

One of the most famous depictions of agricultural labor was Grigorii Miasoedov's *Harvest Time (Scythers)* (1887) [see Figure 7]. Described by art critic Vladimir Stasov as "full of poetry, light feeling, health, and solemnity," *Harvest Time* is an expansive painting that portrays a group of male and female peasants rhythmically mowing wheat in unison with long-handled scythes.<sup>546</sup> On an achingly beautiful day, the pale pink sunlight warms the backs of the workers while butterflies dance above the gilded wheat stalks and violet wildflowers. The peasants remain intensely focused on their collective task, however, and follow the lead of a male peasant at the center of the composition. The *muzhik* wears a woven wreath of golden wheat around his head, a symbol that recalls an angelic halo or even the crown of thorns worn by Christ at his crucifixion. After years of bodily sacrifice in these fields, the elderly peasant has gained wisdom and earned his position as head of the group. Miasoedov's pastoral representation offers more than visual beauty; his painting seeks to

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<sup>546</sup> *The World of the Peasantry in Russian Art*, 92.

elevate the Russian peasant because of his work ethic, humility, and dedication to a traditional pastime.

Indeed, *Scythers* recalls several famous passages from Lev Tolstoi's bestseller *Anna Karenina* (1877) in which the author describes harvest time as "the most pressingly busy season of the year, when an extraordinary tension of self-sacrificing labor manifests itself among all the peasants, such as is never shown in any other condition of life."<sup>547</sup> According to the novel's protagonist, the landowner Constantine Levin, the countryside was where "one rejoiced, suffered, and labored" and where the rural peasantry developed the Christ-like qualities of "strength, meekness, and justice" through manual toil.<sup>548</sup> Miasoedov's depiction of the humble, laboring peasantry, completed only a few years after the publication of *Anna Karenina*, similarly attributes saintly virtues to Russia's *narod*. These three Wanderers collectively viewed Russia's agrarian tradition as an important aspect of their cultural heritage and national future. Their optimistic representations of rural laborers attest to their respect for the peasantry and their knowledge that agriculture remained an essential component of the economy even in a post-emancipation era of increasing urbanization and industrialization.

By contrast, American painters Winslow Homer and Thomas Anshutz questioned whether agricultural labor benefited or harmed African-American freedpeople by restricting their geographic and economic mobility. In his famous work, *The Cotton Pickers* (1876) [see Figure 8], Homer portrays two contemplative African-American women looking into the distance across a cotton field. Their worn clothing and bonnets suggest their modest means,

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<sup>547</sup> Lev Tolstoi, *Anna Karenina*, The Maude Translation, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1970), 717.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

but they appear strong and healthy in body and spirit. The painting's title asks the viewer to consider whether the painting is historical or contemporary; are the cotton pickers slaves or freedpeople?<sup>549</sup> In fact, it is almost impossible to answer this question because the composition intentionally offers few temporal or geographic clues. Instead, the painting's intrinsic ambiguity begs the viewer to consider how much conditions had changed for African Americans since their emancipation and to ponder the role of agriculture in uplifting freedpeople from poverty. Exhibited at New York's Century Club, *The Cotton Pickers* was deemed by one reviewer to be a model work for artists who hoped to truthfully represent the African-American experience.<sup>550</sup>

Three years after Homer completed his thought-provoking composition, Thomas Anshutz (1851-1912) created a similar painting that subtly critiqued black Americans' continued societal marginalization on secluded rural farms where they struggled to eke out an existence. As an artist, Anshutz strove to capture life as he truly saw it; in 1873 he recorded that, during *plein-air* excursions, he would "get out [his] materials and make as accurate a painting of what [he saw] in front of [him] as [he could]."<sup>551</sup> Indeed, his depiction of an African-American mother tending her vegetable garden alongside her children, entitled *The Way They Live* (1879), strikes the viewer as a genuine snapshot of African-American farm life. The humble family toils on their dry patch of land in the hot sun, focused only on

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<sup>549</sup> Viewers may also have asked the same question of "Scythers," in which the peasants' status as enserfed or free is ambiguous.

<sup>550</sup> The reviewer believed that too many artists focused on the "comical features" of "negro life." "The National Academy Exhibition, 1877," *Scribner's Monthly* XIV, no. 2, June 1877, page 263, and William Howe Downes, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer, Volume 3* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 89.

<sup>551</sup> Anshutz's "Discourse on Art," ca. Fall 1873, microfilm roll 140, Archives of American Art, quoted in Randall C. Griffin, *Thomas Anshutz: Artist and Teacher* (Huntington, New York: Heckscher Museum, 1994), 28.

ensuring that their cabbages survive. Although little is known about the scene's geographic location, experts surmise that Anshutz painted the composition at the site of the event somewhere south of Philadelphia, possibly in the mountains of West Virginia.<sup>552</sup> Reviewers praised the work after it was displayed at the Academy of the Fine Arts in 1879; one called it "remarkably well painted" and lauded Anshutz's representation of the figures of the black family as "especially good."<sup>553</sup> The artist's compassion for his subjects is apparent in the respectful way in which he portrays them; the industrious mother's calm, serious facial features suggest that she possesses a sober and introspective nature. Finally, the painting's title, *The Way They Live*, likely impressed upon viewers the idea that African Americans were economically disadvantaged and lived in difficult conditions in rural communities far removed from the urban settings where Anshutz's paintings were exhibited. Such sympathetic representations of African-American freedpeople may have evoked sympathy in audiences with limited knowledge of how freedpeople struggled to establish new lives after their emancipation.

Other American painters of African-American laborers lacked the empathy demonstrated by Homer and Anshutz in their compositions. For instance, artist William Aiken Walker played upon racial stereotypes in a range of two-dimensional works depicting freedpeople. Walker created many paintings for private buyers or mass audiences instead of submitting them to exhibitions like the National Academy of Design, a fact that may have contributed to the unsophisticated and shallow nature of his works. In one representative

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<sup>552</sup> H.B.W., "Notes," Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Vol. XXXV, 1940, 118. Metropolitan Museum of Art Object Files for Thomas Anshutz's *The Way They Live* (1879).

<sup>553</sup> Clipping, "The Fine Arts," Philadelphia's *Daily Evening Telegraph*, November 10, 1879. Metropolitan Museum of Art Object Files for Thomas Anshutz's *The Way They Live* (1879).

image from the late nineteenth century, *Cotton Pickers*, two African-American fieldworkers stand side by side with vacant expressions on their faces. Their tattered, threadbare clothing and the dilapidated cabin in the background attest to their lowly circumstances on an unnamed Southern cotton plantation. But the man and woman seem content in their situation; their placid, empty faces suggest nothing to the viewer about any inner ambitions they might harbor. In another oil painting, *I'll Stick to Cotton as Long as it Sticks to Me* (1886), an utterly bedraggled African American, likely a former slave, also maintains an air of indifference to his situation. Hand in his pocket, he leans comfortably against a basket of cotton while lazily smoking a corncob pipe. Such flat, racialized representations likely appealed to the same white late nineteenth-century audiences who appreciated the nostalgic short stories of authors like Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris that featured fictional freedmen who preferred life as slaves.<sup>554</sup> Walker's title, *I'll Stick to Cotton as Long as it Sticks to Me*, certainly suggests that the indolent freedman did not care about relocating from the plantation where he had likely resided since before emancipation. Although his unflattering depictions of rural African-American freedpeople contrasted with those of Homer and Anshutz, Walker seems to have shared their perception of (and approved of) fieldwork as a limiting, restrictive environment for black workers. Together, these three artists' unenthusiastic visions of rural America differed substantially from those of Russian painters who saw the peasantry's agricultural labor as an ennobling, purifying endeavor that represented an essential element of Russia's national heritage.

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<sup>554</sup> See Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia, or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1895, c1887); and Joel Chandler Harris, *Balaam and His Master: And Other Sketches and Stories* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891).



## Religion and Ritual in Russian and African-American Culture

Members of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions also expressed their pride in Russia's history through depictions of peasant traditions and religious rituals. They produced the majority of such paintings between 1870 and 1890, a twenty-year period that coincided with a nationwide surge of interest in revisiting and preserving Russia's past through the transcription of peasant folk songs, the construction of buildings in neo-Muscovite style, and the composition of operas, symphonies, and ballets that retold events relating to the country's founding or brought traditional folk tales to life on stage. Wanderers Vasilii Maksimov, Il'ia Repin, and many other artists contributed to this movement through the creation of paintings depicting peasants passing down folk tales, conducting ancient wedding rituals, and participating in religious processions and pilgrimages.

One of Maksimov's earliest paintings was *Grandmother's Tales* (1867), a composition that received first prize from the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Artists.<sup>555</sup> Inspired by Maksimov's memories of his mother who, according to one friend, "recounted interesting fairy tales and authentic histories to the children on long winter evenings," *Grandmother's Tales* similarly takes place in a candlelit hut where a wise grandmother captivates an audience of children and young adults who surround her as they attentively listen to stories passed down from one generation to the next.<sup>556</sup> This nostalgic,

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<sup>555</sup> Maksimov spent time working in the countryside in 1866 and subsequently produced *Grandmother's Tales* (1867). "Biografiia V.M. Maksimova, sostav. M.V. Iamshchikovoï-Altaevoi," OR GTG, f. 81, o. 1, d. 22, l. 2-3

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 3.

sentimental scene about the role of oral tradition in rural communities resonated with audiences and may have inspired subsequent painters to pursue similar themes.<sup>557</sup>

Numerous Wanderers also revealed to audiences the private rituals of peasant families as they prepared to give away sons and daughters in marriage. Maksimov's *The Arrival of a Magician at a Peasant Wedding* (1875) depicts a glowing cottage where a wedding party feasts in celebration of a newly married couple.<sup>558</sup> But an unexpected visitor interrupts the gathering; a snow-covered magician stands at the entryway, preparing to either bless or curse the happy couple.<sup>559</sup> Similar works that portrayed ancient peasant wedding rituals through a romanticized or ethnographic perspective include Grigorii Miasoedov's *Examining a Bride* (second half of the nineteenth century), Alexei Korzukhin's celebratory *Hen Party* (1889), and Andrei Riabushkin's *Peasant Wedding in the Tambovskii Province* (1880) and *Awaiting Newlyweds in Novgorod Province* (1891).<sup>560</sup> Together, these works served as visual records of artists' interpretations of the peasantry's most sacred cultural practices and celebrations of their life in the provinces.

A third popular mode of peasant representation was that of the humble Christian procession (*krestnyi khod*) which occurred on various holy days during the year.<sup>561</sup> In the

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<sup>557</sup> See Konstantin Makovskii, *Stories of Grandfather* (1881) and Nikolai Bogdanov-Bel'skii, *A New Fairy Tale* (1891).

<sup>558</sup> This painting was exhibited in the fourth show of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions (1875-1876).

<sup>559</sup> Russian peasants sometimes worried that village magicians or sorcerers would cast a spell on a bride and groom, causing unhappiness, illness, or even death. For more information about the numerous rituals surrounding betrothal and matrimony, see Chapter Five in Christine Worobec, *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995).

<sup>560</sup> See *The World of the Peasantry in Russian Art*, 132.

<sup>561</sup> This ceremonial ritual dates back to the fourth century A.D. and is common to both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions.

Russian Orthodox Church, nineteenth-century peasants often collectively displayed their religiosity through public parades and demonstrations where they carried icons, flags, or holy objects. Artists including Konstantin Savitskii, Leonid Solomatkin, and Illarion Prianishnikov captured these rituals in grand paintings depicting a devoted, faithful peasantry kissing icons, waving banners, and enduring harsh traveling conditions as they participated in religious processions.<sup>562</sup>

Il'ia Repin's *Procession of the Cross in Kursk Province* (1883), inspired by the artist's visit to a region renowned for its pilgrimages, made an especially strong impression on audiences thanks to its scale, level of detail, and representation of different classes (estates).<sup>563</sup> Exhibited at the eleventh show of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions, *Procession of the Cross* was primarily a critique of the economic and spiritual divisions among the downtrodden, bedraggled peasantry, the wealthy nobility, and tidy urban merchants who all marched together in a long parade.<sup>564</sup> According to Iakov Minchenkov, a manager of the Society, Repin painted this work for the peasantry; he "saw before him images from the epoch of serfdom, before him stood the living people of this era . . . and he presented them on canvas with all the strength of his talent."<sup>565</sup> Through his condemnation of the material gap between the peasantry and nobility, Repin sought to impress upon audiences

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<sup>562</sup> See Konstantin Savitskii, *Meeting the Icon* (1878); Leonid Solomatkin, *Religious Procession* (1882); and Illarion Prianishnikov, *Resurrection Day in the North* (1887) and *Procession* (1893).

<sup>563</sup> Critics gave the painting mixed reviews. Many conservative journals saw the work as destabilizing, liberal, and unartistic. See Elizabeth K. Valkenier, *Il'ia Repin and the World of Russian Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 93-94.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> "Minchenkov, Iakov Danilovich. Vospominaniia o peredvizhnikakh," accessed at "Klassika" Lib.Ru. [http://az.lib.ru/m/minchenkow\\_j\\_d/text\\_0180.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/m/minchenkow_j_d/text_0180.shtml).

the paternalistic idea that, in spite of life's challenges, the peasantry's humble religiosity enabled them to endure social oppression and physical poverty.

In contrast to their Russian peers, American artists did not depict African-American culture as representative of American national culture; instead, they portrayed black music and religious rituals as either mysterious curiosities or as a bridge that could link two disparate peoples.<sup>566</sup> During the mid-to-late nineteenth century, most white Americans saw more differences than commonalities between their religious and secular traditions rooted in western European history and those of the slaves transported to the United States from different regions in Africa who maintained many elements of their heritage. This ethnic and cultural division, partly manifested and enforced in the practice of segregation, was particularly sharp in the South where, as James Cobb aptly puts it, "This definition of southern identity effectively excluded the South's black residents in much of the same way both black and white southerners had been 'othered' out of the construction of American identity."<sup>567</sup>

In American art, George Fuller's (1822-1884) *Negro Funeral, Alabama* (1881) perfectly illustrates this white American mentality. Born in Massachusetts, Fuller traveled to Augusta, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama, during the 1850s, where he witnessed aspects of slave culture such as a mass baptism in a nearby river and a slave burial.<sup>568</sup> Although Fuller did not record his impressions of the funeral in his diary, he completed a sketch in

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<sup>566</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, popular minstrel shows portrayed African-American culture as exotic through highly disparaging, racialized performances by white musicians in blackface.

<sup>567</sup> James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>568</sup> Sarah Burns, "Images of Slavery: George Fuller's Depictions of the Antebellum South," *American Art Journal* 15, no. 3 (1983): 35-36.

March of 1858 that most likely inspired the oil painting he completed more than twenty years later.<sup>569</sup> *Negro Funeral, Alabama* is a stark, impressionistic painting that depicts an undefined crowd of slaves surrounding a coffin in a desolate field. Harsh yellow light pierces the clouds, illuminating the figure of a black celebrant whose outstretched arms and tall stature command the attention of his peers. The scene conveys a sense of the exotic rather than the familiar; here, Fuller emphasizes the physical and experiential distances between the black slaves and the viewer who is positioned as an outsider.

Other post-bellum paintings portrayed elements of slave culture, particularly that of black music, as a bridge that made possible the connection of black and white Americans.<sup>570</sup> One representative composition is Eastman Johnson's *Fiddling His Way* (1866), an illustration of a black freedman entertaining a white family through music. A cozy scene taking place inside a rural farmhouse, *Fiddling His Way* exemplifies a style that one critic described as Johnson's original "method of painting . . . [that of] 'the portrait interior' . . . [depicting] a family group assembled in their drawing room" which produced for audiences a familiar and "charming effect of domesticity."<sup>571</sup> In the painting, a well-dressed freedman deftly plays his instrument to the delight of the white family, particularly its youngest members, who respectfully listen to the engaging tune that infuses the dim cottage with vitality and animates its residents. Racial tensions often ran high between impoverished white Americans and black Americans during the nineteenth century, but in Johnson's

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>570</sup> See Frank Buchser, *Guitar Player* (1867) and Thomas Eakins, *The Dancing Lesson (Negro Boy Dancing)* (1878).

<sup>571</sup> Edgar French, "An American Historical Portrait Painter of Three Historical Epochs," *World's Week*, December, 1906, clipping from the Eastman Johnson files at the Watson Library Archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

painting, the ex-slave's music acted as an integrational, unifying force. Although the family invited into their home an unfamiliar itinerant musician, he in turn opened the doors of communication between two typically segregated groups through the universal language of music.

Like Johnson, Winslow Homer similarly spanned the gap between white and black culture in his painting, *Dressing for Carnival* (1877), which was exhibited and sold at auction in 1879.<sup>572</sup> The composition, which Homer described as one of his “darkey pictures,” shows a complex scene in which a group of freedpeople prepares to celebrate Independence Day.<sup>573</sup> In front of a Virginia plantation's slave quarters, two women help sew a man into a colorful costume of red, white, blue, and yellow fabric while small children waving American flags watch with great interest. The freedman's garb blends American patriotic colors with visual and stylistic elements of the West Indian Jonkonnu festival, a celebration during which the rules governing relations between landowners and slaves were temporarily suspended and costumed slaves engaged in revelry at the master's expense.<sup>574</sup>

After emancipation, some African Americans observed Jonkonnu on the Fourth of July, presumably the phenomenon that Homer shows in *Dressing for Carnival*. By depicting the melding of two disparate cultural traditions in his painting, Homer alludes to the process of assimilation simultaneously occurring in many parts of the nation and reminds audiences

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<sup>572</sup> This painting, likely inspired by Homer's Petersburg trips, may also have been showed under the title *Sketch – Fourth of July in Virginia* in 1877. “Catalogue for the American Collection of Paintings,” Kurtz Gallery Auction Catalogue, April 8-9, 1879, photocopy from the Metropolitan Museum of Art Object Files for Winslow Homer's *Dressing for Carnival*; and Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art*, 234.

<sup>573</sup> Winslow Homer to Thomas B. Clarke, April 23, 1892, Winslow Homer Papers, Archive of American Art, photocopy from the Metropolitan Museum of Art Object Files for Winslow Homer's *Dressing for Carnival*.

<sup>574</sup> The JBHE Foundation, “Jonkonnu,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 17 (1997): 70.

that emancipated former slaves had a new and rightful place in American society as citizens who collectively celebrated both national and individual independence.<sup>575</sup> Unlike Fuller, who distanced audiences from the exotic slave burial, Homer combined an unfamiliar aspect of African-American culture with the well-known Fourth of July holiday to encourage mutual understanding between black and white Americans. Thus, Homer is one of few American artists whose representations of former slaves approach the spirit of the Russian artists who portrayed peasant rituals and culture as a central component of Russia's national heritage.

### **Literacy and Learning: Representations of Peasants and Freedpeople as Students**

In Russia and the United States, the abolition of slavery and serfdom paved the way for additional policy reforms that provided freedpeople and peasants with access to education. For instance, Russia's 1864 Education Statute encouraged the founding and local management of elementary schools without estate-based barriers to entry and ultimately produced a significant rise in literacy rates among peasant populations.<sup>576</sup> African-American freedpeople simultaneously learned to read and write in rising numbers after emancipation; they created educational opportunities for children and adults by founding local schools, petitioning state governments to set up public institutions, or by attending schools funded by private charitable organizations or the Freedmen's Bureau.<sup>577</sup> As a result, illiteracy rates among African Americans dropped from 80 percent of people 14 and older in 1870 to 30.5

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<sup>575</sup> Harvey, *The Civil War and American Art*, 233-234.

<sup>576</sup> Literacy rates among rural men and women increased from 6 percent in the 1860s to 25 percent in the 1910s. Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 4; and Ben Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 52-54.

<sup>577</sup> Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 69.

percent in 1910.<sup>578</sup> Although some farming families in Russia and the United States were initially skeptical about the value of education, both peasants and freedpeople quickly realized that literacy could help them succeed in business, as well as provide them with the tools to interpret the Bible, enjoy popular literature, or serve in the military.<sup>579</sup>

Most Russian and American artists created compositions that celebrated peasants' and freedpeople's educational achievements, but a handful of artists produced paintings that questioned the former bondsmen's commitment to gaining literacy.<sup>580</sup> One of the strongest proponents of peasant schooling was Nikolai Bogdanov-Bel'skii (1868-1945), an artist who, as a peasant child himself, studied under Moscow University professor Sergei Rachinskii at the elementary school for local children he founded in the rural town of Tatevo.<sup>581</sup> Bel'skii's appreciation for this opportunity, gratitude to Rachinskii, and belief in the merits of education for rural children are evident in numerous sentimental paintings that recall those of his peer American painter Norman Rockwell (1894-1978). In the work *Mental Calculation. In Public School of S.A. Rachinskii* (1895), peasant boys in traditional clothing earnestly struggle to solve a long division equation that the teacher has drawn on a chalkboard.<sup>582</sup> Their sincere interest in the presented material is evident from the bright, genuine expressions on their faces. Indeed, Bogdanov-Bel'skii may have sought to dispel any doubts the nobility

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<sup>578</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970; and Current Population Reports, Series P-23, Ancestry and Language in the United States: November 1979, accessed at [http://nces.ed.gov/naal/lit\\_history.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/naal/lit_history.asp).

<sup>579</sup> Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 9, 13, 18, 22-24; and Williams, *Self-Taught*, 81, 147, 169.

<sup>580</sup> For additional paintings of peasant education, see Aleksandr Morozov, *Village Free School* (1865) and Nikolai Bogdanov-Bel'skii, *Sunday Reading in the Rural School* (1895), *At the Sick Teacher's House* (1897), and *School Girls* (1901).

<sup>581</sup> Lykova, ed., *The State Tretyakov Gallery*, 194.

<sup>582</sup> This painting was displayed at the twenty-fourth show of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions.



harbored about the former serfs' aptitude and appetite for learning. A later painting, *At the Doors of a School* (1897) [see Figure 9], further encouraged empathy in educated audiences by placing the viewer in the position of a peasant child who stands in the doorway of a schoolroom as he timidly observes his future classmates. The threshold symbolizes the beginning of an important journey for the child, with walking stick in hand and knapsack on his back, whose life's path will undoubtedly be altered by the education he will soon receive.

Like Bogdanov-Bel'skii, American painters Winslow Homer, Thomas Waterman Wood, and Eastman Johnson also celebrated African Americans' academic successes in their paintings, but they especially emphasized the religious benefits of literacy. For instance, Homer's *Sunday Morning in Virginia* (1877) and Wood's *Sunday Morning* (1877) both depict African-American children reading aloud from the Bible to their grandmothers in humble domestic settings. In Homer's composition, four children jointly study the precious book in the corner of an empty wooden cabin, while Wood portrays a single female child reading to an elderly woman sitting in a rocking chair. In both paintings, the young children are either bathed in hopeful sunlight or the glow of an adjacent fire, artistic decisions that reference the figurative power of knowledge and faith to illuminate the mind and soul. In addition, by portraying literate children and their proud grandparents who had most likely endured decades of enslavement, Wood and Homer conveyed an optimistic message to audiences about the future achievements of the black community's youngest generation.

Although Bogdanov-Bel'skii, Homer, and Wood primarily focused on children, artist Eastman Johnson chose to feature an adult freedman learning to read. *The Lord is My Shepherd* (1863), painted shortly after Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation, shows a well-dressed young man sitting by the dying embers of a fire as he quietly reads from the

Old Testament of the Bible. Art historian Eleanor Harvey contends that the painting contains layers of meaning; at the surface, the image “seems to posit the gentle nature of a formerly enslaved man reading the Psalms as a model of emerging humanity and citizenship.”<sup>583</sup> Indeed, the painting’s title alludes to the first verse of Psalm 23, a passage that speaks of God’s protection on life’s difficult journeys, but Harvey argues that the freedman is most likely reading from Exodus, a Book that describes the enslaved Israelites’ escape from Egypt.<sup>584</sup> Thus, although one critic called Johnson a simple “painter of the fire-side” who typically chose to portray a “character positive,” at times the artist’s works contained subtle, politically controversial messages that revealed Johnson’s personal beliefs about contemporary divisive issues like emancipation and slave literacy.<sup>585</sup>

Other artists including Aleksei Stepanov (1858-1923), Vladimir Makovskii (1846-1920) and Edward Lamson Henry created compositions that questioned peasants’ and freedpeople’s interest in learning to read and write. In late nineteenth-century Russia, peasant communes in rural villages hired instructors from other regions to teach at local schools, but these itinerant teachers were not paid well and possessed a low social status in the town.<sup>586</sup> Furthermore, the insular residents of isolated villages could be suspicious of outsiders who did not understand their traditions and practices. Two genre paintings, Stepanov’s *Arrival of the Teacher* (1889) and Makovskii’s *Arrival of the Teacher in the Village* (1897), depict a town’s cold reception of a traveling instructor. Stepanov’s work shows a group of

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<sup>583</sup> Eleanor Harvey, “Painting Freedom,” *New York Times*, October 30, 2013.

<sup>584</sup> This biblical story was very familiar to slaves, who drew parallels between their experience and that of the Israelites. Harvey, “Painting Freedom.” The freedman’s Bible appears to be opened to either Genesis or Exodus.

<sup>585</sup> Eugene Benson, “Eastman Johnson,” *The Galaxy*, July 1868, vol. VI, 1.

<sup>586</sup> Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 37.

apprehensive peasants huddled together by a hut as they watch a horse-drawn wagon carrying an educator enter their little village. The stone-faced men and women stand with arms crossed, uncertain of how this stranger might change their traditional ways.

Makovskii's painting plays upon the same theme; in it, a female teacher in modern clothing sits sullenly at a table outside of her new rural home while her peasant hosts watch her from a distance. Neither the teacher nor the peasants make eye contact in the composition, a fact that attests to their mutual mistrust and the emotional gulf that separates them.

But while Russian artists Makovskii and Stepanov focused on physical and experiential divisions between peasants and instructors to articulate a degree of skepticism about peasant education, American painter Edward Lamson Henry depicted a young African-American girl's schoolhouse infractions. *Kept In* (1888) [see Figure 10] shows a stubborn child sulking alone in a classroom as she gazes out the window, observing her classmates playing during recess. Her lack of interest in education is apparent in her indifferent posture; she leans back with arms behind her head in feigned relaxation, ignoring the textbook that she has cast upon the floor. Henry's representation of a reluctant black student contrasts sharply with Bogdanov-Bel'skii's sentimental paintings of enthusiastic peasant children, perhaps sending a subtle message to audiences that freedpeople were too undisciplined to thrive in academic settings. Although ambivalent depictions of apathetic African-American students and peasants by artists like Henry, Makovskii, and Stepanov remained exceptional examples that did little to discourage peasants and freedpeople from obtaining an education, their representations may have confirmed the views of those who opposed providing former bondsmen with access to public schools.

## Urban Migration and the Struggle to Survive: Peasants and Freedpeople Leave the Countryside

A sixth and final common theme in representations of peasants and freedpeople is that of urban migration, a phenomenon that transformed the social fabric of both the United States and Russia during the late nineteenth century. Lured by new job opportunities in factories, shops, and on city streets, hundreds of thousands of former bondsmen and their offspring migrated from tenant farms and former plantations to bustling urban centers between 1890 and 1910.<sup>587</sup> Reflecting upon this massive social shift, Russian and American artists created numerous paintings that explored the challenges peasants and freedpeople faced on the road and after arriving in unfamiliar cities. American painter William Aiken Walker and Russian artists Sergei Korovin (1858-1908), Sergei Ivanov (1864-1910), and Sergei Vinogradov (1869-1938) each portrayed phases of former bondsmen's journeys in a variety of paintings which illustrate the hardships peasants and freedpeople endured as migrants. Walker's *The Old Traveler* (late nineteenth century) and Korovin's *Peasant on the Road (For Earnings)* (1890s) both depict poverty-stricken men dressed in rags and torn shoes as they make their way on foot across the countryside to unknown destinations. Wized and sober, the lonely figures carry simple sacks upon their backs, symbols of their few worldly possessions. These representations do not inspire hope; rather, they evoke empathy in the viewer for the itinerants with a grim past and an uncertain future.

Ivanov's *On the Road: The Death of a Migrant* (1889), featured at the seventeenth show of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibitions, offers more clarity by depicting in gory detail a migrant's tragic end. A male peasant's body lies stretched across the road in front of

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<sup>587</sup> Urban migration began before 1850 but significantly increased during the late nineteenth century. Nell Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 174.

his wagon; his face has been covered with a sheet and his arms are folded across his chest. The peasant's wife weeps face-down on the ground, her tears soaking the dry, desolate path upon which they were traveling in search of a new life. Disastrously, the family's sole provider has perished, and it is unclear how the woman and child will survive on their own.

Ivanov's graphic scene contrasts sharply with idealized depictions of peasants working the land by Miasoedov, Konstantin Makovskii, and other Wanderers. As one of the darkest, most pessimistic visual representations of urban migration, *The Death of a Migrant* likely suggested to late nineteenth-century audiences that peasants were better suited to life in traditional agricultural settings. Two additional works that convey a similar message to viewers about the former bondsmen's ability to survive in urban settings include Vinogradov's *Without Work (Waiting for the Ferry)* (1888) [see Figure 11] and Walker's *Where Canal Meets the Levee* (undated) [see Figure 12]. These compositions are illustrations of unemployed migrants who recline against bales of cotton or doze in the mud as they wait for work by the riverside.<sup>588</sup> Both Vinogradov's peasants and Walker's freedpeople lazily lounge, smoke pipes, and converse to pass the time, representations which signaled to late nineteenth-century viewers that the former bondsmen were neither productive members of urban society nor worthy competitors for metropolitan jobs.

These depictions belie the historical experiences of peasant and African-American migrants who had little difficulty obtaining gainful employment in cities like St. Petersburg, Moscow, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia. Two autobiographies offer first-hand accounts

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<sup>588</sup> These men may have been looking for employment as dock workers or longshoremen who assisted loading or unpacking cargo from incoming boats at urban ports. For a discussion of waterfront labor during the nineteenth century, see Eric Arenson, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

of the job opportunities that awaited migrant workers during the late nineteenth century. African American William Pickens, the son of tenant farmers, described his work experience in Argenta, Arkansas, where his family arrived in the winter of 1890-1891. While studying in high school during the late 1890s, Pickens took up work in a stave factory and copper shop, where he proudly recalled “earning . . . seventy-five cents a day, more money than I had ever received steadily before in my life.”<sup>589</sup> Soon after, Pickens’s father, now “a fireman for a sawmill,” helped him find additional part-time labor by “securing for [him] the privilege of employing some of [his] . . . Saturdays on the lumber yards.”<sup>590</sup> Like Pickens’s family, hundreds of thousands of Americans migrated from farms to cities to take advantage of unprecedented prospects of securing regular salaries in thriving industries.

Autobiographical serf narratives also attest to the ways in which industrial development improved the lives of the peasantry. Ex-serf F.D. Bobkov remembered how the construction of new factories transformed his native village and provided the residents with more wealth, penning, “Yes, there were many changes. Some men, owing to their own laziness and idle life, became impoverished, but the peasants, thanks to their energy, now rejoiced in life.”<sup>591</sup> During the late 1870s, Bobkov, who moved several times during his lifetime, recalled working for a factory where he received a salary of 150 rubles per month, a princely sum compared to the 15-20 rubles in net farm income that rural peasant households

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<sup>589</sup> William Pickens, *The Heir of Slaves: An Autobiography* (Concord: The Rumford Press, 1911), 64. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998, accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/pickens/pickens.html>.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>591</sup> “Iz zapisok byvshego krepostnogo cheloveka,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* no. 5, 190, 446-474; no. 6, 734-764; no. 7, 143-164. Accessed at [http://dugward.ru/library/alexandr2/bobkov\\_iz\\_zapisok\\_byvshego\\_krepostnogo.html](http://dugward.ru/library/alexandr2/bobkov_iz_zapisok_byvshego_krepostnogo.html).

earned in the late nineteenth century.<sup>592</sup> These two testimonies serve as evidence of the new opportunities generated by industrialization, a topic infrequently depicted by Russian and American painters of the late nineteenth century. Their experiences provide an important counterpoint to the pessimistic representations of urban life that many Russian and American artists produced during this time. Ultimately, the differences between these artistic portrayals and the historical realities suggest that both Russian and American painters were discomfited by emigration trends that saw traditionally agrarian peoples abandoning the countryside for a more unrestricted existence in metropolitan areas where they exercised their free will in choosing from an array of jobs, leisure activities, and more.

## **Conclusion**

In Russia and the United States, the abolition of serfdom and slavery triggered decades of reflection among artists who sought to make sense of these transformational events and their enduring consequences. Russian and American genre painters created works of art that focused on everyday life in their respective countries, with a particular emphasis on the peasants and freedpeople who comprised the nation's newest group of citizens. In their paintings of former bondsmen, artists in both countries examined a variety of overlapping topics and produced corresponding and opposing representations of peasants and freedpeople that assessed the legacies of bondage, military service, agricultural labor, culture, and education. At the turn of the twentieth century, growing rates of industrialization and urbanization inspired artists to look beyond traditional thematic topics to consider how peasants and freedpeople would fare in unfamiliar metropolitan environments located far from the farms and plantations of the pre-emancipation era.

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

Their diversity of perspectives on a range of topics reveals that there was no single point of view embodied in what critics deemed national art. In the United States, where memories of the divisive Civil War remained fresh in the minds of Northern and Southern painters, divergences in representations of African-American freedpeople were starker than in Russia. The analysis of portrayals of former bondsmen also reveals that, within each country, artists' attitudes about emancipation changed over time. Consider, for instance, the differences between Miasoedov's *Congratulation of the Betrothed in the House of the Landlord* (1861), which idealizes the relations between masters and serfs, and his *Reading the Manifesto of 1861* (1874), which powerfully represents the moment peasants learned of their liberation. Finally, this comparison suggests that, for artists reflecting on notions of national identity and citizenship, ethnicity remained an important consideration. Russian artists represented the peasantry as embodying a shared heritage through paintings illustrating their agricultural, religious, and cultural traditions. By contrast, Northern and Southern artists alike depicted African Americans as outsiders whose ways of life were an exotic source of fascination and sometimes ridicule, rather than national pride.





Figure 1. Nikolai Nevrev, *Bargaining. A Scene of Serf Life. From the Recent Past* (1866).



**Figure 2.** Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *The Price of Blood* (1868).



Figure 3. Carl Lemokh, *Summer (with Congratulations)* (1890).





**Figure 4.** Carl Guthertz, *I Promised the Missus' I'd Bring Him Home or Faithful Unto Death* (1904).



Figure 5. Il'ia Repin, *Seeing off a Recruit* (1879).



Figure 6. Thomas Waterman Wood, *A Bit of War History* (1867).



**Figure 7.** Grigorii Miasoedov, *Harvest Time (Scythers)* (1887).





**Figure 8.** Winslow Homer, *The Cotton Pickers* (1876).



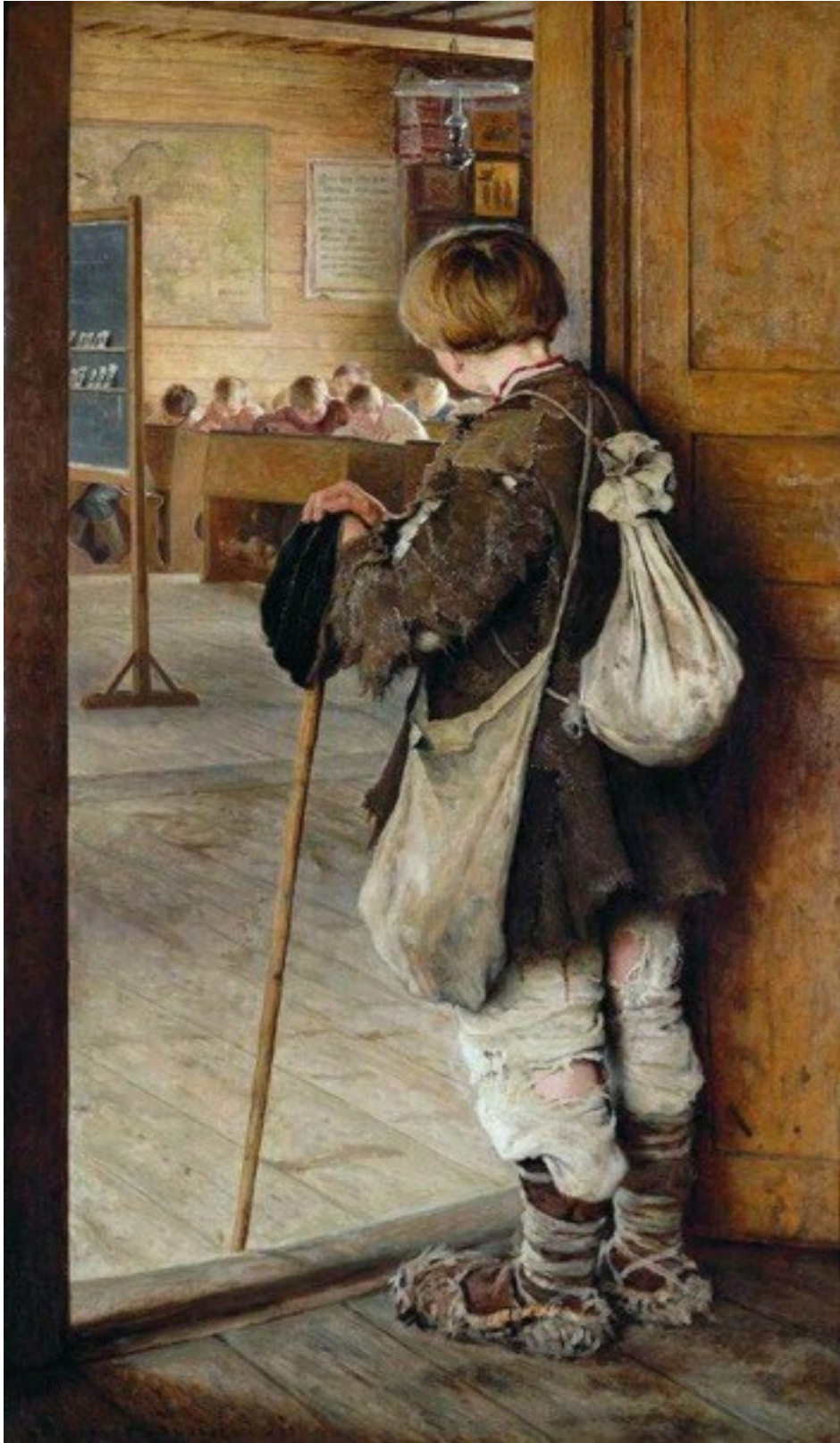


Figure 9. Nikolai Bogdanov-Bel'skii, *At the Doors of a School* (1897).



Figure 10. Edward Lamson Henry, *Kept In* (1889).





Figure 11. Sergei Vinogradov, *Without Work* (1888).

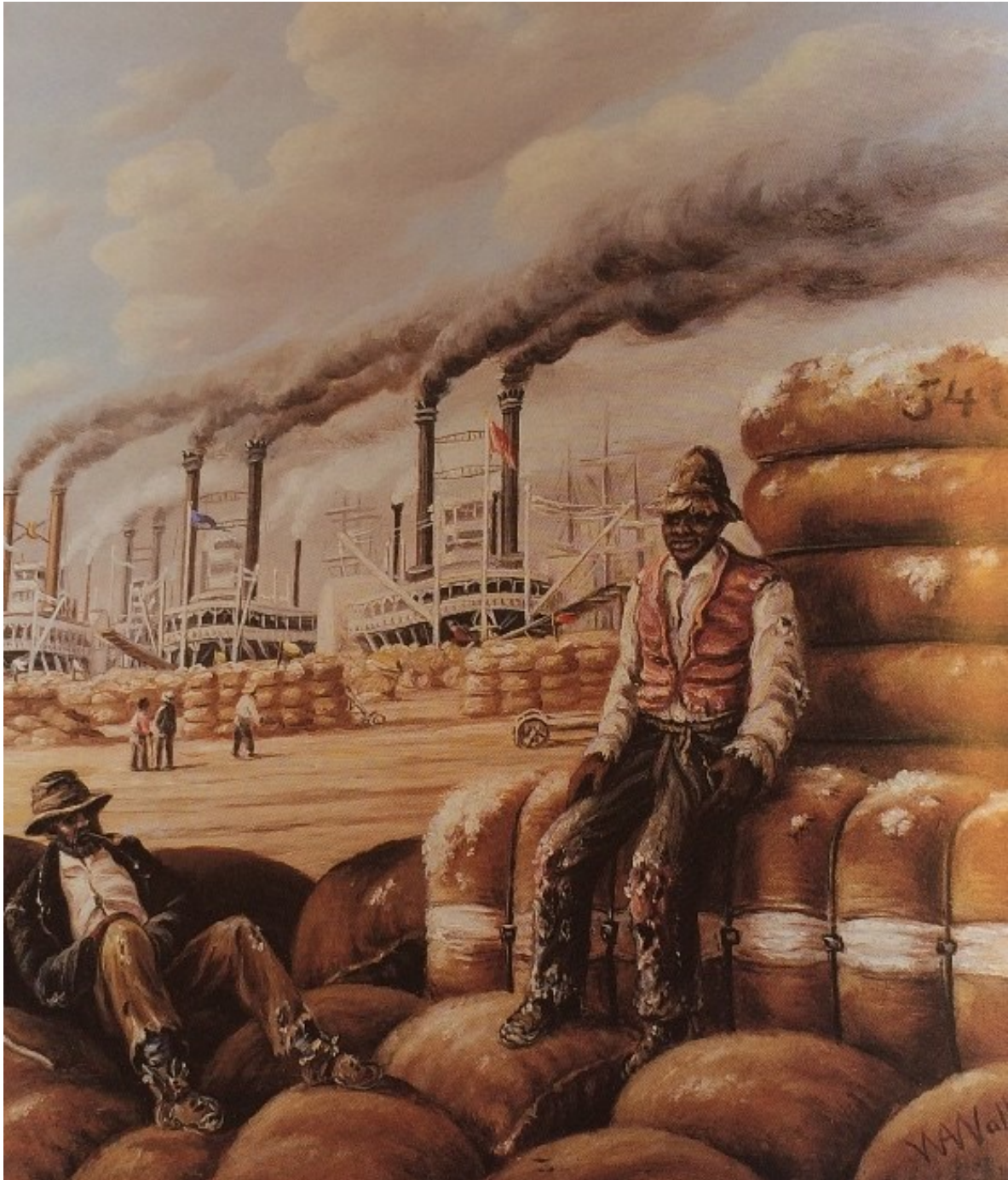


Figure 12. William Aiken Walker, *Where the Canal Meets the Levee* (undated).

#### CHAPTER FOUR: SELLING SERVITUDE, CAPTIVATING CONSUMERS: IMAGES OF BONDSMEN IN AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN ADVERTISEMENTS, 1880-1915

The metal plough cuts deeply into the rich, fertile earth as the Russian peasant guides two horses across a small plot of land.<sup>593</sup> In the distance, birds soar above a river that gently winds toward the green onion domes and thatched roofs of structures in a nearby village. The colorful fin-de-siècle advertising poster promoting Rudolph Bekher's agricultural equipment offers a vision of rural tranquility as the independent peasant in traditional dress, possibly a former serf, deftly manipulates a modern agricultural tool. Indeed, the sun shines upon the man whose future seems bright.<sup>594</sup> Meanwhile, a contemporaneous advertisement for Durham's "Bull Fertilizer," produced in the United States, similarly draws upon pastoral imagery to market a modern product.<sup>595</sup> This illustrated trade card portrays a male African-American farmer, perhaps a freedman, struggling to pull two obstinate mules that are hitched to a steel reaper. The card's tagline, "No Kicking When 'Bull Fertilizer' is used," mocks the man and subtly alludes to the historical tradition of white landowners' control over black laborers. While the poster depicts the Russian peasant as a successful steward of his property, the black farmer appears incompetent and foolish.

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<sup>593</sup> A version of this chapter appeared in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Global Slavery* (March 2016).

<sup>594</sup> Rudolph Bekher, "*Luchshie plugi v mire*," undated (likely produced at the turn of the twentieth century), Russian National Library Poster Collection.

<sup>595</sup> "Durham Bull Fertilizer," 1884. Box 16, c. 1, Advertising Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Although the messages embedded within these advertisements differ in significant ways, the poster and the trade card similarly reference the historical traditions of two nations whose agricultural labor forces were composed of bonded workers: Russian peasants and African-American slaves. Emancipation freed these two groups just four years apart, but Russian and American citizens feared or even resisted their societal assimilation during the decades that followed. In both countries, businesses played an important role in molding attitudes about the integration process through their depictions of peasants and freedpeople in advertisements. Indeed, visual representations of the former bondsmen were a critical source of popular culture that informed viewers and shaped their conceptions of freed serfs and slaves.

The image of the Russian peasant appears in posters, ephemera, and newspaper advertisements for cigarettes, candy, beer, musical instruments, farm equipment, and rubber-soled shoes. This chapter identifies the range of pictorial representations of serfs and peasants in ads from nineteenth-century newspapers and in materials from the pre-revolutionary Poster and Ephemera Collections of the Russian National Library and the Russian State Historical Museum. By analyzing these depictions, it is possible to glean information about businesses' and advertisers' marketing goals through the carefully crafted scenes designed to sell goods to specific consumer groups.

In late imperial Russia, illustrated advertisements portraying serfs and peasants at once idealized serfdom and post-emancipation agrarianism, promoted new concepts of nationhood and national identity, and, perhaps most importantly, shaped and reflected broad changes in the nation's social fabric. First, businesses produced nostalgic advertisements targeting non-peasants that depicted serfs and peasants in positions of subservience where

they performed duties for wealthy members of the nobility. Companies also created nationalistic ads that elevated emancipated peasants and their traditional culture as symbols of Russia's collective history and strength. In addition, firms sought to directly capture the attention of Russia's urban peasantry in advertisements. They employed two distinct strategies; first, they distributed paternalistic advertisements that addressed the anxieties of recent migrants by urging them to buy goods or apparel supposedly deemed essential for their successful assimilation. Second, firms targeted peasant consumers by portraying them in ads as independent, decisive patrons or as integrated citizens who shopped as equals alongside Russia's urban elites.

This chapter also examines the range of representations of African-American slaves and freedpeople in posters, trade cards, and magazines from the broad collections of nineteenth-century advertisements and ephemera housed at the American Antiquarian Society and Duke University. Furthermore, a comparison of the ways in which businesses utilized images of African Americans and Russian peasants reveals that U.S. companies developed several marketing strategies that paralleled those of their Russian peers. For example, businesses produced advertisements depicting African Americans in positions of servitude that appealed to white consumers who were nostalgic for a pre-industrial, pre-emancipation era. As in Russia, U.S. companies similarly tapped into the apprehensions of a post-emancipation nation struggling to integrate its former bondsmen as citizens of all backgrounds grappled with changes wrought by rapid industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and geographic expansion.

But while Russian companies produced a significant number of advertisements depicting peasants in positions of equality relative to other citizens, comparable images of

African Americans rarely appeared in U.S. advertisements of the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, one discovers not only the absence of equivalent images of integrated blacks, but instead an abundance of demeaning caricatures of African Americans. Physical differences between blacks and whites contributed to the production of advertisements that emphasized rather than minimized perceived racial differences, but dissimilarities between Russian and American population compositions, urban migration patterns, and notions of nationhood also account for the profusion of denigrating advertisements featuring African Americans in the United States and the comparative scarcity of such peasant representations in Russia.

### **Advertising Ascendant in the United States and Russia**

Advertising became increasingly important during the late nineteenth century when Russia and the United States simultaneously underwent manufacturing booms as numerous industries developed and cities expanded.<sup>596</sup> In the United States, manufacturers created a vast array of goods, including clothing, agricultural equipment, automobiles, alcohol, and cigarettes.<sup>597</sup> Many of these commercial items were distributed via the railroad system, which played a critical role in enabling producers to transport materials to geographically distant consumers.<sup>598</sup> Meanwhile, Russia's economic foundations similarly shifted from agricultural

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<sup>596</sup> U.S. census data show that national indices of industrial production quadrupled between 1880 and 1920. Over the same period of time, the value of finished commodities and construction materials output grew over nine times in real-dollar terms, with the largest area of growth in the food and kindred products industries. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: 1789-1945*, Series J 13-14 –Manufacturing Production – Indexes of Total Production: 1863 to 1939 and Series J 97 – 148. –Value of Output – Finished Commodities and Construction Materials at Producers' Current Prices (Shaw) 1869-1919 (Washington, D.C.: 1949), page 179, 183.

<sup>597</sup> "37 Companies in 1869, 15 Companies in 1914," Box JW1 c. 1, J. Walter Thompson Company. Domestic Advertisements Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>598</sup> More than 290,000 miles of track were added between 1880 and 1920, enabling trains to bring agricultural equipment, livestock, and manufactured goods to millions of Americans living in urban and rural areas all year



labor toward commerce, manufacturing, and textile production.<sup>599</sup> By comparison, the nation's structural change in this regard mirrored that of France during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>600</sup> Improvements to communication systems and infrastructure, such as the government's decision to invest further in railroad construction and supervision in 1880, led to the enhanced flow of information and goods.<sup>601</sup> Russian industries substantially developed further after 1897, when Finance Minister Sergei Witte put the ruble on the gold standard in order to entice foreign investors. As Russia's annual growth rate reached eight percent during the 1890s, the nation witnessed a new era of production and distribution of material goods, many of which were available for purchase in bustling cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow.<sup>602</sup>

The development of numerous industries created new jobs for workers. In the United States, nearly 4 million positions for wage earners were added between 1889 and 1919 at manufacturing establishments having products valued at \$500 or more.<sup>603</sup> Urban areas

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round. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: 1789-1945*, Series K 1-17—Railroads before 1890—Mileage, Equipment, and Passenger and Freight Service: 1830 To 1890 and Series K 28-42—Railroads—Mileage, Equipment and Passenger Service; Operating Steam Railways; 1890 to 1945, 200, 202.

<sup>599</sup> Russia also increasingly focused on the extraction of iron, coal, and oil. Arcadius Kahan, *Russian Economic History: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by Roger Weiss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 16; and Peter Waldron, *Between Two Revolutions: Stolypin and the Politics of Renewal in Russia* (DeKalb: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>600</sup> Paul Gregory asserts that the amount of structural change in the development of Russian industries was "average or slightly below average when compared to [other westernized countries]." See Paul Gregory, *Before Command: An Economic History of Russia from Emancipation to the First Five-Year Plan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28-29.

<sup>601</sup> Under Witte, a former railroad official, track mileage increased by 40 percent. Waldron, *Between Two Revolutions*, 17.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: 1789-1945*, Series J 1-12. —Manufactures—General Statistics for All Manufacturing Industries: 1849 to 1939, page 179.

expanded dramatically due to the influx of immigrants from abroad and the in-country migration of rural residents. Between 1880 and 1920, the total U.S. urban population grew by 283 percent from about 14 million to 54 million people.<sup>604</sup> Both the quantity and the scale of cities grew dramatically between 1880 and 1920 as well; the total number of urban areas grew from 939 to 2,722, while the number of places comprising 100,000 inhabitants more than tripled.<sup>605</sup> Russian cities also expanded rapidly at the turn of the twentieth century. In-country migration increased sharply between 1880 and 1910, when the percentage of the population in European Russia holding passports doubled.<sup>606</sup> Just 7.8 percent of the Russian population resided in urban areas in 1851, but between the 1850s and 1913, the number of urban residents increased by almost 300 percent.<sup>607</sup> In Moscow, where 75 percent of the city's residents were born elsewhere, the urban population grew by 50 percent between 1882 and 1902.<sup>608</sup> Overall, these changing migration patterns boosted Russia's total urban residency population to 16 percent by 1914.<sup>609</sup>

Industrialization, migration, and improvements to national infrastructure enabled Russian and American merchants and manufacturers to reach a wider range of potential

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<sup>604</sup> Whereas approximately 28 percent of Americans lived in cities in 1880, 51 percent of Americans lived in urban areas by 1920. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: 1789-1945*, Series B 145-159—Population—Urban Size-Groups and Rural Territory: 1790 to 1940, page 29.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> B.N. Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII-nachalo XX v.)*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1999), in David Eltis, *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 344.

<sup>607</sup> The majority of peasant migrants were men, a phenomenon which initially created a gender imbalance in cities like St. Petersburg at the turn of the twentieth century. West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 95.

<sup>608</sup> Robert Eugene Johnson, "Peasant Migration and the Russian Working Class: Moscow at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Slavic Review* 35, no. 4 (1976): 652.

<sup>609</sup> Kahan, *Russian Economic History*, 5.

customers. Advertising, a nascent industry in each country prior to the late nineteenth century, became an increasingly important component of late nineteenth-century companies' strategies of promoting their goods and shaping the culture of mass consumers. As they tried to inform buyers about the wide range of products now available to them, Russian and American firms also performed a balancing act by using marketing materials to reassure consumers who were apprehensive about social and economic changes. In Russia, Tsar Alexander III and Tsar Nicholas II presided over autocratic regimes with paradoxical policies; although these rulers restricted political activity, they also encouraged elements of economic liberalism, albeit under the state's watchful eye. According to historian Sally West, Russian advertising mirrored this contradiction by deliberately promoting "a consumerist ethic at odds with autocratic society" that "spoke in the language of both tradition and change, simultaneously perpetuating and undermining the values of Russian cultural heritage."<sup>610</sup> Ultimately, Russia's rapid economic transformation, inadequate protections for urban workers, and a lack of political rights sowed seeds of discontent that produced labor strikes, rioting, and general upheaval during the Revolution of 1905. Such unrest exceeded the potentially palliative effect of advertisements seeking to diminish the psychological hardships inherent in the process of modernization.

Americans were similarly troubled by the unsettling changes generated by industrialization. Discord was prevalent among laborers who worked long hours in factories and manufacturing plants. On Chicago's Haymarket Square, laborers clashed with police after protesting conditions at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company plant in 1886, while an 1892 strike at Andrew Carnegie's steel factory in Homestead, Pennsylvania,

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<sup>610</sup> Sally West, *I Shop in Moscow: Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Tsarist Russia* (DeKalb: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 4.

similarly ended in violence. In 1894, angry Americans marched across the country toward Washington, D.C., as part of Jacob Coxey's army to encourage the government to enact policies to support unemployed workers. Although the United States did not experience a major revolution comparable to that of Russia at the turn of the twentieth century, these individual examples demonstrate that social unrest was similarly widespread.

During a period of significant change, American and Russian businesses sought to guide apprehensive consumers along the pathway toward modernization through comforting advertisements. Companies blended text and images to create a language of familiar signs and symbols, easily comprehended by viewers, which conveyed information and meaning. Recognizing that an increasing number of people were leaving their rural homes to live in crowded cities, Russian and American companies marketed products of the industrial age through comforting pastoral imagery. For instance, historian T.J. Jackson Lears contends that American late nineteenth-century artists and lithographers "re-created a vision of preindustrial life" in pictures of homes and farms in peaceful agrarian settings that represented "the still point of the turning world."<sup>611</sup> Businesses also joined traditional images with wholly modern ones including sprawling factories or innovative agricultural equipment as part of what Lears calls "an ideology of national progress that merged with technological, intellectual, and spiritual development."<sup>612</sup>

Two well-known images, a chromolithograph of John Gast's *Westward, Ho!* (1872) and a poster for the Mariia Vasilevna Sodomova factory (1884), present a striking

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<sup>611</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 103.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

opportunity for comparison.<sup>613</sup> In both illustrations, benevolent, outsized, female figures preside over scenes of industrialization, migration, and national transformation. In the first picture, America's patriotic Columbia leads pioneers and other entrepreneurial groups westward as telegraph lines, trains, ships, and bridges appear in her wake. Meanwhile, the Sadomovaia advertisement similarly depicts Mother Russia as a patron saint or spirit of industrial progress; she floats serenely above a group of rural and urban peasants who inspect yarn in front of a factory located in a bucolic setting. This advertisement references Russia's industrial and urban transformation through its allusion to the processes of migration and its illustration of a harmonious union between the rural peasantry and modern industrial development.<sup>614</sup> These parallel examples reflect companies' broader strategies of incorporating traditional images in advertisements to habituate consumers to a new, modern world. Moreover, as Russian and American businesses looked to their respective national pasts for inspiration, they both chose to use visual representations of two groups whom consumers definitively associated with agrarianism and rural life: Russian serfs and African-American slaves.

### **U.S. and Russian Advertisements in Daily Life**

Russian and American businesses touted the superiority of their wares to urban and rural consumers through textual and visual advertisements in newspapers, journals, catalogues, magazines, ephemera, trade cards, and illustrated posters. Advertisements were especially noticeable in cities, where broadsides brightened the walls of taverns and colorful signs shouted to shoppers through storefront windows, columns, or the side of horse-drawn

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<sup>613</sup> George A. Crofutt produced the chromolithograph, *American Progress*, of Gast's *Westward, Ho!* in 1873. Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>614</sup> West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 198.

trolleys.<sup>615</sup> Even building facades served as canvases for painted announcements that urged customers to sample the latest consumer products.

In a pamphlet printed in 1909, American agency J. Walter Thompson Co. declared that the rise of advertising was “the permanent result of an economic revolution” and scolded businesses that still hesitated to spend money on marketing, admonishing, “If you have anything worth advertising, and do not advertise it, you are simply keeping yourself out of touch with the world’s progress.”<sup>616</sup> Responding to the changing times, both American and Russian manufacturers increasingly recognized that advertising was vital to the growth of their businesses and adjusted their budgets accordingly. In the United States, private companies’ advertising budgets dramatically increased during the late nineteenth century, with businesses spending \$30 million in 1880 and \$600 million in 1910.<sup>617</sup> While the practice of advertising among manufacturers and retail stores in Russia initially lagged behind Europe by approximately 15 years, by 1905 a great number of Russian companies’ advertising budgets matched those of their western peers.<sup>618</sup>

In pre-revolutionary Russia, advertising agencies did not play a major role in crafting the messages and ideas of the advertisements in newspapers and on posters. Rather, businesses of varying sizes often contracted out different advertising needs to placement

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<sup>615</sup> See “Nevskii prospekt. Uglovoi fasad doma 36” (1908), in I.A. Ozerov, *Nevskii prospekt: Istoriia Sankt-Peterburga v fotografiakh. Konets XIX – nachalo XX veka* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2003), 134; and West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 3, 29.

<sup>616</sup> “Advertising as a Selling Force,” New York: J. Walter Thompson Company, 1909, in JWT Box DG5 c. 1, J. Walter Thompson Company. Publications Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>617</sup> William R. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 42.

<sup>618</sup> Eleonora Glinternik, *Reklama v Rossii XVIII - pervoi poloviny XX veka* (St. Petersburg: Avror, 2007), 62; and West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 52.

agents, artists, copywriters, printers, and distributors.<sup>619</sup> As West points out, evidence reveals “the continuation of merchant/manufacturer control of advertising content up to the First World War, whether through direct composition or the hiring of independent writers and artists.”<sup>620</sup> By contrast, U.S. advertising agencies played a significant role in creating advertisements for American companies prior to 1914. During the 1890s, ad agencies Lord & Thomas and N.W. Ayer & Son ushered in new business by employing copywriters and artists to design advertisements for customers.<sup>621</sup> In addition, advertising giant J. Walter Thompson Co. touted the skills of its in-house copywriters as essential to businesses prone to producing unattractive or unsophisticated ads, assuring potential clients, “This agency practically insures you against such mistakes. It has writers and designers, trained to the work of telling the merits of goods in the most effective way.”<sup>622</sup> Thus, professional copywriters and artists were essential in helping U.S. businesses create engaging marketing content, potentially more uniform in terms of theme than that of Russia, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **Advertisements in American and Russian Print Media and Ephemera**

Perhaps more so than in Russia, print media was a central avenue for the dissemination of information about new consumer goods in the United States, which possessed an increasingly literate and interconnected populace. The American advertising

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<sup>619</sup> West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 54.

<sup>620</sup> West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 41.

<sup>621</sup> Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Belmont: Wadsworth Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>622</sup> *The Thompson Blue Book on Advertising 1904-1905* (New York: J. Walter Thompson Company, 1905), 13, in Box DG4 c. 1, J. Walter Thompson Company. Domestic Advertisements Collection and Publications Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

boom was largely fueled by cost-efficient developments in lithography and transportation that resulted in the production and wide circulation of an abundance of journals and newspapers.<sup>623</sup> Publishers adopted business models that relied on advertising revenue to fund their operational expenses and sold advertising space directly to businesses or through placement agencies. In turn, companies strove to capitalize upon the reading habits of a new generation during an age when, as one advertisement put it, there had never before been “so many Magazines, Newspapers, and interesting books published, subscribed for, and read.”<sup>624</sup>

Numerous businesses competed to place illustrated ads in printed publications to ensure that information about their products reached the widest possible audience. In the United States, J. Walter Thompson Co. responded to growing manufacturer demand by helping companies purchase space in newspapers and journals.<sup>625</sup> In 1889, Thompson claimed to place 80 percent of all ads in the United States and continued to prosper during the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>626</sup> The agency succeeded in large part because it targeted varied demographic groups, touting its access to numerous magazines that reached “the homes of well-to-do people who have the means to purchase and intelligence to

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<sup>623</sup> In the 1880s, millions of Americans learned about current events, religion, science, and art from daily newspapers or from some of the 10,000 different periodicals in existence. Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes*, 29-30; and Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway, eds., *History of the Book in America: Print in Motion— The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880 - 1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>624</sup> Acetylene Jones, “That Health Light for Homes,” Box 35, c. 1, Advertising Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>625</sup> The firm’s strategy was to purchase large amounts of advertising space and to resell it to interested businesses.

<sup>626</sup> By 1900, the agency’s portfolio of clients surpassed 800. Excerpted from “1889 Hubbard’s Blue Book,” Box JW1 c. 1; and *Blue Book on Advertising* (New York: J. Walter Thompson Company, 1901), 7, in Box DG4 c. 1, J. Walter Thompson Company, Domestic Advertisements Collection and Publications Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.



appreciate the desirability of an article brought to their notice.”<sup>627</sup> Thompson urged clients to establish mutually beneficial relationships with publications, advising, “The illustrated weeklies, the humorous and society papers, the scientific periodicals and trade journals—all have their special clientele, which it is frequently wise to cultivate.”<sup>628</sup> As advertisements in newspapers and journals became commonplace, businesses and agencies grew savvier in their marketing decisions. For example, Thompson explained to its potential clients in 1902 that “Our intimate and profound acquaintance with newspapers and magazines here give an impressive advantage . . . . We can insure that automobiles shall not be extensively advertised to the working classes nor bargain jack-knives to the well-to-do.”<sup>629</sup> These examples show that companies created ads with distinct messages for particular consumer groups and targeted them through selected publications.

Although Russian literacy rates were significantly lower than those of the United States, printed newspapers and periodicals also served as important vehicles for Russian firms hoping to spread information about their products to rural and urban readers.<sup>630</sup> Russia’s most widespread publications included *Russkoe slovo* (Russian Word), the nation’s largest newspaper, *Peterburgskii listok* (Petersburg Sheet), and *Russkie vedomosti* (Russian

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<sup>627</sup> They charged businesses between \$12 and \$15 per line nonpareil for advertisements placed in popular publications like *Century*, *Fireside Monthly*, *Harper’s*, and *Scribner’s*. Excerpted from “1889 Hubbard’s Blue Book,” Box JW1 c. 1, J. Walter Thompson Company, Domestic Advertisements Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>628</sup> *The Thompson Blue Book on Advertising* (New York: J. Walter Thompson Company, 1905,) 14. Box DG4, c. 1, J. Walter Thompson Company. Publications Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>629</sup> *The Thompson Blue Book on Advertising* (New York: J. Walter Thompson Company, 1902), 8, Box DG4, c. 1, J. Walter Thompson Company. Publications Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>630</sup> According to the 1897 census, 21 percent of the total population was literate. See Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 4.

Gazette).<sup>631</sup> During the late nineteenth century, the circulation of such printed materials increased dramatically as distribution channels grew and literacy rates increased. For example, between 1870 and 1916, circulation of *Peterburgskii listok*, the “boulevard” newspaper, grew by 1,000 percent from 9,000 to 128,500.<sup>632</sup> Subscription journals also experienced dramatic growth. Some of the most popular magazines, including *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* (World Illustration) and *Ogonek* (Little Flame), were “thin,” illustrated journals containing elaborate images that could be interpreted and understood by less educated readers.<sup>633</sup> Each journal published 52 issues per year for between four and thirteen rubles each.<sup>634</sup> Russia’s most popular journal, *Niva* (Grain Field) reached more than 235,000 readers after circulation doubled between 1891 and 1900.<sup>635</sup> In the aforementioned publications, readers learned about domestic and international events, read fiction or poetry, and admired the black and white advertisements for soap, furniture, perfume, musical instruments, agricultural equipment, sewing machines, gramophones, clothing, and bicycles that filled their pages.

A second way in which Russian and American businesses reached consumers was through illustrated advertising posters. French artist Jules Chéret (1836-1932), the father of commercial art, popularized the poster medium in Paris by creating visually stunning works

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<sup>631</sup> Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 9.

<sup>632</sup> West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 31.

<sup>633</sup> Tatsumi Yukiko, “Russian Illustrated Journals in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Dual Image of Readers,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 26: 164-165.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> Mikhail Anikst, Nina Baburina, and Elena Cherneva, *Russian Graphic Design, 1880 – 1917* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 19-20.

in the Art Nouveau style that attracted audiences with their strong colors and contrasting images.<sup>636</sup> First appearing in Russian in 1868, *reklamnye plakaty* (advertising posters) were not widely used in America and Russia until the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>637</sup> In the United States, businesses began hiring artists directly to create large-scale works depicting scenes in which men, women, and children sampled their products.<sup>638</sup> As commercial works of art, posters entranced consumers because of their size and exquisite level of detail. Their unique format enabled businesses to develop their brands by crafting narratives about different products that appealed to specific consumer groups separated by class and gender. For instance, in the United States, advertisements for luxury goods such as perfume or fragrant soap typically featured elegant young women clad in expensive, fashionable clothing. Confectionary advertisements usually depicted well-dressed children indulging in sweets, while the earliest beer and tobacco posters defied class boundaries by showing working-class men engaging in daring athletic activities or business professionals conversing in up-scale restaurants. Ultimately, for large businesses with big advertising budgets, posters presented new opportunities for promoting merchandise to diverse buyers.

Like American illustrated posters, Russian *plakaty* similarly served as vehicles that mediated the experience of shopping through representation and constructed narratives that told a complex story through visual elements. For example, an 1899 Laferm advertisement

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<sup>636</sup> Gilles Feyel, “Presse et publicité en France (XVIIIe et XIXe siècles),” *Revue Historique* 305, Fasc. 4, no. 628 (2003): 864.

<sup>637</sup> The Russian terms are of German and French provenance; *plakat* is derived from the German word for poster, “*plakat*,” as well as the French verb, *plaquer*, which means “to apply or attach” something to a surface. The French term, *réclamer*, can mean “to call for.” Irina Zolotinkina and Galina Polikarpova, *Reklamnyi plakat v Rossii: 1900-1920-e* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2010), 7; Elena Barkhatova, Irina Alexeeva, Vladimir Alexeev, Nicolas Chkolnyi, and Thierry Devynck, *Le premier âge d'or de l'affiche russe: 1890-1917* (Paris: Bibliotheque Forney, 1997), 11; and Snopkov, Snopkov, and Shkliaruk, *Reklama v plakate*, 9.

<sup>638</sup> Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes*, 86.

portrays an urban scene in which a group of wealthy men in top hats examines an announcement for the company's "*Trezvon*" cigarettes that had been painted upon the cracked plaster covering a brick wall.<sup>639</sup> But an urban peasant clad in a bright red shirt and shiny leather boots, articles of clothing typically used to depict a successful urban peasant, stands at the front of the assembly as he studies the text. Here, the peasant exercises his ability to read, a new skill that allows him to stand alongside the city's well-dressed businessmen as they collectively interpret the ad. This aspirational poster may have appealed to male peasant consumers who hoped to become integrated among the city's educated upper- and middle-class members. Thus, the format of the *plakat* also enabled Russian businesses to transmit messages to targeted consumer groups through a language of representation.

A final way in which American and Russian businesses promoted their products was through the creation and distribution of different types of ephemera such as fans, cigar boxes, instruction manuals, pamphlets, paper dolls, stamps, calendars, and illustrated cards. In addition, companies incorporated visual imagery on the exterior packaging of products during the late nineteenth century. Russian confectionary firms frequently adorned candy wrappers with colorful scenes of domestic life relating to the title of a particular series or brand of candy. Interestingly, elements of American culture occasionally surfaced in Russian ephemera. For example, an African-American gentleman and a white performer dance across the cardboard box containing M. Konradi's "Cake-Walk" sweets, while a Native American

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<sup>639</sup> *Trezvon* has several meanings, including a "ringing" noise, gossip, or rumors. "*Papirosy 'Trezvon.'*" *Tovarishchestvo 'Laferm.'* St. Petersburg, February 5, 1899. Russian National Library Poster Collection.

rode bareback on a bar of flag-bearing “American Chocolate.”<sup>640</sup> U.S. tobacco companies also typically enlivened their products with visual imagery; for instance, American company W.T. Blackwell & Company used illustrated paper labels on its white pouches of dried tobacco and decorated its “Clear Havana” cigar boxes with colorful floral island scenes that ostensibly referenced the plant’s provenance.<sup>641</sup>

Less widely circulated in Russia, the illustrated card was one of the most common types of advertising ephemera in the United States.<sup>642</sup> During the mid-to-late nineteenth century, American merchants and shopkeepers handed out slim, colorful, paper cards depicting or describing various products in their stores. Large manufacturers could design and print their own materials, while smaller companies often ordered their cards directly from businesses like Sunshine Publishing of Philadelphia, Donaldson Brothers of Five Points, and New York Pictorial Printing, which charged \$3.50 per thousand single-sided cards.<sup>643</sup> Businesses eventually improved their marketing strategies by producing sets of between 15 and 95 “collectible” cards that could be exchanged, shared, or displayed rather than tossed into the trash.<sup>644</sup> Tobacco companies employed this advertising tactic during the 1880s, when they repackaged cigarettes by swapping the traditional round bundle design for

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<sup>640</sup> M. Konradi, “Kek-Uok,” St. Petersburg, undated; and “Amerikanskii shokolad, Factory in Moscow,” 1898.

<sup>641</sup> W.T. Blackwell & Co., Blackwell’s Durham Clear Havana [Cigar Box], Box 4, c. 1, Tobacco Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>642</sup> Trade cards were less widely distributed in Russia, where businesses mailed notices, letters, or visiting cards to selected members of Russia’s elite. West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 29.

<sup>643</sup> Roy Alquist, “Sewing Machine Tradecards,” *Paper Collector’s Marketplace*, undated, 14, 16, Box 49, Advertising Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>644</sup> Lou McCulloch, “On Paper: Of Generals, Dukes, and Tobacco Cards,” *American Collector*, February, 1982, 7, Box 4, W. Duke, Sons & Co. Advertising Materials, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

cardboard boxes, a change that conveniently allowed for the insertion of trade cards.<sup>645</sup> For instance, W. Duke, Sons, and Company, a North Carolina-based tobacco giant, produced numerous sets of souvenir cards packed in cigarette boxes depicting U.S. states and their governors, different types of musical instruments, or illustrated cartoons that incorporated wordplay.<sup>646</sup> Overall, the diversity of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century ephemera attests to the expanding possibilities for businesses striving to capture buyers' attention through the production of creative advertisements that shaped the culture of consumerism through their broad reach.

### **Street Scenes: Storefronts, Symbols, and State Allegiance**

In Russia and the United States, urbanites from many backgrounds purchased their goods from street vendors or shopped in *rynki* (outdoor markets), *lavki* (traditional shops), or from a host of new *magaziny* (stores).<sup>647</sup> Many of these businesses described different consumer products through both textual and pictorial signage that informed consumers about the products they stocked inside their shops.<sup>648</sup> Seeking to appeal to both domestic and foreign customers and perhaps to signal higher product quality, Russian businesses frequently printed information about their brand or products in multiple languages including Russian, English, German, and French. American shops also displayed product information in a range of languages to inform and attract immigrants from diverse backgrounds; for

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<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> See collections in Boxes 2 and 3, W. Duke, Sons & Co. Advertising Materials, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>647</sup> See Marjorie Hilton, *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 22.

<sup>648</sup> For early twentieth-century photographs of storefront windows and shops on Nevskii Prospekt, a major thoroughfare in St. Petersburg, see "Fasad doma 1 po nevskomu prospektu" (1901), in Ozerov, *Nevskii prospekt*, 11.

example, photographer Joseph Byron captured a Brooklyn street scene from 1899 where women and children lined up for a taste of Horton's Ice Cream in front of a pricing sign printed in Hebrew.<sup>649</sup>

In Russia, however, storefront windows did more than transmit information about the cost or composition of merchandise housed within. Historian Marjorie Hilton argues that, prior to the Revolution of 1905, merchants who identified with the state signaled their political views to customers by “symbolically melding their business firms with the imagery and rituals of state power.”<sup>650</sup> One way in which they did so was through storefront designs that evoked Russia's medieval past. For example, confectionery company George Borman signified its links to the state through a storefront renovation inspired by the patriotic *Style Russe*, an architectural style influenced by the Silver Age and promoted by the conservative Tsar Alexander III.<sup>651</sup> Drawing from Muscovite Russian architecture as well as nineteenth-century *Art Nouveau*, the *Style Russe* was at once traditional and modern, influencing aspects of Russian culture such as graphic design and building construction.<sup>652</sup> A comparison of photographs taken between 1900 and approximately 1915 reveals that the shop expanded and remodeled the building; while George Borman's 1900 storefront contained unremarkable square glass windows that mirrored those of surrounding shops, its new design joined two semi-circular glass panels to form an entryway in the shape of a two-dimensional onion dome and featured a sumptuous façade with swirling Cyrillic lettering. Two additional storefront

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<sup>649</sup> Joseph Byron, “Brooklyn, 1899,” in Albert K. Baragwanath, *New York Life at the Turn of the Century in Photographs* (New York: Dover Publications and the Museum of the City of New York, 1985), image 29.

<sup>650</sup> Hilton, *Selling to the Masses*, 9, and West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 77.

<sup>651</sup> See Anikst, Baburina, and Chernevich, *Russian Graphic Design*, 17-19; and William Craft Brumfield, *The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xx-xxi.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

symbols alluded to Russian state power: an imperial double-headed eagle perched on the awning over the doorway and a bust of Peter the Great that watched passing shoppers from the window display.<sup>653</sup>

Russian companies also touted their connections to the state through their participation in urban trade fairs or large-scale exhibitions where they vied with one another to win awards certifying the superiority of their products.<sup>654</sup> One of the most desirable prizes, however, was the government's permission to print the imperial seal with its formidable double-headed eagle, a signifier of the state's endorsement of their goods, on products or advertising materials.<sup>655</sup> This noteworthy image loomed large in the mind of writer Sergei Gornyi, who recalled from his childhood days in St. Petersburg that "golden eagles were embossed on the [wrapping] of the chocolate of George Borman [in honor of] the exhibition in Nizhnii Novgorod."<sup>656</sup> Grand spectacles like that of Novgorod and other cities captivated Russian consumers by enticing them with an enormous display of items. In a description of St. Petersburg's 1870 All-Russia Manufacturing Exhibition, a journalist praised the show's role in allowing inventors to quickly debut their newest creations to the public and for acquainting consumers "with the best and cheapest products" as a "kind of school of the people, which acts through the education of even the masses."<sup>657</sup> Trade fairs and major

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<sup>653</sup> See "Fasad doma 21 po nevskomu prospektu" (1900) and "Vitrina magazine tovarishchestva 'Zhorzh Borman' (Nevskii prospekt, 21)," in Ozerov, *Nevskii prospekt*, 50-51.

<sup>654</sup> Businesses that amassed prizes at numerous competitions displayed these circular golden emblems on advertising materials; for example, international florist T. Gerstner appears to have exhibited no fewer than eight awards in its storefront windows in 1903. See "Zdanie peterburgskogo obshchestva strakhovaniia (Nevskii prospekt, 5), in Ozerov, *Nevskii prospekt*, 14.

<sup>655</sup> Hilton, *Selling to the Masses*, 80; and West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 68-69.

<sup>656</sup> Sergei Gornyi, *Al'bom pamiati* (St. Petersburg: Giperion, 2011), 36.

<sup>657</sup> An additional article outlining the rules for visitors indicates the popularity of such exhibitions; it warns ostensibly overeager consumers not to directly handle the products on display or to carry away their purchased



exhibitions served as important spaces where consumers could learn about the latest goods, but more importantly, these state-endorsed competitive events promoted the spirit of entrepreneurship in Russia by encouraging manufacturers to compete for consumers' dollars by creating attractive products.

Visual evidence of merchant-state alliances, critical in an autocratic system where government capital played an outsized role in the flowering of industry, was less apparent on product packaging and city streets in the United States. While the nationalistic *Style Russe* grew increasingly popular in Russian cities, American builders and designers drew not from the country's colonial past, but from eclectic sources of inspiration such as ancient Greece and Egypt or medieval Europe to create urban storefront facades and buildings that revived foreign architectural traditions.<sup>658</sup> Lears argues that "this jumble of pseudohistorical styles" produced "a new and bewilderingly various visual environment" for late nineteenth-century urban residents.<sup>659</sup> He posits that, ironically, architectural disunity in America's sprawling cities contributed to Americans' heightened sense of national interconnectedness. In cities dominated by miscellaneous structures, supported by a complex market economy, and populated by immigrants from around the globe, Americans felt less autonomous and increasingly interdependent as they observed changes that challenged historic classical liberal notions of "independent selfhood."<sup>660</sup> Ultimately, late nineteenth-century urban development

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items from the exhibition until its official closing. "Pravila dlia posetitelei Vserossiiskoi Manufakturnoi Vystavki," from the "Illiustrirovannoe opisanie: Vserossiiskoi Manufakturnoi Vystavki 1870g," *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* 74, nos. 1-2, pages 1-2.

<sup>658</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 33.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., 34.

contributed to changing conceptions of American identity not through singular emphasis of a particular national style, but through the amalgamation of a widening range of diverse peoples and ideas.

### **Analyzing Images of Serfs and Slaves in Russian and American Advertisements**

Both Russian and American businesses and ad agencies relied upon a multitude of similar strategies to market their goods to consumers. A close analysis of advertisements in newspapers, posters, and ephemera reveals that companies used text and images that spoke to different consumer groups in distinct ways. To market products to American and Russian consumers of all backgrounds, companies frequently utilized pictorial representations of serfs, peasants, slaves, and freedpeople that were endowed with meaning through signifying functions such as clothing, shoes, facial features, hairstyles, body language, surrounding environment, and activities.<sup>661</sup> As Victoria Bonnell argues in her examination of Soviet political posters, such images comprise a “visual language (with a lexicon and syntax)” that viewers interpret through the act of seeing.<sup>662</sup> In both imperial Russia and the post-war United States, as in the Soviet period that Bonnell studies, such representations conveyed a great deal of information about “class identity . . . gender and gender relations, ethnicity, and other forms of cultural and social identification.”<sup>663</sup> Both Russian and American companies used pictorial depictions to assign to peasants and freedpeople varying positions in rural and urban social hierarchies. For example, Russian advertisements utilized different representations of rural peasants to either denigrate or elevate former serfs. While some

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<sup>661</sup> Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, (Routledge, 2003), 415.

<sup>662</sup> Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

images of rural peasants signaled their lack of sophistication and subordinate relationship to sophisticated city dwellers, others glorified their agrarian lifestyle and culture as symbolic of traditional Russia's beauty and strength.

Advertisements are valuable primary sources which, in the words of historian Peter Burke, "testify to the values that are projected onto inanimate objects in our culture of consumption, the equivalent, perhaps, of the values projected on to the landscape" of a particular era.<sup>664</sup> As physical objects, illustrated or decorated pieces of ephemera were physically handled by a range of people, an act that may have legitimized the images and ideas they described or embodied.<sup>665</sup> For example, in his study of black collectibles in late nineteenth-century American ephemera, Kenneth Goings finds that "bjects of material culture gave a physical, tangible reality to the idea of racial inferiority" because those who used these items "consciously or unconsciously accepted the stereotypes they presented."<sup>666</sup> An assessment of advertisements' design and meaning allows scholars to glean information about businesses' motives, but historians may never fully comprehend the ways in which viewers received these representations. Nonetheless, as Bonnell notes in her study of Soviet posters, visual analysis allows historians to "map out the repertoire of references available in contemporary culture" that consumers recognized and understood.<sup>667</sup> For example, American advertisements targeting white, middle-class, female consumers repeatedly featured images of female African Americans wearing red kerchiefs or headscarves. Many Americans

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<sup>664</sup> Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 95.

<sup>665</sup> Kenneth Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xiii.

<sup>666</sup> Goings defines black collectibles as "items made in or with the image of an African American. Ibid., xiii.

<sup>667</sup> Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 10-11.

subsequently began to associate these symbolic articles of clothing with the notion of servile black women, representations that created and reinforced particular stereotypes. Thus, in order to efficiently transmit information to consumers about the intended use or quality of the promoted product, businesses constantly used recognizable images.

### **Selling Servitude: Master-Serf Relationships in Russian Advertisements**

An examination of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian posters, ephemera, newspapers, and illustrated journals reveals that businesses depicted serfs and peasants as distinct archetypes: servant of the aristocracy, preserver of traditional Russian culture, benighted migrant, and shrewd urbanite. First, companies created nostalgic scenes referencing pre-emancipation Russia that depicted peasants in positions of servitude in relation to landowning noble families or overseers. Several advertisements marketing teas portray female peasants serving the beloved drink to wealthy aristocratic families. A colorful wrapper for F. Turbin's *Folk Tea* presents a picturesque scene in which a father, mother, and son sit around an enormous brass samovar atop a parlor table. The family's wealth is evidenced by the blue and yellow wallpaper, the rich curtains and embroidered tablecloth, their shining leather shoes, and their fashionable western clothing. The father relaxes in his chair, holding a teacup in one hand and a newspaper in the other, watching as a peasant dressed in traditional folk attire offers tea to the family. She displays her subservient position through her demure gaze, focusing intently on her task and bowing her head respectfully as the family looks on.<sup>668</sup> In a comparable advertisement for Pavel Gorbunov's *Fruit Tea and Coffee*, this time in poster form, a mother wearing western clothing sits with her two children on the sunny porch of a country estate. A female peasant dressed in traditional folk costume,

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<sup>668</sup> F. Turbin, "Narodnyi Chai," late nineteenth century, Russian National Library Ephemera Collection.

her head adorned with a sumptuous jeweled *kokoshnik* (headdress), looks upward toward her mistress while serving the family tea from a brass samovar.<sup>669</sup>

In advertisements such as these, the servant's status as a serf or a peasant is somewhat ambiguous, but the allusions to an idealized view of serfdom are clear. The scene occurs on a rural estate, the servant women wear the attire of rural peasants that differentiates them from the aristocratic families adorned in luxurious western clothing, and body language reveals the unequal power dynamics between masters and bondswomen.<sup>670</sup> It is improbable, however, that such advertisements solely targeted members of Russia's elite. Although tea was unaffordable for the majority of the Russian population at the turn of the nineteenth century, prices halved between 1885 and 1900, resulting in increased consumption across a broader range of socio-economic groups.<sup>671</sup> Consequently, late nineteenth-century advertisements depicting nostalgic images of servitude sent aspirational messages to non-peasant, middle-class consumers seeking to position themselves in the new social order. By purchasing and drinking *Fruit Tea* or *Folk Tea*, they could imagine themselves engaging in an exclusive and refined activity formerly restricted to the landowning nobility of the pre-emancipation era.

A second category of advertisements alludes to pre-emancipation master-serf relationships through the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity in depictions of peasants engaging in mechanical field work under the watch of a *nachal'nik*, or "boss." Merchant

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<sup>669</sup> Pavel Gorbunov, "*Fruktovyi chai i kofe iz vinnykh iagod*," in Glinernik, *Reklama v Rossii*.

<sup>670</sup> These advertisements portray peasant women in ornate costumes that only would have been worn on special occasions, not for work. This mode of representation links the women to traditional Russian culture and offers a paternalistic view of serfdom as an institution that provided to peasants not only necessities, but also expensive clothing.

<sup>671</sup> Audra J. Yoder, "Myth and Memory in Russian Tea Culture," *Studies in Slavic Cultures XIII: Memory* (2009): 2; and Ivan Sokolov, "*Rossiiskaia <Chainaia skazka>: ot istokov do kontsa XIX veka*," in *Kofe i chai v Rossii* 3 (2013): 20.

Andrei Gustavovich Gendune's firm marketed its portable field engines and peat machines in a 1900 issue of *Russian News* through an illustration in which a group of peasants works alongside a Gendune machine.<sup>672</sup> Dressed in western clothing and standing atop the enormous piece of equipment, an overseer presides over the scene, keeping an attentive eye on the peasants who are presumably unable to operate the machinery independently. *Plakaty* and trade cards depict the rural peasantry in a similar fashion; for example, a colorful poster for Henry Lantz's locomobiles shows female peasants in headscarves and male peasants in archetypical red *rubashki*, or blouses, feeding wheat into an enormous threshing machine. In the foreground, however, stands the *nachal'nik* who sports a coat and bowtie and holds a small book. He alone looks directly at the viewer as if to affirm his authority and control.<sup>673</sup> Finally, a trade card for I.B. Pappe's tobacco firm presents a highly idealized and anachronistic scene of peasants harvesting tobacco [see Figure 1]. Clad in colorful costumes reminiscent of the medieval attire of Muscovite 'Rus,' male and female peasants pick and bundle the plant's green leaves before hauling them onto a waiting train. These diminutive peasants are the least threatening of those portrayed in the three aforementioned advertisements; they appear as child-like adults, docile and obedient.<sup>674</sup>

Drawn from different types of advertising media, a common theme of peasant servitude nonetheless emerges from these representations. In the first two examples, peasants are shown as subordinate to a prominently featured boss or overseer who manages their labor and helps operate the sophisticated machinery. The Pappe trade card goes a step further by

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<sup>672</sup> *Russkie vedomosti* no. 254, 1900, 4; and *Vestnik finansov, promyshlennosti i torgovli*, no. 5, 1903, 80.

<sup>673</sup> Henry Lantz, "*Lokomobili i molotilki*," likely produced during the late nineteenth century, Russian National Library Poster Collection.

<sup>674</sup> I.B. Pappe, untitled card, published November 20, 1892, Russian National Library Ephemera Collection.

depicting the peasantry as infantilized, costumed serfs who merrily complete their fieldwork without objection. In addition, all three advertisements blend elements of the old and new in a reassuring combination: railroad tracks and trains appear alongside peasants harvesting tobacco in traditional dress; the smoke of a noisy threshing machine billows into the blue sky above an idyllic wheat field.<sup>675</sup> Such images may have appealed to a Russian population wary of change and slow to implement and utilize mechanized farm equipment to improve laborers' productivity.<sup>676</sup> Seeking to capture market share in a difficult environment, manufacturers of agricultural machinery may have produced these advertisements to target gentry landowners who collectively possessed 79.9 percent of private land in 1877 and 52.7 percent in 1905.<sup>677</sup> Although the proportion of land held by members of the nobility declined during the late nineteenth century, nobles comprised the majority of purchasers of agricultural land through 1897.<sup>678</sup> Such property-owners with large holdings likely had the capacity to make significant capital investments in expensive equipment to increase agricultural output on their land. Thus, advertisements that marketed new-fangled machinery using traditional imagery and deferential peasant workers may have made the transition more palatable to members of the nobility.

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<sup>675</sup> This strategy relates to what Sally West described as advertisers' awareness of their role in "facilitating the modern" through "the language of both tradition and change." West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 4.

<sup>676</sup> Between 1883 and 1915, crop production grew by approximately 2.3 percent annually across all of Russia. The use of mechanized agricultural equipment was not widespread even by the turn of the twentieth century. Raymond W. Goldsmith, "The Economic Growth of Tsarist Russia, 1860-1913," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 9, no. 3 (1961): 442, 447.

<sup>677</sup> Nicholas Spulber, *Russia's Economic Transitions: From Late Tsarism to the New Millennium* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 74.

<sup>678</sup> Seymour Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985), 32-33; and Roberta Manning, *The Crisis of the Old Order in Russia: Gentry and Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 10.

## Peasants as a National Symbol

Images of peasants in advertisements also served a second, related purpose during the late nineteenth century, when many Russians struggled with the changes wrought by industrialization, geographic expansion, and the incorporation of new ethnic groups into their empire. Russia's military defeat in the Crimean War (1856) prompted intellectuals to reconsider and redefine the content of the nation's character and collective identity. Many intellectuals, including the politically oriented Populists of the 1870s, promoted the concept of a national metamorphosis achieved through the reinterpretation of the principles of the Slavophile movement by emphasizing "a fictive ethnicity," in the words of Etienne Balibar, or a romanticized vision of the Russian folk.<sup>679</sup> As Russia's expanding borders absorbed new ethnic groups, some intellectuals believed that the nation's Slavic citizens were the true descendants of Muscovite 'Rus' and deserved to stand as Russia's "politically and culturally dominant group."<sup>680</sup> Furthermore, as Cathy Frierson explains, the image of the "communal peasant" as a "moral actor for whom not the survival of the fittest but the survival of the community and its cultural heritage" particularly resonated during the Era of Great Reforms when intellectuals debated "questions of Russia's development."<sup>681</sup>

Advertisements sought to address this collective anxiety about national identity and expansion through images of the peasantry positioned as primary symbols of Slavic identity and history. Consider a turn-of-the-century poster for È.I. Mel'goze's Kharkov-based

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<sup>679</sup> Olga Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 12, 13.

<sup>680</sup> Here, Maiorova refers to the viewpoint of intellectuals like Mikhail Katkov (1818-1887) editor of *Moscow News*, whose newspaper advocated the unification of "the heterogeneous state on the basis of, and for the benefit of, the 'ruling nationality.'" Ibid., 21.

<sup>681</sup> Cathy Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101.



agricultural machinery manufacturing firm, which one contemporary described as known for its “efficient, durable [equipment] . . . that perfectly meets the requirements of Russian peasants and landowners in possession of small-to-medium sized holdings.”<sup>682</sup> The Mel’goze poster depicts a peasant in a conventional red *rubashka* driving a seeding machine across a spherical map of Russian territory. A throng of men and women of different ethnographic backgrounds wearing their respective traditional costumes reaches longingly upward toward the peasant, arms outstretched, from their positions in Central Asian and eastern European territory.<sup>683</sup> In banner form, a slogan splashed across the globe declares, “All require only a Mel’goze seeder.” While the peasant’s literal job is that of a farmer, his figurative role is to sow his seeds in order for future generations of Slavic people and their traditions to flourish across the empire. Indeed, the Slavic peasant’s preeminent position in relation to other ethnic groups is unmistakable.

Other advertisements depicting the peasantry as a national symbol employed a gentler, more nostalgic approach. For example, an 1888 poster for Shapshal “Conversation” cigarettes shows a peasant couple, an accordion-playing boy in a red *rubashka* and a girl in a yellow headscarf and *lapti* (bast shoes), strolling through a rural village.<sup>684</sup> Similarly saccharine images of young peasants were particularly common in confectionary ephemera. Packaging for George Borman’s candies and chocolates features sentimental portraits of peasant children building snowmen in villages, sledding, playing the accordion, or holding

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<sup>682</sup> Vasilii Aleksandrovich Dmitriev-Mamonov (graf), *Ukazatel’ deistvuiushchikh v Imperii aktsionernykh predpriiatii i torgovykh domov*, Vol. 2 (E. Bern’, 1905), 326.

<sup>683</sup> È.I. Mel’goze, “Zavod zemledel’cheskikh mashin,” undated, Russian National Library Poster Collection.

<sup>684</sup> Br. Shapshal, “Beseda papirosy” St. Petersburg, September 16, 1888. Russian National Library Poster Collection.

dolls.<sup>685</sup> Other products incorporated historical elements of peasant culture; for example, Borman's chocolate bar series "Russian Songs in Persons" shows at least ten distinct village scenes of peasant life that illustrated the lyrics of traditional Russian folk songs.<sup>686</sup>

Finally, advertisers depicted the peasantry as the protagonists of myths and folktales. For instance, Borman's "Golden Fish" candies presented an image of a male peasant casting his net in the story of the omnipotent fish who possessed the ability to grant any wish to the poor *muzhik* (peasant) and his greedy wife.<sup>687</sup> Meanwhile, confectionary firm M. Konradi's "Konek Gorbunok" candy showed colorful scenes from the fairytale "The Little Humpbacked Horse," a story in which a cunning peasant surmounts numerous obstacles to win the hand of the Tsar's daughter, while the "Krylov's Fables" series depicted peasants as the leading characters in tales like "The Hermit and the Bear" and "The Miser and the Chicken."<sup>688</sup> Sweet treats such as these were likely marketed to upper- or middle-class children and their parents who possessed the means to purchase little indulgences. Together, advertisements that presented appealing illustrations of the peasantry through fables and folktales solidified their position as inheritors and preservers of traditional Russian culture.

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<sup>685</sup> See George Borman, "Shokolad druž'ia," after 1896, and George Borman, Untitled pre-revolutionary wrapper, Russian National Library Ephemera Collection.

<sup>686</sup> George Borman, "Russkie pesni v litsakh" undated, Russian National Library Ephemera Collection.

<sup>687</sup> George Borman, "Zolotaia rybka," undated, Russian National Library Ephemera Collection.

<sup>688</sup> M. Konradi, "Konfety Konek Gorbunok," undated, and "Basni Krylova," undated, Russian National Library Ephemera Collection.

## Country Bumpkin to City Slicker: The Education of the Peasant Migrant

During the 1880s and 1890s, industrialization and urban expansion weakened the traditional borders between imperial Russia's rural villages and bustling cities.

Manufacturers built new factories that promoted urban growth and offered rural peasants salaried jobs that provided an escape from the hardships of agricultural labor. Although author Lev Tolstoi famously depicted Russia's peasants as pure folk who lived simply without surrendering to earthly desires for wealth, scores of peasants migrated to cities, particularly after Petr Stolypin's reforms following the Revolution of 1905, which abolished peasants' redemption payments and permitted families to privatize and sell portions of communally-held land, an act that gave peasants capital liquidity and increased freedom of movement.<sup>689</sup> Peasant migration from the central-industrial regions fueled this growth; statistics show that 75 percent of Moscow's migrants were from the peasant estate and that the vast majority of Moscow's factory workers were peasants.<sup>690</sup> Working conditions in factories could be difficult, but peasants endured these challenges in exchange for salaries that enabled them to buy manufactured goods and experience the excitement of metropolitan life. By 1897, peasants made up approximately 50 percent of Russia's total urban population and approximately 75% percent of the total population.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>689</sup> Gregory, *Before Command*, 41-42; and Eugenia Chernina, Paul Castaceda Dower, and Andrei Markevich, "Property Rights and Internal Migration: The Case of the Stolypin Agrarian Reform in the Russian Empire," Working Paper 147, Centre for Economic and Financial Research at New Economic School (2010): 3.

<sup>690</sup> Johnson, "Peasant Migration and the Russian Working Class," 654.

<sup>691</sup> David Moon, "Peasant Migration, the Abolition of Serfdom, and the Internal Passport System in the Russian Empire c. 1800-1914," in Eltis, *Coerced and Free Migration*, 346; and David Moon, "Estimating the Peasant Population of Late Imperial Russia from the 1897 Census: A Research Note," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 1 (1996): 151.

Migrants simultaneously exercised a newfound sense of autonomy and joined communities of people from across the Russian empire. In cities, traditional relationships based upon *sosloviia* (estates) changed in important ways. Although the 1897 census found that 84 percent of Russia's male population self-identified as members of the peasantry, a category that traditionally described agricultural laborers who resided on private or state-owned lands in semi-autonomous village communities, this classification did not capture the experiences of urban peasants who worked in newly constructed factories, sold newspapers, or performed other kinds of urban services.<sup>692</sup> No longer constrained by historic master-serf relationships, urban peasants strolled along boulevards and window-shopped beside merchants, intellectuals, and members of the aristocracy.

Exercising their newfound purchasing power, male peasants frequently bought manufactured products to bring as gifts when they returned to the countryside to visit their parents, wives, and children. Stories from popular nineteenth-century periodicals offer a human portrait of this common occurrence. One fictional tale published in the supplement to the *Moscow Sheet* recounts the adventures of a male peasant, Ivan Artemov, who migrated to a city in order to support his family members living in a nearby village. For fourteen years, Ivan "had worked hard in the factory. During this time he built himself a new hut, dressed himself as a city-dweller . . . and dressed up his [wife] Mar'ia."<sup>693</sup> Reflecting on his successes, Ivan proudly creates a mental inventory of the goods he acquired for the family's *izba* (hut). He recalls how, having amassed "two samovars, small and everyday, and big and celebratory, for guests, he set out chairs, and Mar'ia hung curtains on the windows, and put

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<sup>692</sup> Elise Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 101-102.

<sup>693</sup> "Razdum'e (iz narodnoi zhizni)," *Moscow Sheet Supplement*, January 1, 1906, no. 1, page 12.

flowers in broken jugs, and he whitened the stove with chalk.”<sup>694</sup> Ivan’s story reflected the experiences of urban peasants who sought to transform their homes and physical appearances through the purchase of newly accessible consumer products at the turn of the twentieth century. Thousands of rural peasants like the fictional Ivan faced an unfamiliar world in cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg. They quickly learned, however, that it was important to follow new rules of decorum and dress. Stories like that of Ivan Artemov suggest that urban peasants learned to outfit themselves “*po-gorodskomu*,” as city-dwellers, by replacing their worn bast shoes and *valenki* (felt boots) with polished black leather boots and smart short-brimmed caps.<sup>695</sup>

Manufacturers recognized the opportunity for capturing urban peasants’ attention through advertisements intended to edify buyers who sought to learn how to dress “*po-gorodskomu*.” For example, in 1904, the Russian-American Association of Rubber Manufacturing printed a poster that portrayed a stylish urban peasant speaking with a witless rural peasant wearing tattered clothing and dilapidated bast shoes [see Figure 2].<sup>696</sup> The well-groomed urban peasant points to a pair of new rubber-soled footwear, teaching the country bumpkin about the shoes’ merits. This advertisement likely resonated with recent migrants who were hoping to assimilate into city life and who dreaded a scenario in which their peers pointed out their ignorance about urban dress codes. Manufacturers also encouraged parents to buy appropriate products for their children in order to conform to metropolitan mores. Another 1904 Russian-American Association of Rubber Manufacturing poster employed

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<sup>694</sup> Ibid.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> Russian-American Association of Rubber Manufacturing, St. Petersburg, 1904, Russian National Library Poster Collection.

such a tactic in its representation of a well-to-do urban peasant woman wearing colorful necklaces and an embroidered blouse who bends down to show her son the black rubber sole of a shoe.<sup>697</sup> Like parents instructing their children, manufacturers similarly coached and encouraged recent migrants to buy their goods. Through didactic posters like these, businesses tapped into consumers' latent apprehensions about the transition from rural to city life.

Manufacturers also produced aspirational advertisements seeking to capture peasants' attention by highlighting the benefits of metropolitan consumer culture. Laferm's "Trezvon" cigarettes produced a paper cut-out figure depicting an archetypical urban peasant. Sporting sleek leather boots, a red shirt, a neatly trimmed beard, and a jaunty cap, the tidy peasant smokes as he gazes assuredly at the viewer. His socio-economic position is evident not only in his dress and stature, but also in his apparent ability to afford the eight boxes of the cigarettes he carries in his arms.<sup>698</sup> The subtleties of Laferm's message about materialism and urban integration contrast sharply with the overt nature of A.N. Shaposhnikov's provocative-for-its-day poster "Tary-Bary," or "Chit-Chat" cigarettes. As they converse and smoke, two urban peasants clad in boots and red blouses look with great interest at a man dressed in flamboyant western clothing. Holding a cane, wearing a top-hat, and smoking a cigarette, the gentleman cuts a stylish figure. The poster's slogan, "*Papirosy Tary-Bary zakurili dazhe bary,*" references the class division between the men; "*bary*" is a plural form of the word

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<sup>697</sup> Russian-American Association of Rubber Manufacturing, St. Petersburg, 1904, Russian National Library Poster Collection.

<sup>698</sup> Laferm "Trezvon" Cigarettes, undated, Russian National Library Poster Collection.

“*barin*,” which meant nobleman or master during the pre-emancipation era.<sup>699</sup> Therefore, this advertisement’s urban peasants are pleased to discover that members of the nobility smoke Tary Bary cigarettes, a brand that they, too, can afford to enjoy. In posters like these, manufacturers presented to peasants a vision of upward social mobility that appeared within their reach through material consumption.

A third aspirational poster, tobacco factory S. Gabai’s “How Van’ka Arrived in Moscow and Came to *Fame* Cigarettes,” serves as an additional example of an ad that tapped into peasant fears about urban assimilation and promoted personal transformation through the purchase of goods [see Figures 3 and 4]. Designed as a pictorial narrative akin to a comic strip, the poster features twelve individual scenes with text that recount the humorous story of the hapless migrant Van’ka.<sup>700</sup> This unique format permitted the artist to convey a considerable amount of information to the intended viewer, likely a socially mobile peasant, through the comic strip’s elaborate storyline. Upon arriving at the outskirts of a city with his worldly possessions on his back, Van’ka, a scruffy peasant wearing worn bast shoes and a red shirt, stands aghast at the impressive sight of palaces and factories. After he reaches the city, however, Van’ka doesn’t quite fit in; he is nearly run over by a horse-drawn carriage and finds himself uncomfortable among unfamiliar people, dreaming instead of his village. Suddenly shaken from his homesick reverie by the comforting voice of another recent migrant, Van’ka strikes up a new friendship, but finds himself in trouble once again after getting drunk with his coarse compatriot in a local tavern. Finally, however, a well-dressed urban peasant approaches the weeping Van’ka whose remorse for his follies renders him

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<sup>699</sup> In English, the slogan reads, “Chit-Chat cigarettes – even noblemen smoke them.” A.N. Shaposhnikov, “Tary-Bary” cigarettes, approximately 1914, Russian State Historical Museum Archive.

<sup>700</sup> Van’ka is a name that connotes the idea of “every-man,” or the common peasant.

open to advice about how to properly assimilate to urban life. Van'ka subsequently cleans himself up, acquires stylish urban clothing, and buys "Fame" cigarettes. In the closing image, Van'ka is surrounded by sophisticated urban peasants as he smokes and converses in his new community.<sup>701</sup>

S. Gabai's poster shares many thematic elements with the advertisements produced by tobacco firms Laferm and A.N. Shaposhnikov. But this poster is highly unusual in its representation of Van'ka's transformation from rural villager to urban peasant. While other ads primarily depict this shift through the adoption of new types of clothing, S. Gabai's comic strip portrays Van'ka's metamorphosis in physical, bodily terms. Early images of Van'ka as a benighted villager appear as racialized caricatures in which his nose and lips are garishly exaggerated in form and size. After Van'ka's urban transformation through the purchase of snappy clothing and cigarettes, however, his visage is unrecognizable. Van'ka's formerly black hair becomes blonde and his mouth and nose shrink significantly. This remarkable poster distinguishes between rural and urban peasants by portraying the former group as possessing intrinsic physical characteristics that recall the racialized tropes employed by U.S. companies to disparage African Americans in advertisements. Such an example suggests that in Russia, as in the United States, advertisers constructed imaginary racial and ethnic physiognomies in order to convey ideas about bodily differences between sets of people.

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<sup>701</sup> S. Gabai, "Kak Van'ka v Moskvu prishel i do 'Slavy' doshel" (How Van'ka Arrived in Moscow and Came to 'Fame'), May 20, 1900, Russian State Historical Museum Archive.



### **One of the Crowd: The Urban Peasant's Assimilation**

As businesses attempted to sell modern products like rubber-soled shoes and cigarettes to a nascent consumer group, they created advertisements that tapped into urban peasants' anxieties about the new world. Manufacturers marketed a metropolitan way of life characterized by particular modes of dress and behavior as essential to a migrant's successful assimilation. However, some businesses rejected the strategy of portraying urban peasants as outsiders and instead depicted them as fully integrated members of city society who were as capable as anyone else in their ability to select and purchase certain products. Numerous newspaper advertisements and posters position peasants alongside wealthier members of Russian society with whom they wouldn't typically associate. These advertisements contain striking, radical representations of the peasantry, who appear as social equals to merchants, civil servants, or even members of the nobility. In one lighthearted newspaper advertisement for the Moscow-based "Company Gramophone," several children hold hands, spinning in a circle as they dance to music. Four of the five children wear expensive western clothing, but a fifth child sports black leather boots and a flowing blouse that recall the costume of an adult male urban peasant.<sup>702</sup> Although advertisements for products like gramophones targeted urban dwellers with the means to afford such luxuries, non-threatening representations of young peasants as part of an assimilated group created a harmonious image that delicately referenced broader societal changes.

Most posters depicting integrated urban peasants were published after 1900, when the number of migrants had skyrocketed in cities. Recognizing a new demographic opportunity, manufacturers spoke directly to adult male urban peasants in advertisements promoting

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<sup>702</sup> "Kompaniia Grammofon," *Russkie vedomosti*, no. 353, 1900, 3.

affordable products like beer and cigarettes. For instance, Andrei Nikolaevich Bogdanov's tobacco factory, one of nine in St. Petersburg at the turn of the century, produced a poster for its "Kapriz" cigarettes in 1904 that featured a range of urban residents all smoking the same brand.<sup>703</sup> A soldier, a professional, a child in a sailor suit, and two urban peasants stand shoulder to shoulder as they collectively enjoy Bogdanov cigarettes. The advertising slogan explains the price and offers an egalitarian message: "'Harmless and cheap' – that's the motto . . . They offer Caprice [cigarettes] to the old and young and even children and even the ill."<sup>704</sup>

A poster for Saatchi and Mangubi's "Zoria" cigarettes employs a similar tactic through its depiction of a crowd of city dwellers rushing to buy cigarettes from a peddler. The urban denizens form a line; gentlemen in top hats stand at the front and the back while a bearded urban peasant in a red blouse waits in the middle, extending his arm toward the peddler's golden cigarette box.<sup>705</sup> Beer and mead manufacturers like the Kalashnikov Factory also created inclusive advertisements that sought to attract a wide range of consumers. Their poster for Kalashnikov beer presents four men drinking out of glass steins; two bearded men in traditional costumes represent urban peasants, while a third gentleman wearing a red bow tie and spectacles appears to be a member of the nobility.<sup>706</sup> Their slogan, "Kalashnikov Factory beer — caters to every taste," offered textual validation of the beer's supposedly universal appeal. Together, these posters reveal that manufacturers of non-durable goods like

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<sup>703</sup> Igor Bogdanov, *Dym otechestva, ili, kratkaia istoriia tabakokurenii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007), 129.

<sup>704</sup> A.N. Bogdanov, "Kapriz (Caprice)," December 19, 1904. Russian National Library Poster Collection.

<sup>705</sup> Saatchi i Mangubi, "Zoria," January 27, 1900. Russian National Library Poster Collection.

<sup>706</sup> Kalashnikov Brewery, "Vkusy kazhdogo ugozhdaet," 1900s, in Snopkov, Snopkov, and Shkliaruk, *Reklama v plakate*, 60.

beer and cigarettes sought to transcend traditional economic and estate boundaries in their marketing materials through depictions of the urban peasantry as socially integrated, knowledgeable consumers. Furthermore, it is surprising that some of the most egalitarian images of the peasantry were produced not by sympathetic intellectuals or idealistic Populists, but by profit-driven businessmen who recognized the vast collective purchasing power of urban peasant workers and who strove to sell as many products as possible through the creation of advertisements that encouraged consumption across all estates.

### **Selling Servitude: Master-Slave Relationships in American Advertisements**

While pictures of serfs and peasants flooded Russian posters, newspapers, and product packaging during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American advertisers from all parts of the country similarly utilized images of African-American slaves and freed people in broadsides, trade cards, and ephemera that primarily targeted white consumers. As in Russia, businesses deployed archetypal representations of black Americans to convey messages to buyers about social hierarchies, gender roles, and conceptions of perceived racial traits. African Americans appeared in advertisements as wizened faithful servants, loyal Mammy figures, filthy sharecroppers, garishly dressed urban dwellers, or even unsuspecting victims of violent actions perpetrated by white people. Speaking about depictions of African Americans in early twentieth century films, scholar Lawrence Reddick references many of the stereotypical characteristics attributed to blacks in late nineteenth-century advertisements; these included “ignorance, superstition, fear, servility, laziness, clumsiness . . . [and] a predilection for eating fried chicken and sliced watermelon.”<sup>707</sup> Black Americans rarely appeared in positions of equality relative to whites or figured as symbols of

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<sup>707</sup> Lawrence D. Reddick, “Educational Programs for the Improvement of Race Relations: Motion Pictures Radio, the Press, and Libraries,” *Journal of Negro Education* 13, no. 3 (1944): 369.

national identity; rather, businesses in the U.S. disparaged bondsmen to a degree and with a frequency that far exceeded that of Russian companies.

As in the nostalgic Plantation School literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sentimental visions of the antebellum South and the Civil War era pervaded contemporaneous advertisements. Realizing that white Americans' fascination with the "Old South" transcended regional boundaries, Northern, Southern, and Midwestern businesses all used imagery and language relating to the antebellum era in advertisements. Companies recognized that, in the words of historian Karen Cox, urbanites across the country "felt an antipathy toward modernity and longed for a return to America's pastoral and romantic past," viewing a mythical South as the perfect escape from city life.<sup>708</sup> Thus, like Russian businesses, Southern companies were "keenly aware of consumers' anxiety about modernization, and they cleverly linked their products" to traditional concepts and images relating to the antebellum South in the hopes of enticing nervous customers.<sup>709</sup> For instance, the Southern Manufacturing Company's advertising card for "Good Luck Baking Powder" featured the visage of a genteel white Southern woman entitled "A Belle of the Old South," while J.H. McElwee's card for "Ante-Bellum Smoking Tobacco" pictured a seated white gentleman enjoying his "North Carolina Sun-Cured Tobacco" from a long pipe.<sup>710</sup> The

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<sup>708</sup> Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 3.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>710</sup> The Southern Manufacturing Company, "Good Luck Baking Powder," Richmond, VA, 1907, Box 17, c. 1. Advertising Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University; and J. H. McElwee, "Ante-Bellum Smoking Tobacco," Statesville, NC, Box 1, c. 1, Tobacco Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Boston-based company Potter and Wrightington even marketed “Old South Brand Baked Beans,” which they claimed were “baked the old fashioned way not *stewed* or *boiled*.”<sup>711</sup>

Recognizing Americans’ growing desire for national reunification, businesses also carefully referenced the Civil War in advertisements. During the late nineteenth century, scholar David Blight posits, many white Americans ignored the pressing racial problems of the post-emancipation era, focusing instead on reconciliation and consequently sacrificing “the civil and political liberties of African Americans . . . on the altar of reunion” in the process.<sup>712</sup> Indeed, several advertisements alluding to the war perfectly illustrate this trend. A card for Richmond-based Myers Brothers & Co.’s “Love Tobacco,” produced in the late nineteenth century by a lithographer in Detroit, Michigan, and distributed in Bangor, Maine, depicts a Union soldier and a Confederate soldier pausing from battle to exchange precious goods. The Union soldier asks, “Haloo Johnny! Got any tobacco want to swap for coffee?” “All right, Yank!” he replies, “Pass over the coffee; I’ve got the best tobacco made in the world.”<sup>713</sup> This idealized vision of wartime fellowship spoke more to the nation’s post-war desire for reunification than to wartime realities. Furthermore, such a harmonious vision of compromise between whites submerged slavery’s role as the central cause of the Civil War and disregarded important questions about integration for black freedpeople. Other advertisements were more explicit in their preference for a specifically white process of reunion. For example, a card for the Providence, Rhode Island-based company Spicers and

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<sup>711</sup> Potter and Wrightington, “Old South Brand Baked Beans,” Boston, MA, after 1880, Box 17, c. 1. Advertising Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>712</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001), 139.

<sup>713</sup> Myers Brothers and Company, “Love Tobacco,” Richmond, VA, late nineteenth century, Box 22, Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

Peckham promotes a stove entitled “The New ‘Model Grand’ Portable Range” [see Figure 5]. In the illustration, Uncle Sam sits at a table across from the stove, waiting for an African-American waiter to serve his dinner. Uncle Sam’s message of reconciliation, achieved at the expense of freedpeople, is clear through his declaration to the black servant: “Let us have *piece!*”<sup>714</sup>

### **The Freed Slave: Still a Faithful Servant**

Although some businesses ignored African Americans in advertisements, many others deployed distinct representations of slaves and freedpeople to attract white consumers. One of the most prevalent images of African Americans was that of the faithful servant, which conformed to predominantly literary archetypes including the freedman in Thomas Nelson Page’s *Marse Chan* (1887)<sup>715</sup> The image of the black servant, typically either a male slave or a freedperson, was a submissive figure who maintained an unwavering loyalty to his white master or mistress.<sup>716</sup> Some advertisements, like the trade card for Boston-based Chase & Sanborn’s “Seal Brand” java and mocha, marketed as the “Aristocratic Coffee of America,” merely indicated the presence of a mistress. The card depicts a docile, toothless African-American man who holds up a can of coffee, saying, “My missus says dar’s no good coffee in these yer parts. Specs she’ll change ‘er mine when she drinks SEAL BRAND.”<sup>717</sup> Chase &

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<sup>714</sup> Spicers and Peckham, “The New ‘Model Grand’ Portable Range,” Ephemera Late Trade Cards not in ABE 17976, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>715</sup> See Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia, or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895, c1887).

<sup>716</sup> Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3-4.

<sup>717</sup> Chase & Sanborn, “Seal Brand Java & Mocha Coffee,” Boston, MA, 1888, Folio Trade Cards – Late – Box 2, American Antiquarian Society.

Sanborn likely utilized this image of a non-threatening, loyal black servant to draw in white female customers who might have imagined themselves in a position of a well-to-do lady.

Other manufacturers chose to use colorful pictures of black men and women serving white families. For instance, a trade card for H.E. Taylor's Furniture Polish featured a black servant rubbing a brass lamp while her white mistress pitches in by polishing a handsome upright piano [see Figure 6]. The scene is one of upper-middle-class domestic serenity; a fire glows brightly, a dog wanders about, and a child watches while the adult women complete the housework.<sup>718</sup> By contrast, other advertisements overtly place African-American servants in positions of inferiority relative to white mistresses who do not toil alongside them. Enoch Morgan's Sons Company's pamphlet for "Sapolio Soap" tells the story of a "lady" who "much discomfort knew" because her "pots and pans, and kettles too,/Were never bright and shining;/Her servants at the labor hard/Were all the while repining." The pamphlet portrays a black female servant kneeling before her white mistress, unable to clean the kitchen accoutrements until the lady's introduction of "Sapolio Soap." The advertisement concludes by reinforcing the superiority of whiteness, as the "tablet white as snow" ensures that "uncleanliness quick fades away" from the lady's kitchen.<sup>719</sup>

Businesses also exploited the exceedingly popular image of the black "Mammy" in their representations of African-American servants. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans viewed the female Mammy, a household slave who helped raise white

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<sup>718</sup> H.E. Taylor & Co., "Can't Be Beat Furniture Polish for Family and General Use," after 1876, Folio Trade Cards – Late – Box 1, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>719</sup> Enoch Morgan's Sons Company, "Sapolio Soap," New York, NY, Trade Cards Late - Pamphlets Post 1876, American Antiquarian Society.

children, as a maternal, loving, and loyal figure.<sup>720</sup> Children of planters such as author John Esten Cooke recalled their black Mammies fondly in adulthood, but the notion of a Mammy also suffused the collective mentality of the many white Southerners who had never had one, for as scholar Jessie Parkhurst notes, “In order to be recognized as belonging to the aristocracy of the Old South it was necessary to say that one had been tended by a ‘Black Mammy’ in youth.”<sup>721</sup> Such images of servile African Americans were an essential component of aspirational advertisements because, as historian Kenneth Goings asks, “What better way to . . . provide the consumer with a sense of racial superiority than the stereotypical Old South/New South myth of the loyal, *happy* servant just waiting to do the master’s—now the consumer’s—bidding?”<sup>722</sup> Thus, businesses that deployed images of black Mammies in late nineteenth-century advertisements tapped into middle-class consumers’ yearning to belong to a kind of American nobility and their nostalgia for a romanticized antebellum South, a place that seemed evermore distant as the United States marched down the path of industrialization and urbanization.

Trade cards and pamphlets featuring black Mammies caring for white children on behalf of their parents abounded at the turn of the twentieth century. The cover of Walter A. Taylor’s riddle book promoting the use of “Dr. Biggers’ Huckleberry Cordial” features a Mammy wearing a red kerchief with a white child on her lap, while an interior image depicts the same woman holding the ill child as the white mother, dressed in fine clothing, offers a

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<sup>720</sup> McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 82.

<sup>721</sup> Remembering his mammy, Cooke wrote, “God forbid that I should ever be anything but proud of that old negro’s affection. Not so long as I live.” See John Owen Beaty, *John Esten Cooke, Virginian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), 10; and Jessie W. Parkhurst, “The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household,” *The Journal of Negro History* 23, no. 3 (1938): 351.

<sup>722</sup> Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose*, 11.



spoonful of medicine.<sup>723</sup> A similar representation on a trade card for Excelsior Metal Polish portrays a black Mammy, hair tied back under a crimson scarf, scrubbing pots in the kitchen alongside her white mistress while children play underfoot.<sup>724</sup> Some businesses even incorporated anachronistic images of black Mammies into advertisements; for example, a 1908 magazine advertisement for Colorado's "Rock Island [Railroad] Lines" depicted a white family in a horse-drawn carriage accompanied by a Mammy who looked after the children on their mountain adventure.<sup>725</sup> Finally, additional advertisements excluded white parents from their illustrations in order to highlight the fond relationship between Mammies and their young charges. One notable example appears on a card for Dixon's Stove Polish, where a smiling Mammy gently cleans the greasy polish off of a white child. The young girl's affection for her Mammy is evident in her gestures; she lovingly gazes at the black woman while tenderly stroking her cheek with one hand.<sup>726</sup>

In sum, numerous American businesses utilized representations of Mammies as caretakers and faithful servants in advertisements intended to attract white customers. Their strategy mirrored that of Russian manufacturers who similarly developed aspirational marketing materials utilizing the image of the submissive peasant to evoke in customers nostalgia for a genteel, pre-emancipation age. By creating and deploying illustrations of masters and their loyal servants, both Russian and American businesses sought to convince

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<sup>723</sup> Walter A. Taylor, "Taylor's Riddle Book," Atlanta, GA, after 1876, Trade Cards Late Pamphlets - Post 1876, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>724</sup> Excelsior Metal Polish, Boston, MA, undated. Box 18 - Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>725</sup> Rock Island Lines, 1908. Box 8 c.1, Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>726</sup> Dixon Crucible Company, "Dixon's Stove Polish," Jersey City, NJ, after 1880, Ephemera Late Trade Cards not in ABE 17976, American Antiquarian Society.

consumers that they, too, could participate in a post-emancipation version of a past aristocratic tradition if they simply purchased the right products.

### **The Black Farmer Ridiculed**

The passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments granted citizenship to freed slaves and gave black men the right to vote, but Congress passed no national legislation that provided freedpeople with land in the form of private property on a widespread basis. During the decades that immediately followed the abolition of slavery, many former slaves entered into a system of sharecropping in which black laborers farmed land owned by white masters and paid rent in the form of seasonal surplus. By 1900, however, African Americans had made significant progress on the path to becoming independent farmers. In his study on black land ownership, Claude Oubre analyzes census data to evaluate change over time and discovers that while the percentage of black farmers who owned their own farms varied by state, ownership rates increased on the whole across the South between 1865 and 1900, when 25.2 percent of all Southern black farmers owned the land upon which they labored.<sup>727</sup> In states like Virginia, where slaves once supported numerous tobacco plantations, 59.2 percent of black farmers owned the land upon which they worked in 1900.<sup>728</sup>

American manufacturers of sewing materials, farm equipment, and tobacco products responded to black progress by creating racialized advertisements that mocked the efforts of black farmers. An advertising card for J & P Coats' thread contains an unflattering illustration of rural farm life in which an African-American couple struggles to train a

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<sup>727</sup> Claude F. Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Land Ownership* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 180.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

donkey. The stubborn animal resists the wife's best efforts to control him while her husband watches bemusedly, whip in hand, as he scratches his head. This scene of emasculation sent the paternalistic message to viewers that African-American men and women were unable to manage farms without white guidance.<sup>729</sup> Indeed, a card for Durham Bull Fertilizer printed just six years later depicts a portly white overseer holding a wooden staff while he looks down upon a black laborer working in his field.<sup>730</sup> Other advertisements presented infantilized representations of African-American farmers; an undated trade card for Jacob G. Shirk's "Homestead" cigars features an African American with a boyish face smoking a cigar and pointing to a tobacco field where other diminutive figures pick leaves.<sup>731</sup> Such demeaning portrayals of African Americans gave white viewers the impression that these laborers were non-threatening. Like the late nineteenth-century Russian posters featuring child-like peasant laborers and bosses, American advertising cards similarly spoke to white landowners through subtle references to authority and power.

### **Ambition and Entrepreneurship: Resisting Black Progress**

After emancipation, African Americans sought to exercise their newfound liberties in a variety of ways: by running their own households without landowner interference, purchasing fine clothing, or founding businesses or community organizations like churches and schools. Some white Americans were discomfited by the former slaves' independence and clung to the paternalistic idea that they required white support in order to survive, much

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<sup>729</sup> J & P Coats' Thread, "Ef dis don't fetch you NOTHING will." 1881, Box 20, Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>730</sup> Durham Bull Fertilizer, "Makes Me Grow," Durham, NC, 1887, Box 16, c. 1, Advertising Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>731</sup> Jacob G. Shirk, "Homestead" Cigars, Lancaster, PA, likely late nineteenth century, Box 2, c.1, Tobacco Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

less maintain successful careers and stable families. Manufacturers of products like stove polish, ovens, cleaning chemicals, food products, and cigarettes recognized white anxieties about black integration and created numerous advertisements that denigrated black Americans who sought to create autonomous lives for themselves in the aforementioned ways.

First, businesses portrayed African Americans as incapable of understanding basic household tasks like cooking. For example, an advertising card for the Massachusetts-based Weir Stove Company depicts a cartoonish black man with exaggerated facial features holding up a kitten. It appears as though a nearby cat has delivered her litter of kittens inside of the man's oven, but he expresses his total confusion about the situation, asking the viewer in broken English, "Uf de ole cat hab kittens in de ubben doant it make um biskit."<sup>732</sup> Such disparaging images reinforced white perceptions of African Americans as helpless, naïve, and unable to manage their households after emancipation. Additional advertisements mocked African Americans who purchased expensive clothing, characterizing those who did so as uncouth mimickers of white people. Before emancipation, some slaves who acquired new outfits deliberately showed off their finery; as scholars Shane White and Graham White explain, slaves with access to costly items publicly constructed a "vivid, visual presence . . . [as] an emphatic repudiation of their allotted social role," an action that whites interpreted as unsuitable for their station and even defiant.<sup>733</sup> White attitudes about black fashion persisted after emancipation and manufacturers played upon these sentiments in a number of

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<sup>732</sup> Weir Stove Company, "Glenwood & Elmwood Ranges & Parlor Stoves," Taunton, MA, after 1876, Ephemera Late Trade Cards not in ABE 17976, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>733</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past & Present* 148 (1995): 184.

advertisements. A series of cards marketing “Boraxine” toilet soap depicted black monkeys dressed in fine clothing as they courted, painted, danced, hunted, or fished.<sup>734</sup> Meanwhile, trade cards for companies like Clarence Brooks & Company portrayed African Americans dressed in garishly bright clothing and fanciful hats engaging in foolish behavior.<sup>735</sup>

A number of advertisements were particularly critical of black Americans’ attempts to form community organizations or start new businesses, depicting them as unqualified to seek such goals. An elaborate ad from 1886 for Dixon’s Stove Polish entitled “Brother Gardner Addresses the Lime Kiln Club on the Virtues of Dixon’s Stove Polish” portrays a meeting of the “Lime Kiln Club,” whose twelve African-American members sport colorful, mismatched suits and whimsical accessories. The club’s headquarters are modest, but members are nonetheless enthusiastic about discussing the mundane topic of stove polish. The back of the advertising card contains the text of club leader Brother Gardner’s humble speech touting Dixon’s polish as well as the signatures of all twelve members which included “Bro. Shindig,” “Give-a-dam Jones,” “Accordingly Davis,” and “Trustee Pullback.”<sup>736</sup> Together these details presented a ridiculous portrait of black civic life in which African Americans convened to discuss unimportant ideas and bestowed upon themselves nonsensical honorifics. Advertisements such as these not only spoke to white racism, but also reflected Americans’ latent fears about black independence and their ability to organize and exercise power.

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<sup>734</sup> J.D. Larkin & Company, “Boraxine,” Buffalo, NY, 1882, Box 18, Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>735</sup> Clarence Brooks & Company, “The Rivals Embrace,” and “Why Does He Want to Shine ‘Em Up for Nothing?” after 1876, Box 18, Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>736</sup> Dixon Crucible Company, “Dixon’s Stove Polish,” Jersey City, NJ, 1886, Susan Paine Gift in Process Not Dig Not Cat. Late Trade Cards Folio, American Antiquarian Society.

Manufacturers similarly produced illustrations lambasting black entrepreneurs. For instance, Boston's Henry Mayo & Company created a card marketing its "Codfish Balls" that portrayed an African-American man in a top hat and ill-fitting suit marching toward Liberia alongside his wife, who sports a sky-high hairstyle and house slippers. The advertisement's caption describes their ambitions: "We's gwine back to our old ancestral halls, to make our fortune sure on dees codfish balls."<sup>737</sup> The insulting advertisement, produced by a Northern company, ridiculed entrepreneurial African Americans by depicting them as incompetent, naïve, and possessing unattainable desires. Like the illustration for Dixon's Stove Polish, Henry Mayo's trade card similarly reflected white resistance to black progress.

### **"I'd Get That Coon:" Suppressing Black Progress**

Although numerous representations of African Americans mocked their efforts to improve their communities or personal circumstances, a final category of advertisements marketed to white Americans showed violent, disturbing images in which black men, women, and children were physically threatened, beaten, or even killed. First, a comparison of two cards promoting "Duryea's Improved Corn Starch" reveals important distinctions between depictions of African Americans and white Americans. In one version, a black man in worn clothing pastes a poster onto a wall stating, "Post No Bills" as a white policeman approaches.<sup>738</sup> A second version of the same advertisement, however, depicts a white man in tidier clothing similarly affixing a poster to a wall, but this time, two white children look on

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<sup>737</sup> Henry Mayo & Company, "Boston Codfish Balls," Boston, MA, after 1876, Box 5, Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>738</sup> "Duryea's Improved Corn Starch," New York, NY, after 1876, Folio Trade Cards – Late - Box 2, American Antiquarian Society.

in delight; the policeman and the “Post No Bills” sign are absent.<sup>739</sup> The discrepancy between the two representations conveys the impression that black men have criminal tendencies and must be watched by authority figures. Meanwhile, other advertisements paired friendly imagery and intimidating text to subtly communicate a menacing message. For example, an advertisement for Seneca Falls-based Rumsey & Company’s Pumps features a racialized caricature of an African-American couple preparing to carve a watermelon as they sit on a fence in the country. Text below the image, however, ominously alludes to the man’s knife and to the broader tradition of violence against black men: “We’ll Cut You Deep,” the caption reads.<sup>740</sup>

Masquerading as humor, the most disturbing advertisements present brutal scenes of violence against black Americans. In an illustration on a card for “The Alden Fruit Vinegar,” a cartoonish African-American man stealing two chickens looks in horror at a white farmer, presumably owner of the birds, who points a gun in his direction.<sup>741</sup> Such an image may have affirmed late nineteenth-century perceptions of African Americans as criminals and offered a justification of white men’s extra-legal attempts to act as community policemen. A comparable advertising card for “Merrick’s Thread” depicts a white dog lunging at a black child stealing a chicken. Attached to his doghouse with thread, the hound is unable to reach his target and moans with disappointment, “If this was not Merrick’s Thread I’d get that

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<sup>739</sup> “Duryea’s Improved Corn Starch,” New York, NY, after 1876, Folio Trade Cards – Late - Box 2, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>740</sup> Rumsey & Company, “Pumps,” St. Louis, MO, after 1876, Folio Trade Cards - Late - Box 1, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>741</sup> “The Alden Fruit Vinegar,” sold in Hartford, CT, after 1876, Box 6, Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

Coon.”<sup>742</sup> Rawson’s Railroad and Steamship Company produced an especially gruesome advertisement in 1882. Entitled “(Going to Camp Meeting), Gone to meet the Angels peaceful evermore,” the illustration depicts a white engineer driving a train called the “Sunny South” across the countryside [see Figure 7]. Suddenly, the train rams into a black family, their dogs, and their mule, instantly killing them all. Blood splatters against the front of train as the disembodied figures fly through the air. A black child is beheaded, while another child’s leg is broken into pieces.<sup>743</sup>

Graphic images like these reflected the normalization of violence against African Americans during the late nineteenth century, when instances of lynching and other forms of white violence against blacks reached their apex.<sup>744</sup> Such atrocities occurred in part as a response to post-emancipation black advancement. Despite the fact that African Americans faced racism, obstacles to political and economic gains, and threats of bodily harm in the 1880s and 1890s, freedpeople and their descendants made progress by purchasing private land, slowly accumulating capital, attaining access to education, and strengthening their communities. But the question remains: Why did not more businesses create advertisements that celebrated black achievement or social integration like Russian companies did by depicting former serfs as symbols of national heritage or even assimilated members of urban society?

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<sup>742</sup> “Merrick’s Thread,” after 1876. Box 21, Ephemera Collection Trade Cards, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>743</sup> Rawson’s Railroad and Steamship, “(Going to Camp Meeting), Gone to meet the Angels peaceful evermore,” 1882. Folio Trade Cards - Late Box 1, American Antiquarian Society.

<sup>744</sup> 4,697 lynching cases were recorded between 1880 and 1930, an estimate that may not account for unreported instances. Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 15.



Even late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertisements in newspapers targeting black readerships like the *Savannah Tribune*, the *Washington Bee*, and the *Kansas Baptist Herald* typically used the visages of white Americans to market services like embalming or products like soap and sewing machines.<sup>745</sup> Indeed, socially integrated scenes depicting black and white Americans were rare. When African-American figures did materialize in early twentieth century advertisements, they appeared in advertisements for black-owned companies, representations that contrasted with those produced by white-owned businesses. For instance, advertisements for insurance companies like North Carolina Mutual and Providence Association or the haircare products of successful black entrepreneurs like Madame C.J. Walker and G.A. Morgan featured dignified images of African Americans in tidy, sophisticated clothing.<sup>746</sup> Targeting black customers, black-owned firms created respectful representations of African Americans that differed significantly from the caricatures of white-owned businesses that dominated the broader marketplace. Advertisements like these paved the way for the surge of commercial marketing materials targeting African Americans from the 1930s and onward following the National Negro Business League's publication of its seminal analysis of African Americans' purchasing power, which encouraged entrepreneurial African Americans to found popular magazines and advertising agencies targeting black readers and consumers.<sup>747</sup>

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<sup>745</sup> "Cuticura Soap," *The Savannah Tribune*, February 24, 1900, page 4; "Santa Fe Watch Co.," *Kansas Baptist Herald*, December 9, 1911, page 4; "S. H. Hines, Undertaker and Embalmer," *Washington Bee*, September 16, 1905, page 5; and "New Home Sewing Machine," *Washington Bee*, November 23, 1907, page 7.

<sup>746</sup> "The North Carolina Mutual and Provident Association" in *The American Citizen*, May 6, 1911, page 1, Box 69. c. 1, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>747</sup> Blacks were largely disregarded as a potential consumer group until the 1930s, when demographic trends reversed and African Americans began comprising a growing percentage of the total population. African

Nonetheless, dignified images of African Americans made up a small percentage of all illustrations of African Americans appearing in national advertisements at the turn of the twentieth century. As in Russia, where non-peasants owned most Russian businesses, white Americans owned and managed the overwhelming majority of U.S. businesses through the turn of the twentieth century. By contrast, however, these companies largely ignored black consumers because they composed a minority of both the total and the urban populations.<sup>748</sup> Although approximately 200,000 blacks migrated northward and westward between 1890 and 1900, African Americans comprised a comparatively small portion of metropolitan populations.<sup>749</sup> Furthermore, an examination of U.S. Census data between 1860 and 1920 shows that the share of African Americans as a percentage of the total population steadily declined by an average of .7 percent each decade.<sup>750</sup> U.S. businesses focused on creating advertisements that attracted the white consumers who made up the majority of the total national and urban populations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Firms

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Americans made up 9.8 percent of the total population in 1940 and 12.1 percent of the population in 1990. See "Total Population in the Continental United States," U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 1. United States –Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990;" and Nikki L. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford, *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia: Greenwood Milestones in African American History* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 6.

<sup>748</sup> Blacks made up less than 12 percent of the total U.S. population in 1900, while whites composed about 88 percent. "Total Population in the Continental United States," U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 1. United States – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990," accessed at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html> in May 2014.

<sup>749</sup> According to U.S. Census data, about 77 percent of African Americans still lived in rural areas in 1900, while approximately 57 percent of whites resided in the countryside. Ibid.; Monroe N. Work, *Negro Year Book: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1921-1922* (Alabama: Tuskegee Institute and the Negro Year Book Publishing Company, 1922), 391; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: 1789-1945*, Series B 13-23 – Population, Decennial Summary: Sex, Urban-Rural Residence, and Race: 1790 to 1940 (Washington, D.C.: 1949), page 25; and Nell Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 174.

<sup>750</sup> African Americans comprised 14.1 percent of the population in 1860 and just 9.9 percent in 1920. "Total Population in the Continental United States," U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 1. United States –Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990." Accessed at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html> in May 2014.

managed by white citizens essentially ignored the black minority, choosing instead to deploy denigrating images of African Americans in advertisements to entice white consumers. By contrast, large-scale manufacturers selling products in Russia were likely incentivized by the peasants' national demographic majority to produce representations of former serfs in positions of equality relative to other social groups. Indeed, most Russian firms could not afford to offend the peasantry, a group of potential consumers with growing purchasing power who made up approximately 40 percent of urban residents in 1897.<sup>751</sup>

## **Conclusion**

American and Russian businesses sought to captivate the widest possible range of potential consumers through advertising images of serfs, peasants, slaves, and freedpeople during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, while Russian firms sometimes depicted peasants as symbols of traditional culture or assimilated members of society, American businesses portrayed African Americans as outsiders who remained unintegrated at the turn of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, these differences in representation point to a common strategy: Both U.S. and Russian companies recognized that strong nationalistic and nostalgic undercurrents coursed through both populations. Many Russians and Americans desired to strengthen their respective countries through retrospective policies. But while Russians influenced by Slavophilism and Populism believed that the peasants' traditions and institutions were essential to national advancement, most Americans continued to view the former slaves through the lens of race. Rather than including freedpeople in their plans for reconstruction, they saw African Americans as impediments to reunion and believed that black integration was unachievable. Thus, Russian and American

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<sup>751</sup> As mentioned previously, peasants formed 84 percent of the total population in 1897.

businesses' distinct portrayals of the former bondsmen both reflected and shaped popular views about nation-building and collective identity. But while U.S. advertisements depicting violence against blacks foreshadowed the nation's continued social upheaval, depictions of assimilated peasants gave no indication of the bloody revolutions that would soon bring about Russia's political, economic, and social transformation.



**Figure 13. I.B. Pappe, *untitled trade card* (November 20, 1892).**

Russian National Library Ephemera Collection



**Figure 14. Russian-American Association of Rubber Manufacturing Company, *St. Petersburg* (1904).**

Russian National Library Poster Collection



Figure 15. *Van'ka approaches Moscow*





Figure 16. After Van'ka's transformation S. Gabai, *Kak Van'ka v Moskvu prishel i do "Slavy" doshel* (May 20, 1900).

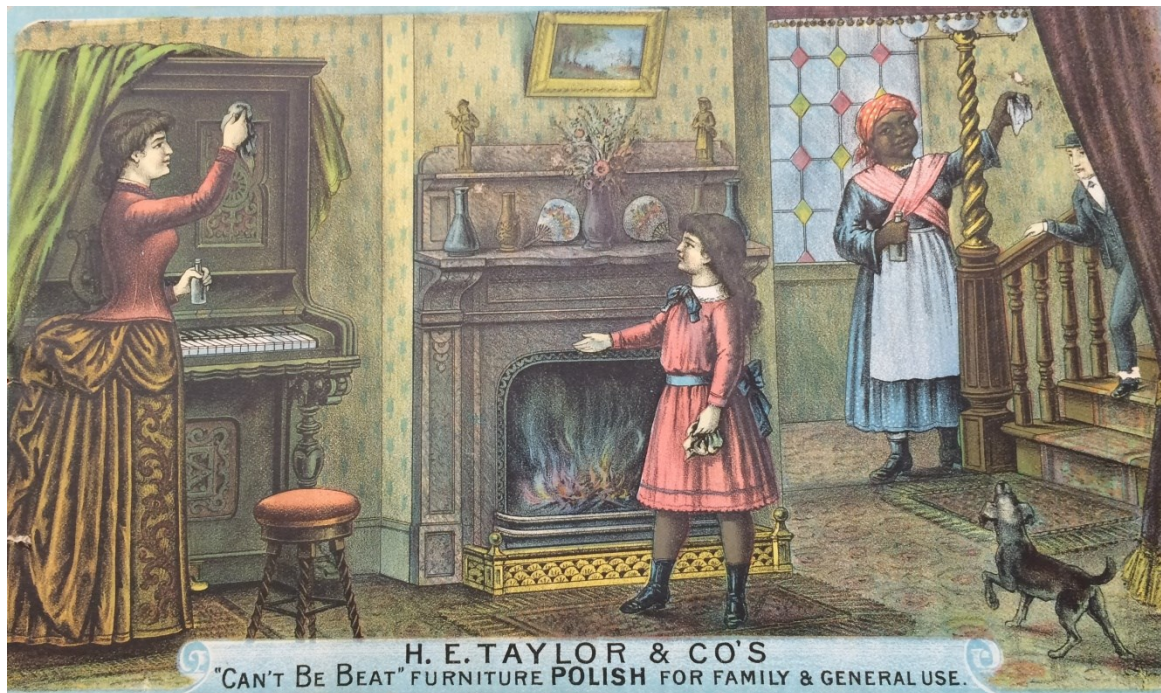
Russian State Historical Museum Archive





Figure 17. Spicers and Peckham, *The New 'Model Grand' Portable Range* (after 1876).

. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society



**Figure 18. H. E. Taylor & Co., *Can't Be Beat Furniture Polish for Family and General Use* (after 1876).**

Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society





**Figure 19. Rawson's Railroad and Steamship, (*Going to Camp Meeting*), *Gone to meet the Angels peaceful evermore* (1882).**

Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE CHALLENGES OF ASSIMILATION, 1890-1905

[The mice] scent for themselves new abundance:  
Soon the Master will die of decline,  
The heir will abandon the Manor,  
Where lived his illustrious line,

And the house will forever be empty,  
The overgrown steps out of sight . . .  
And to think about this is so mournful  
While it blows and it rains in the night.

-Alexei Tolstoi, 1840s, trans. M. Baring.

In his poem, “Outside it is Blowing and Raining,” Russian nobleman Alexei Tolstoi laments the deterioration of a *barskii dom* (manor house) during a nighttime storm in the 1840s. He conjures an image of a once prosperous estate that falls into ruin as it ceases to serve as a productive institution that relies upon the enforced labor of the industrious peasantry and the stewardship of the nobility. More broadly, however, Tolstoi’s prescient lines foreshadow the impending decline of the aristocracy after the abolition of serfdom. Between 1861 and 1905, a host of political and economic changes resulted in the nobility’s forfeiture of power and the peasantry’s attainment of increased geographic and social mobility. By the turn of the twentieth century, Russian landlords had lost control of nearly one-third of their collective property, and estates across the country had fallen into disrepair.<sup>752</sup> At the same time, many former serfs purchased land or relocated to urban centers where they encountered both opportunities and challenges. Similar dynamics

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<sup>752</sup> Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994), 28.

transformed the post-emancipation United States, where white landowners faced growing financial difficulties and black freedpeople made strides in acquiring acreage. For instance, between 1880 and 1910, statistics suggest that overall black farm ownership increased while white ownership decreased.<sup>753</sup> Like the peasantry, black freedpeople also migrated to metropolitan areas in search of jobs and increased autonomy, a phenomenon that altered the demographic compositions of rural and urban areas. Together, these changes reshaped the social structures that had long defined Russian and American society and produced unrest in both populations.

Russians and Americans reflected upon their changing worlds in literature, illustrations, and cartoons that circulated widely among both countries' populations. As they considered the decline of the landowning class and the rise of former bondsmen, they produced competing representations of serfs, slaves, peasants, and freedpeople that idealized or criticized the pre- and post-emancipation eras. While many authors and artists were white, educated citizens who had never experienced bondage firsthand, others were African American or came from the peasant estate. As descendants of former bondsmen, their experiences differed from those of their predecessors; they grew up as subjects and citizens but still bore the weight of their familial histories of enslavement or enserfment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their representations often contrasted sharply with those of white or non-peasant authors who sentimentalized serfdom and slavery.

This chapter examines three types of portrayals of former bondsmen in fiction and illustrated journals at the turn of the twentieth century, a period characterized by industrialization, national soul-searching, interracial and inter-estate violence, and general

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<sup>753</sup> Lee J. Alston, "Issues in Postbellum Southern Agriculture," in *Agriculture and National Development: Views on the Nineteenth Century*, Louis Ferleger, ed., (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 217.

social upheaval. First, writers like Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, Evgenii Opochinin, and A. Gorskii continued to write short stories designed to appeal to mass readers that depicted faithful servants who remained loyal to their masters after emancipation. Their tales, culturally hegemonic during the 1880s, continued to appeal to some readers but appeared stale and out of touch to many others during an increasingly modern era. Instead, forward-looking audiences were captivated by bold representations of the post-emancipation era that acknowledged the rise of African Americans and the peasantry and the decline of Russian and Southern landowners.

Thus, a second representational category comprises works that discuss the accomplishments and obstacles unique to peasants and African Americans during the post-emancipation era. Short stories, *lubochnaia literatura* (mass-oriented literature), and *lubki* (popular prints) by authors like Chekhov, Kate Chopin, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, and others addressed complex issues including racial identity, urban and rural poverty, violence, and interracial or inter-estate relationships. Their realistic portrayals of freedpeople and peasants striving to uplift their families and exercise their free will during the post-emancipation era contrasted sharply with images of nostalgic former serfs and slaves in the historical fiction of the 1880s. These stories and images challenged the sentimental representations of their literary predecessors. Not all Russians and Americans approached the topics of post-emancipation social change and integration with sensitivity. Thomas Dixon, Jr., and the cartoonists of Russia's illustrated satirical journal *Strekoza* (Dragonfly) lampooned or outright condemned African Americans and peasants through demeaning textual and visual representations. Their depictions, designed to stoke public outrage, stood in opposition to the nuanced depictions of African Americans and peasants that subtly

encouraged white and non-peasant audiences to adopt a more empathetic perspective toward the two historically marginalized groups.

### **The Continued Idealization of Slavery and Serfdom**

After acquiring worldwide fame for their sentimental stories during the late nineteenth century, Thomas Nelson Page, Evgenii Opochinin, and Joel Chandler Harris continued to produce early twentieth-century literature that propagated stereotypes about loyal freedpeople and former serfs who preferred slavery to freedom. In 1903, Joel Chandler Harris published *Told by Uncle Remus: New Stories of the Old Plantation*, a collection of folk tales that transmits black culture through the voice of a faithful freedman speaking to a young white child.<sup>754</sup> In *Told by Uncle Remus*, Harris attempts to engage a new generation of readers with the character of the kindly freedman, Uncle Remus, who imparts his wisdom and good humor to his former master's family through stories about the anthropomorphic "Brer Rabbit," "Brer Fox," "Brer Gator," and others. In the book's introduction, he describes how Uncle Remus travels with his now grown white master's family to Atlanta, where he longs to return to the plantation from his days as a slave. Uncle Remus's dream comes true when, Harris writes, the entire family moves back to the countryside, "much to the delight of the old negro," and Uncle Remus reprises his role as storyteller to his master's own young son.<sup>755</sup>

Over the course of the novel, Uncle Remus and "this latest little boy" develop a tender relationship in which he faithfully guides and cares for his young charge. The white child is fragile, sickly, and possesses inherently old-fashioned tendencies; indeed, he is a

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<sup>754</sup> Joel Chandler Harris, *Told by Uncle Remus: New Stories of the Old Plantation* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1905).

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

“source of perpetual wonder” to “the old negro” because of his “large, dreamy eyes, and the quaintest little ways that ever were seen.”<sup>756</sup> The two characters seem to be living relics of a bygone age because they exhibit traits and tendencies from the antebellum era. On the plantation, where the urban child’s health begins to improve, Uncle Remus uses didactic stories to teach the boy about discipline and self-control. Under Remus’s supervision, he grows up to be independent and strong-willed, a development that subtly attests to the purported salubriousness of the plantation environment and the old-fashioned care he receives from the former slave.

Reviewers from numerous journals praised Harris’s latest collection of folk tales but repeatedly commented on the black character’s unusual job of sharing stories from the pre-emancipation era with a twentieth-century reader. For instance, the Atlanta-based *Southern Cultivator*, a journal whose audience largely comprised members of the planter class, described Uncle Remus as a “genial old darling” who sought to convey his “quaint and humorous philosophy” to a “youngster of the modern school.”<sup>757</sup> Critics writing on behalf of the *Congregationalist and Christian World* and *The Dial* also remarked upon the significance of Remus’s task; the first observed that Remus’s “process of getting acquainted with a shy and repressed modern youngster colors the stories and brings out Uncle Remus’s tact and humor in a fresh way,” while the second wrote that Harris’s explanation of why Uncle Remus began telling his stories once again was “ingenious and convincing[,] as if an excuse

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<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

<sup>757</sup> *Southern Cultivator*, “New Uncle Remus Stories,” November 15, 1905, page 63.



for such a proceeding was really needed.”<sup>758</sup> Thus, although reviewers viewed the newest iteration of *Uncle Remus* favorably, their commentary about Remus’s goal of engaging young, modern readers suggests Harris’s stories had begun to appear outdated to twentieth-century audiences.

Thomas Nelson Page similarly depicted African-American freedpeople as yearning to return to the pre-emancipation era in his collection of short stories entitled *Bred in the Bone* (1904). The tale after which the compendium is named, “Bred in the Bone,” recounts the post-war relationship between an elderly freedman and the white grandson of his former master. The ex-slave, the stable-boss of the local jockey, is known to all as “Colonel Theodore Johnston’s Robin, of Bullfield, suh,” a relational title that identifies him as the former property of a white slave owner. Robin recalls with great fondness his life prior to emancipation, an era that Page describes as perpetually dwelling in his mind “with tender memory.”<sup>759</sup> He frequently speaks with colleagues about his days as a slave, asserting that no contemporary horse race could match those of the past and vehemently disputing the claims of the “yellow stable-boy” who insists that “freedom’s better ‘n befo’ de wah.”<sup>760</sup>

As in his previous short stories about freedpeople, Page characterizes Robin as intensely loyal to his former master’s family. During a scene in which Robin is reunited with his old master’s adult grandson, Theodoric Johnston, Page describes how the elderly man greets his former charge as his “young master,” a designation that reflects his self-perception as the Johnston family’s lifelong servant. Theodoric’s appearance also brings back Robin’s

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<sup>758</sup> *Congregationalist and Christian World*, “Folk and Fairy Tales,” November 18, 1905, page 90; and *The Dial*, “Holiday Publications, II,” December 16, 1905, XXXIX.

<sup>759</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, “Bred in the Bone,” in *Bred in the Bone* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904), 6. The short story originally appeared in *Century Illustrated Magazine* in October of 1901.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

memories of the pre-emancipation era. After gazing at Colonel Johnston's grandson, Robin remembers his former master, a gentleman who stood as "the leader of men; whose graciousness and princely hospitality were in all mouths; whose word was law; whose name no one mentioned but with respect."<sup>761</sup> Here, Page's saintly description of Colonel Johnston serves two purposes; first, it helps assure readers that slave owners were venerable people, and second, it reveals the depths of Robin's admiration of and devotion to his former master. Indeed, Robin is so dedicated to the Johnston family that he sells his most prized possession, a gold watch, to ensure that Theodoric can participate in an important horserace. By the end of the story, the black freedman and his young white master have become "great friends" and formed a relationship will thrive in the years ahead.<sup>762</sup>

A second story within Page's collection, "Old Jabe's Marital Experiments," depicts another African American as a freedman so attached to his master's family that he refuses to depart from the plantation of his youth. The paternalistic story begins with a brief history of the ex-slave's origins; Jabe "belonged to the Meriweathers, a fact which he never forgot or allowed anyone else to forget."<sup>763</sup> The reader immediately learns that Jabe may not have been the hardest working slave, but he argued that his worth rested in his faithful service because he "had been on the plantation before any overseer had put his foot there, and he would outstay the last one of them all, which proved to be true."<sup>764</sup> After emancipation, many of his fellow slaves departed to make new lives for themselves, but Jabe purchased land on the plantation so that he could remain close to his former master and mistress. In Page's

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<sup>761</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>763</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, "Old Jabe's Marital Experiments," *Bred in the Bone*, 171.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

perspective, Jabe “had all the privileges of a freedman, but lost none of a slave. He was free, but his master’s condition remained unchanged: he still had to support, when [Jabe] chose to call on him, and [Jabe] chose to call often.”<sup>765</sup> Thus, like Robin and Uncle Remus, Jabe remains perfectly loyal to his former master’s family and even chooses to perform the duties of a slave to receive what Page deems to be its advantages: food, material support, and white companionship.

Reviews of *Bred in the Bone* were ambivalent and critics concurred that Page’s best days were in the past. The *New York Times* argued that while Page exhibited “the same evidence here of intimate knowledge of the proud old Southern gentry and an understanding of the negro character,” there seemed to have been “something vital missing from ‘Bred in the Bone,’ and its loss has a perceptible effect on one’s interest.”<sup>766</sup> Reflecting on the issuance of a new collection of Page’s works that included the short story “Bred in the Bone,” a reviewer for *The Independent* expressed an opinion that mirrored that of the *New York Times*. He admitted that although not much time had elapsed since Page “first began his dialect stories, the most prominent of which are ‘Meh Lady’ and ‘Marse Chan,’” he doubted “whether any of [Page’s] later tales equal[ed] those in freshness of narration or quaintness of idea.”<sup>767</sup> He argued that Page’s stories in *In Ole Virginia*, one of the most popular assemblages of fiction during the late nineteenth century, would always be “far ahead of any story in such a collection as *Bred in the Bone*.”<sup>768</sup> Even the *Congregationalist and Christian World*, which favorably reviewed Harris’s *Told by Uncle Remus*, lamented that the stories

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<sup>765</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>766</sup> “Mr. Page’s Novel,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1904, page 25.

<sup>767</sup> “The Works of Thomas Nelson Page,” *The Independent*, December 6, 1906, page 61.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

contained in *Bred in the Bone* did not “represent the high-water mark of his accomplishment” despite their “qualities of humor and delightful local color.”<sup>769</sup>

Together, these reviews suggest that critics found Page’s short stories about the South and its African-American population less appealing than many did during the 1880s, when the author was hailed as an innovative chronicler of antebellum Southern mores and social relations. While Page’s earlier tales inspired nostalgia in readers, stories of the same genre seemed antiquated during the early twentieth century. Although Page’s and Harris’s representations of loyal ex-slaves appealed to millions two decades after the Civil War ended, they conflicted with the modern realities of American life that included black advancement in the fields of education, business, the arts, and more. A return to the pre-emancipation era seemed increasingly unlikely, and retrospective fiction failed to capture contemporary social changes.

As in the United States, some authors of Russian historical fiction continued to promote idealistic visions of the pre-emancipation era through literary depictions of faithful former serfs at the turn of the early twentieth century. For instance, novelist Evgenii Opochinin published his story “The Last Soul,” an account of an emancipated peasant who takes care of his impoverished master, in *Moskovskii listok* (Moscow Sheet) in 1905.<sup>770</sup> Another story published in *Moskovskii listok* by a lesser-known writer, A. Gorskii, portrays a nostalgic former serf whose life has been bleak and miserable since his liberation from

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<sup>769</sup> “Short Stories,” *Congregationalist and Christian World*, August 6, 1904, page 89.

<sup>770</sup> This story is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two. Evgenii Opochinin, “Posledniaia ‘dusha,’” Supplement to the *Moskovskii listok*, October 9, 1905, no. 75, pages 2-10.

bondage.<sup>771</sup> “Blizzard: A New Year’s Story,” begins by introducing the reader to Dem’ian, a former serf who looks out across the landscape through the snow-covered window of his hut. The elderly peasant “had not always lived in such a tiny, half-sunken hovel,” and he reflected upon bygone days when “all of his fellow villagers, from small to great, with sighs of relief spoke about the great event of the liberation of serfs from bondage.”<sup>772</sup> But Dem’ian remembered and honored the past differently. Every year, he visited his local church on All Saints’ Day, the eighth of November, a holiday marked by the commemoration of beloved deceased friends and family by Russian Orthodox Christians. There, he would take “communion for the soul of his former landowner, and to this day, if he had extra change, he would offer it to the church in commemoration of [founder of the Romanov dynasty] *boyarin* Mikhail and his kin.”<sup>773</sup> In this scene, Dem’ian appears as a traditional peasant who remains devoted to his former master and who espouses Russia’s patriarchal hierarchy comprising the paternal figures of God, the tsar, and one’s father or landowner. He believes that his “deceased *barin* (landlord) was kind to him and trusted in his faithful Dem’ian,” and the former serf “sincerely and deeply” mourned his passing.<sup>774</sup>

After his master’s death and the collapse of the estate under the “new order” of the post-emancipation era, Dem’ian’s life took a turn for the worst.<sup>775</sup> First, his son was conscripted into the military and subsequently passed away in a hospital. Next, his daughter,

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<sup>771</sup> I am unable to find information about this writer’s background. A. Gorskii, “Metel’: Novogodnii rasskaz,” Supplement to the *Moskovskii listok*, January 2, 1894, no. 1, pages 2, 3, and 6.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*

for whom “he could not find in the entire township a decent groom, married without her parents’ consent a puny urban philistine who called himself a merchant,” and their wedding “was a harbinger of new storms and grief for Dem’ian and his wife.”<sup>776</sup> Thus, Gorskii’s description of Dem’ian’s hardships during the late nineteenth century and his continued loyalty to his master present the abolition of serfdom as an event that did not improve the emancipated peasant’s life. Dem’ian seems to yearn for a simpler age and misses the paternalistic figure of his master, a literary portrayal that sentimentalizes the relationship between masters and their human property. Although Gorskii’s mild idealization of serfdom mirrors that of predecessors Solov’ev, Salias, and Danilevskii, his emphasis on the unique hardships that the former serf Dem’ian faces after emancipation signaled a transition to a new type of representation that permeated Russian and American literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **Post-Emancipation Social Change in Russia: The Challenges of Assimilation**

A diverse cadre of writers and artists hailing from different estates, classes, and ethnic backgrounds addressed the complex topic of post-emancipation integration in nuanced, thoughtful short stories and paintings that substituted realism for sentimentalism. The African-American and peasant characters of their literature and art no longer yearned for the pre-emancipation era; rather, they strove to achieve economic mobility and to assimilate into urban societies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some achieved success while others did not overcome the obstacles of poverty and social prejudice. Ultimately, the authors and artists of these new works presented the struggles of African

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

Americans and peasants with an unflinching candor that raised awareness about the difficulties faced by two historically oppressed groups of people.

Playwright Anton Chekhov's short story "Muzhiki" (*The Peasants*) was one of the first works of fiction to depict peasant poverty using literary realism.<sup>777</sup> As discussed in Chapter Four, industrialization transformed the Russian nation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when migration from rural villages to metropolitan centers dramatically increased. Peasant laborers, typically males, sought work in factories and shops and often sent money home to support the families they left behind. In spite of their efforts, both urban and rural peasants alike continued to fight poverty, a phenomenon documented by *zemstvo* commissions, government sponsored censuses, and individual observers interested in social reform.<sup>778</sup> Through fiction, however, Chekhov captured the spirit of the peasantry's dire situation and made it accessible and palpable to mass audiences in a way that data could not.

The son of a serf, Chekhov (1860-1904) indirectly understood the experience of servitude through his family's history.<sup>779</sup> He received educational opportunities that were unavailable to his parents prior to the abolition of serfdom, completing coursework at a *gimnaziya* (high school) and studying at the Moscow University Medical School.<sup>780</sup> Although he originally intended to practice medicine, he began writing short stories as a student and, as the author of his obituary in *Niva* put it, ultimately "became a doctor of men's souls, not so

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<sup>777</sup> Anton Chekhov, "Muzhiki," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridsati tomakh, tom deviatyi, 1894-1897* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/c/chehow\\_a\\_p/text\\_0090.shtml#10](http://az.lib.ru/c/chehow_a_p/text_0090.shtml#10).

<sup>778</sup> Paul R. Gregory, *Before Command: An Economic History of Russia from Emancipation to the First Five Year Plan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 38.

<sup>779</sup> "Konchina A.P. Chekhova," *Niva*, July 10, 1904, no. 28, page 560.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

much as a pathologist, but as a skilled and very profound diagnostician. . . . [a profession to which] he devoted himself completely.”<sup>781</sup> A creator of short stories and plays published in journals including *Severnyi vestnik* (Northern Messenger), *Russkie vedomosti* (Russian Gazette), *Novoe vremia* (New Time) *Budil’nik* (Alarm Clock), and *Strekoza* (Dragonfly).<sup>782</sup> Chekhov revealed to readers his understanding of human nature and psychology through literary works written in the style of realism. He drew inspiration from his diverse experiences exploring his native country and its people; Chekhov visited a penal colony in Siberia, aided villagers during the famine of 1891-1892, and helped conduct the first Russian census of 1897 by gathering information from impoverished peasant families living in Moscow.<sup>783</sup> Through his encounters with Russians from a range of backgrounds, he gained an awareness of the physical conditions in which differing groups of people lived and the social dynamics that shaped post-emancipation Russian society.

Chekhov’s “Muzhiki” recounts the story of the Chikil’deev family, a group of peasants living in abject poverty in the village of Zhukovo. The story begins with the arrival of Nikolai Chikil’deev, a male peasant who returns to his home in Zhukovo from Moscow where he worked as a waiter. Here, Chekhov refers to a common late nineteenth-century practice: male heads of household often worked in factories or shops for a portion of the year and returned to the countryside during the other portion, engaging in a sort of cyclical work

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<sup>781</sup> Ibid.

<sup>782</sup> D. Gorodetskii, “Iz vospominanii o A.P. Chekhove,” *Ogonek*, no. 29, 1904, page 213.

<sup>783</sup> John Coope, *Doctor Chekhov: A Study in Literature and Medicine* (Chale: Cross, 1997), 14; and Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2002), 256-257.



that mimicked that of the traditional agricultural season.<sup>784</sup> Nikolai had long supported his family through his work at Moscow's *Slavianskii Bazar* (Slavic Bazaar) restaurant, but he took ill and was forced to return to Zhukovo with his wife and daughter. The present condition of his family's abode contrasted sharply with the cozy *izba* (hut) of his memories; upon arriving there Nikolai is shocked to find that it is "dark, cramped, and filthy," the stove is "covered with sot and flies," and the structure verges on collapse.<sup>785</sup> The Chikil'deev's house is but one of several homes in the village set apart from the neighboring five-domed church and manor house. Reflecting on their new situation, Nikolai and his family feel "perplexed" and unable to fully comprehend "the poverty, the poverty!"<sup>786</sup> Although the countryside is beautiful, the idyllic scenery cannot mitigate the misery of the Chikil'deev family's circumstances. Chekhov expresses this notion through his authorial voice in a moving passage, exclaiming, "What a lovely life it would be on this side of the grave, were it not for need, terrible, desperate need, from which there is nowhere to find shelter!"<sup>787</sup>

Nikolai quickly realizes that his parents, brother, and sisters-in-law suffer from physical and spiritual impoverishment. His parents teeter on the threshold of starvation, his brother Kir'iak drinks himself into an abusive rage, and his sisters-in-law are "extremely ignorant and could not understand anything at all."<sup>788</sup> Their financial situation, like that of the other peasants in the village, is dire thanks to the burdensome taxes they are unable to pay

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<sup>784</sup> Michael Confino, *Russia before the 'Radiant Future': Essays in Modern History, Culture, and Society* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 173.

<sup>785</sup> Chekhov, "Muzhiki," 1897, accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/c/chehow\\_a\\_p/text\\_0090.shtml#10](http://az.lib.ru/c/chehow_a_p/text_0090.shtml#10).

<sup>786</sup> Ibid.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

<sup>788</sup> Ibid.

each year. In one poignant scene, the village elder removes the family's samovar from their hut after they fail to provide the bailiff with the requisite amount of money, an event that Chekhov describes as "something degrading, injurious . . . as if the *izba* had been stripped of her honor."<sup>789</sup> Natural phenomena further exacerbate the village's poverty; for instance, a domestic fire devastates a neighboring family's home and increases the Chikil'deev family's sense of helplessness.<sup>790</sup>

As they assess their calamitous situation, they recall the days of serfdom in a passage that offers a more balanced account of the institution than that of Chekhov's literary predecessors. Conversing about their past, Osip, an elder member of the Chikil'deev family, asserts that food had been plentiful and that there was a comforting rhythm to life. He remembers that one only had to "work, and eat, and sleep" and that justice was meted out accordingly when "the evil were punished with rods or banished to the Tver' estate, while the good serfs were rewarded."<sup>791</sup> Next, the matriarchal grandmother paints a portrait of the landlord's kin that contrasts sharply with the sentimental descriptions of Salias, reminiscing about how the master was "a carouser and a libertine" whose daughters "married a drunkard .

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<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Here, Chekhov draws readers' attention to an important late nineteenth-century problem for the peasantry: fires plagued their towns, causing billion of rubles' worth of destruction and exceeding famines in their degree of frequency. Educated urban Russians became increasingly aware of the problem of rural fires through the efforts of authors like Chekhov and artists Leonid Somatkin, Illarion Prianishnikov, and Nikolai Dmitriev-Orenburgskii, who visually represented burning villages and soot-covered, grieving peasants in dramatic oil paintings. For examples of nineteenth-century paintings depicting rural fires, see Leonid Somatkin, *Pozhar v derevne* (Fire in the Countryside), 1870; Illarion Prianishnikov, *Pogorel'tsy* (Fire Victims), 1871; and Nikolai Dmitriev-Orenburgskii, *Pozhar v derevne* (Fire in the Countryside), 1885. Cathy Frierson, *All Russia is Burning: A Cultural History of Arson in Late Imperial Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 3; and Ibid.

<sup>791</sup> Chekhov, "Muzhiki," accessed at [http://az.lib.ru/c/chehow\\_a\\_p/text\\_0090.shtml#10](http://az.lib.ru/c/chehow_a_p/text_0090.shtml#10).

. . . and . . . a petty urban bourgeois.”<sup>792</sup> Here, Chekhov’s clear-eyed peasants acknowledge the benefits and flaws of the pre-emancipation era, viewing the past critically and without sentimentalism. Despite all the hardships of the post-emancipation era, they conclude that a life in which they can exercise free will is superior to a life of enslavement.<sup>793</sup>

By the end of the short story, however, the reader realizes that although the peasants believe themselves to be liberated, their choices are in fact constrained by their poverty, and their fates have been predetermined. Burdened by crushing taxes and living in a desolate village far removed from modern Moscow, they cannot escape from their circumstances. Unlike the period immediately following the abolition of serfdom, when everyone “spoke about partitioning, new lands, of treasures,” now “their lives were as clear as daylight, in full view, and they could only speak about need and food.”<sup>794</sup> They await death expectantly, even hopefully, as an event that will finally alleviate the sufferings of their miserable lives.

Through these passages, Chekhov conveys the gravity of the peasants’ condition using realistic description rather than the lachrymose prose employed by authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose novel depicting the plight of America’s slaves, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) produced in Chekhov “an unpleasant sensation which mortals feel after eating too many raisins or currants.”<sup>795</sup> Using stark, spare language, Chekhov produces a bleak picture of rural life at the turn of the twentieth century that effectively evoked sympathy in readers

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<sup>792</sup> Ibid.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid. The peasant Mar’ia exclaims at the end of the passage about the pre-emancipation era, “Net, volia luchshe!”

<sup>794</sup> Ibid.

<sup>795</sup> Shelby Foote, “Introduction,” in Anton Chekhov, *Later Short Stories: 1883-1903* (New York: Random House, Inc. 1998), xvi.

who may have found themselves as surprised as Nikolai to learn about the deterioration of rural peasant life.

“Muzhiki” made a powerful impression on Russian audiences, stirring up controversy even before its publication. For instance, Chekhov recorded in a letter to writer Mikhail Osipovich Men’shikov that censors had “snatched a sizable piece out of ‘Muzhiki,’” a section that amounted to 27 lines, and even threatened his arrest if he failed to comply with their exacting demands.<sup>796</sup> Despite the Censorship Committee’s efforts to remove troubling material from the short story, however, readers were still taken aback by the realistic tale. Some critics argued that the story was imbued with pessimism and that Chekhov had deliberately created a disturbing “portrait of human zoology, or even rural brutality” that depicted the transformation of “man into animal.”<sup>797</sup> Others marveled at Chekhov’s ability to write fiction that effectively recreated life; for example, the publicist Petr Berngardovich Struve, writing under the pseudonym of “Novus,” observed in *Novoe slovo* (New Word) how Chekhov’s descriptions “produced a powerful impression of their remarkable veracity.”<sup>798</sup>

But the truth of the peasantry’s condition was unsettling and readers were discomfited by what Novus calls Chekhov’s representation of a people living in an “endless struggle against want, not illuminated by any glimmer of consciousness or hope for a better future.”<sup>799</sup> “Muzhiki” drew attention to the former serfs’ plight during an era of transformation that benefited those in urban areas but left behind many of Russia’s rural people. Ultimately,

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<sup>796</sup> Anton Chekhov to Mikhail Men’shikov, April 16, 1897, in Avraham Yarmolinsky, ed., *Letters of Anton Chekhov* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 286.

<sup>797</sup> Novus (pseudonym of Petr Berngardovich Struve), “Na raznye temy: ‘Muzhiki’ g. Chekhova,” *Novoe slovo*, February 8, 1897, book 8, page 45.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid., 46.

Chekhov's prescient short story captured the sense of malaise and hopelessness that permeated the peasant population at the turn of the twentieth century, sentiments that produced in them a deep-rooted longing for radical change manifested during the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

After the publication of "Muzhiki," several lesser-known authors expanded upon Chekhov's endeavor by producing short stories that addressed the experiences of peasants seeking to assimilate into metropolitan life. Their pessimistic tales provided similar representations of peasants as individuals who were ambivalent about urban living but dreaded returning to the rural villages of their pasts. One tale, "Soshnikov," recounts the tragic history of an emancipated serf through the perspective of a literate, educated narrator.<sup>800</sup> A musician in his seventieth decade, Soshnikov impresses the narrator with his musical abilities as a talented violinist who plays for customers in a tavern located just over a mile from Moscow. Broad in stature, the performer wears a shirt of "rustic homespun peasant cloth" in the traditional rural style of the nineteenth century.<sup>801</sup> His music attracts customers' attention because of its soulful nature, a characteristic born from Soshnikov's painful experiences as a serf.

Through the narrator's questioning, Soshnikov reveals to the reader his unfortunate past and inability to find happiness in the present. He recounts how he received musical training from his former master, a rural landowner who drove his orchestra of serfs to St.

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<sup>800</sup> P.B., "Soshnikov," supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, January 27, 1908, no. 5, pages 4, 6, 7, 10, 11.

<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 4. This image that recalls the resolute figure in Solomatkin's painting *Brodiachii muzykant* (The Wandering Musician), which was completed in 1871. For a discussion of the characteristics of male peasant attire, see Fedor Maksimovich Parmon, *Russkii narodnyi kostium* (Moscow: V. Shevchuk, 2012), 168-186.

Petersburg and Moscow where they performed for “astonished” audiences.<sup>802</sup> Eventually he fell in love with a female serf named Tanya, but his jealous master succeeded in keeping them apart through various actions. Soshnikov received his freedom but Tanya was sent abroad where she unexpectedly died. Soshnikov became depressed and lost his will to succeed in life; he was demoted from his position as a soloist in Moscow’s orchestra to “the ranks, from which [he was] soon kicked out,” and found himself scrounging for a living playing in local taverns.<sup>803</sup> Haunted by his past, Soshnikov plays sorrowfully for the narrator, who describes the sound emanating from his violin as “snow during a blizzard, hovering, swirling, writhing, moaning, like old spruces bending from the pressure of the wind.”<sup>804</sup> Indeed, this metaphor also captures the experiences of the emancipated serf whose life has been affected by powerful external forces. The story concludes on a pessimistic note, with the author remarking that Soshnikov “fell ill and died in the hospital, forgotten by all.”<sup>805</sup> Like Chekhov’s *muzhiki*, Soshnikov correspondingly cannot lift himself from his lowly circumstances and is destined to suffer a tragic, lonely end as an impoverished peasant.

Two additional short stories published in *Moskovskii listok* at the turn of the twentieth century tackle the topics of urban peasant assimilation and economic mobility in representations of peasant factory workers. The first, “Razdum’e” (Thoughts), tells the tale of Ivan Artemov, a male peasant who migrated from his village to an urban area where he found

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<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid.

employment in manufacturing.<sup>806</sup> Like Chekhov's Nikolai Chikil'deev, however, Ivan suddenly finds himself out of work and "home in his native village," which appears more dismal than the town of his childhood memories.<sup>807</sup> During the fourteen years he spent working in the factory he transformed himself into an urban peasant by dressing as a city-dweller, and he brought material goods to his family in the countryside to improve their lives as well.<sup>808</sup> At first, Ivan enjoyed urban life; he recalls how "the factory exhilarated him," and he spent time amongst his "circle of noisy friends."<sup>809</sup>

At the age of forty, however, Ivan grew tired and weak with age; his "right shoulder sort of fell apart, aching in the weather, then in the morning [he developed] some kind of cough . . . and he himself became . . . angry at the hoots and noises" of factory life."<sup>810</sup> Upon returning to rural Russia, however, Ivan becomes despondent and discovers that he is deeply conflicted about the choices that will determine the course of his life. The story concludes with Ivan's final, depressing realization, posed as a question to readers: "The past—repugnant, but the future—terrifying! How would it be possible to continue living?"<sup>811</sup> On the whole, "Thoughts" is a remarkable work of fiction because it serves as a psychological portrait of a peasant striving to adapt to urban life and simultaneously improve his family's financial circumstances. While "Muzhiki" and "Soshnikov" assess the experience of the

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<sup>806</sup> This story is also referenced in Chapter Four. M. Bylov, "Razdum'e," supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, January 1, 1906, no. 1, pages 12-16.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

peasantry from an outsider's viewpoint, "Thoughts" brings the reader into the mind of Ivan Artemov, a novel literary strategy that encouraged early twentieth century audiences to empathize with the peasantry by figuratively walking in their shoes.

A second story in *Moskovskii listok* that portrays an ambitious peasant who leaves his rural village in search of opportunity, "Za chuzhie den'gi" (For Other People's Money), offers a darker and more pessimistic representation of urban assimilation than that of "Razdum'e."<sup>812</sup> Lukin, the tale's protagonist, lives in an apartment with his wife and three small children near the factory where he had worked as the *artel'shchik* (member of the cooperative) by collecting money.<sup>813</sup> Although he had already spent ten years in the position, when he "thought about his service, about his life," he realized it was characterized by disquiet.<sup>814</sup> Lukin knew of other people in his position who were killed on the job while they sent and collected money on behalf of their bosses, an awareness that produced in him "severe anxiety."<sup>815</sup> One dark night, Lukin journeys to the post office to collect a significant amount of money, and his worst fears are realized: Two former colleagues shoot and kill him.<sup>816</sup>

After Lukin's murder, the reader is brought to a new scene in the urban peasant's apartment where his wife anxiously awaits his return. She paces around the house, reheating the samovar and reflecting upon their recent conversation about moving back to the

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<sup>812</sup> N. Afanas'ev, "Za chuzhie den'gi," supplement to *Moskovskii listok*, January 8, 1908, no. 2, pages 12-14.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid.

<sup>815</sup> Ibid.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid, 13.



countryside. Fed up with the uncertainty and danger of her husband's job, she discussed with him the possibility of returning to the countryside where they owned land and would live "in poverty, but peacefully."<sup>817</sup> However, Lukin delayed their departure, and she in turn "didn't want him to give up a good income," in spite of what she called their "eternal anxieties."<sup>818</sup> Her thoughts are interrupted when a group of men suddenly arrives at the apartment with the body of her deceased husband. The children are awakened by the commotion, and the oldest exclaims in horror, "Mama! Mama! They brought our Papa!"<sup>819</sup> Lukin's wife sees "the pale, set face of her husband" with eyes that remain open "as if they were asking [her], 'For what?' 'For what?'"<sup>820</sup>

"Za chuzhie den'gi" presents a pessimistic vision of urban life through its realistic descriptions of factory life and its portrayal of a conflicted peasant family. Like "Razdum'e," "Za chuzhie den'gi" gives readers the opportunity to consider the difficult choices facing peasants like Lukin and his wife, who were torn between their desire to live in the familiar quiet of rural Russia and the necessity of earning money to support their families. Ultimately, "Za chuzhie den'gi" conveys a subtle message to readers through its dark conclusion: Rural peasants ought not to change their traditional ways of life by migrating to metropolitan areas where they would surely struggle, and perhaps even perish.

The troubled representations of urban peasant assimilation in the aforementioned short stories mirrored many portrayals in *lubki* (popular prints) and *lubochnaia literatura*

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<sup>817</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid.

(popular literature) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jeffrey Brooks has traced the extensive history of these mass-oriented publications which first appeared in the seventeenth century as religious-themed prints for the nobility.<sup>821</sup> Over the next two centuries, *lubki* and *lubochnaia literatura* evolved in style and content as their subject matter became increasingly secular. By the turn of the nineteenth century, *lubki* primarily appealed to the rural and urban peasants who adorned the walls of their homes and taverns with the colorful illustrated sheets, much like African-American freedpeople decorated cabins with engravings from illustrated journals at the turn of the twentieth century. *Lubochnaia literatura* changed in a similar fashion, a transformation that is reflected in its subject matter. Brooks contends that 40 percent of works published during the 1890s related to “folklore, chivalrous tales, instructive works, and tales about merchants,” whereas the subjects of “banditry, crime, science, romance, and an admixture of crime and romance,” a category growing in popularity, made up of 16% of works during the same decade.<sup>822</sup>

Peasants appreciated reading tales that reflected many of the changes transforming their villages or that illustrated the challenges of urban life. Like the writers of “Razdum’e” and “Za chuzhie den’gi,” stories intended for a middle-class audience, authors of the peasant-oriented *lubochnaia literatura* and *lubki* pertaining to upward economic or social mobility also warned against “the dangers of aspiring too high.”<sup>823</sup> For instance, Brooks describes how the male protagonist of Viktor Lunin’s *Fabrichnaia krasavitsa* (The Factory Beauty) lives in

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<sup>821</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 63.

<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid., 289.

fear of his envious colleagues after he wins over his love interest from the factory.<sup>824</sup>

Gambling, another way of striving to improve one's fortunes, was figuratively demonized in the *lubok* "Demon igry: kartezhnaia igra ne prineset dobra" (The Demon of Game. Card Games Will Not Bring Good Fortune).<sup>825</sup> The print depicts several smaller illustrations that surround an image of a fierce dragon made of cards. Clutching a bag of money, the dragon breathes fire onto the smoldering towns and cities of Russia. Meanwhile, a male peasant shields his son from the dragon, pointing toward the creature as if to warn the child of the dangers of gambling. The smaller illustrations adorning the exterior of the *lubok* depict men who have lost all of their possessions: one peasant sells his clothing while another lies bleeding on the ground after having committed suicide from despair. This instructive *lubok* cautioned peasants by urging them to avoid temptations that might bring about their financial ruin. Although precious little information exists about the producers of such *lubochnaia literatura* and *lubki*, Brooks argues that they "took their writing seriously," were "concerned about the issue of upward mobility particularly as it applied to their own careers," and shared with readers their own experiences with "ambition, success, disappointment, and injustice" through simple, illustrated fiction tales with which audiences could directly relate.<sup>826</sup>

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<sup>824</sup> Ibid., 79. See Viktor Lunin, *Fabrichnaia krasavitsa* (Moscow: 1897).

<sup>825</sup> "Demon igry: Kartezhnaia igra ne prineset dobra," April, 1881, *lubok* from the Museum of Wooden Architecture and Peasant Life, Suzdal, Russia.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid., 91.

## Post-Emancipation Social Change in the United States: The Challenges of Assimilation

While a host of Russian authors confronted the obstacles facing former serfs at the turn of the twentieth century, American writers Charles Waddell Chesnutt and Kate Chopin similarly created ground-breaking works of fiction that candidly acknowledged the problems African Americans encountered in the 1890s and 1900s. Like the peasantry, African Americans also fought against poverty and strove to become integrated into urban populations. But blacks, even those who had never experienced slavery, faced the unique obstacle of racism, a phenomenon that affected their quality of life in many ways. For example, whites excluded African Americans from public spaces through laws enforcing segregation, refused to pay fair wages for their labor, and prohibited interracial sexual relations through state laws that were notably upheld by the Supreme Court during the landmark case *Pace v. Alabama* (1883). They even committed horrific acts of violence like lynching, a growing occurrence in rural areas during the late 1890s that were, as Fitz Brundage puts it, a form of “systematic political terrorism.”<sup>827</sup> Through a wide range of endeavors, white Americans effectively pushed back against the assimilation of black freedpeople at the turn of the twentieth century.

The sensitive topics of interracial marriage, segregation, and lynching infrequently appeared in popular fiction during the decades immediately following the abolition of slavery. Although sentimental literary representations of slavery dominated the genre during the 1880s, a new cohort of Southern writers, one of whom was biracial, brought these issues

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<sup>827</sup> Lynching rates rose during periods of economic hardship such as the depression of 1893-1898. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 6; and Roberta Senechal de la Roche, “The Sociogenesis of Lynching,” in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 60.

to the forefront of the public mind through realistic short stories and novels that addressed these taboo subjects and much more during the 1890s and 1900s. The first of these authors is Kate Chopin (1850-1904), a woman of French and Irish descent whose depictions of sentient, complex African Americans in post-emancipation Louisiana raised white readers' awareness of issues pertaining to racial identity and integration. Chopin was a native of St. Louis, Missouri, but relocated with her husband to Louisiana where she resided for nearly fifteen years. Familiar with the institution of slavery from her childhood experience of growing up in a house with slaves and from her marriage to the son of former slave-owners, Chopin displayed a special sensitivity toward African Americans in her writing.<sup>828</sup> Like Page and Harris before her, Chopin attained a degree of authorial expertise through her lineage; critics believed that a central reason for the "facility and directness with which Mrs. Chopin handle[d] the Creole dialect and the fidelity of her descriptions of that strange, remote life on the Louisiana bayous" was that "Mrs. Chopin herself [was] a Creole and . . . lived much of her life in New Orleans and on her Natchitoches plantation."<sup>829</sup> However, her work differed from that of Harris and Page through what Richard Potter calls "her departure from the traditional stereotypes" and her "realistic and humanistic" representations of African Americans living in Louisiana.<sup>830</sup>

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<sup>828</sup> "Mrs. Kate Chopin: Author of Bayou Folk," *Current Literature*, August, 1894, Volume XVI, no. 2, *American Periodicals*, page 106; Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 93; and "Biography," *The Kate Chopin International Society*, accessed at <http://www.katechopin.org/biography/>.

<sup>829</sup> "Mrs. Kate Chopin," *Current Literature, American Periodicals*, page 106.

<sup>830</sup> Richard H. Potter, "Negroes in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 12, no. 1 (1971): 42.

Inspired to begin writing for the public after her husband's untimely death from malaria in 1882, Chopin captivated readers with her stories about the lives of Louisiana's diverse residents.<sup>831</sup> Her collection, *Bayou Folk* (1894), focuses on the wide-ranging experiences of African Americans in rural Louisiana, with 15 of the 23 tales featuring black men and women.<sup>832</sup> One story, "In and Out of Old Natchitoches," offers a poignant glimpse of the tense post-emancipation racial relations between white and black Louisianans. Readers meet a progressive landowner, Mr. Alphonse Laballière, who purchases an old plantation where he intends to grow cotton. He befriends the plantation's inhabitants, the mixed-race Giestin family who had never been enslaved, but white society immediately criticizes him for appearing "entirely too much at home with the free mulattoes."<sup>833</sup> Nonetheless, Laballière persists in his attempts to establish good relations by taking "his meals at the free mulatto's, quite apart from the family, of course; and they attended, not too skillfully, to his few domestic wants."<sup>834</sup> Talk around town continues, however, with neighbors remarking that Laballière "had more use for a free mulatto than he had for a white man," but the forward-thinking landowner ferociously insists that it is his own business if he chooses to "hobnob with mulattoes, or negroes or Choctaw Indians or South Sea savages."<sup>835</sup>

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<sup>831</sup> "Biography," *The Kate Chopin International Society*, accessed at <http://www.katechopin.org/biography/>.

<sup>832</sup> Potter, "Negroes in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," 46.

<sup>833</sup> During the nineteenth century in antebellum Louisiana, black Catholic slave-owning Creoles inhabited the Isle Brevelle, amassing land, wealth, and status. Kate Chopin, "In and Out of Old Natchitoches," in *Bayou Folk* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, & Company, 1894), 53, accessed at Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chopinbayou/bayou.html>; and James Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories: Kate Chopin, Grace King, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and George Washington Cable* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), 126.

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Apparently firm in his support of post-emancipation assimilation, Laballière even brings one of the family's children to the local school, an institution for white children that is led by his love interest, Suzanne. Told by the female instructor that it was "not a school conducted fo' the education of the colored population," Laballière leaves the boy there anyway in an act of defiance. Reflecting later upon Suzanne's anger at his audacity, however, Laballière abruptly abandons his principled stance. Blinded by love, he decides that he would like to "exterminate the Giestin family, from the great-grandmother down to the babe unborn," a sentiment that the family perceives and which motivates them to relocate to a segregated area called *l'Isle des Mulâtres*.<sup>836</sup> After the group of free blacks departs from his plantation, Laballière apologizes to Suzanne and woos her back into his good graces.

Some readers may have found themselves surprised by the ease with which Laballière abandons his advocacy of improving race relations between whites and blacks, while others harboring racial prejudices of their own may have empathized with him. Nonetheless, "In and Out of Natchitoches" clearly illustrates the pervasiveness of a rural community's belief in segregation through their rejection of an outsider's attempts to alter traditional race relations. Chopin does not directly criticize Laballière through her description of his character, but she gives readers the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about his actions. Like Laballière, Chopin may have been torn between a desire to encourage post-emancipation assimilation and an awareness of the inherent difficulties of the process.

A second short story in *Bayou Folk*, "Désirée's Baby," also reveals to readers the embeddedness of prejudice toward biracial Americans in late nineteenth-century Louisiana. After the abolition of slavery, white Southerners feared the destruction of the existing racial

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<sup>836</sup> Ibid., 60.

order and, as Martha Hodes argues, believed that “it was crucial that both elite and nonelite white women minded the boundaries of the color line” by avoiding interracial sexual relations.<sup>837</sup> The notion of white female purity, typically applied to upper-class women, pervaded popular culture during the late nineteenth century and shaped public opinion about proper codes of behavior.<sup>838</sup> White women who engaged in sexual intercourse with black men were looked down upon, but society reserved its sharpest condemnation for those whom historian Philip Alexander Bruce (1856-1933) described as the “few white women who have given birth to mulattoes,” a group that he claimed had “always been regarded as monsters; and . . . belonged to the most impoverished and degraded caste of whites, by whom they are scrupulously avoided as creatures who have sunk to the level of the beasts of the field.”<sup>839</sup> Late nineteenth-century Americans even adhered to a principle called the “one-drop rule” that defined individuals with one or more ancestors of African descent as black.

White Americans denigrated those whom they believed possessed African-American blood, assuming that, as Edward B. Reuter explained in his 1918 book *The Mulatto in the United States*, “Any person bearing the physical marks of the lower group . . . embod[ied] the traits that are supposed to be typical of the lower race.”<sup>840</sup> For many white Southerners, Reuter argued, the dark color of a person’s skin represented “a symbol of [the race’s] inferior culture . . . [standing for], in the thinking of the culturally superior group . . . poverty,

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<sup>837</sup> Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 202.

<sup>838</sup> Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>839</sup> Philip A. Bruce, *The Plantation Negro as a Freeman: Observations on His Character, Condition, and Prospects in Virginia* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1889), 55.

<sup>840</sup> Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States* (New York: Haskell House Publishers Limited, 1918), 18.



disease, dirt, ignorance, and all the undesirable concomitants of a backward race.”<sup>841</sup>

Multiracial men and women who looked white drew particular scorn from their peers because their distinctive appearances “separate[d] them from both groups and [made] them alien in both.”<sup>842</sup>

Writing at a time when public disapproval of interracial sexual relations reached its apex, Chopin published a provocative short story that challenged readers to reassess their biases against white women who gave birth to what they referred to as mulatto children. The tale, “*Désirée’s Baby*,” takes place in antebellum Louisiana on a plantation owned by a man of French descent, Armand Aubigny, where he lives with his wife Désirée. An orphan with unknown familial origins, Désirée grew up to be a “beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere” woman who instantly captured her future husband’s attention.<sup>843</sup> Armand doted upon Désirée throughout their marriage and after the birth of their newborn son; two events which tempered the slave-owner’s “imperious and exacting nature greatly.”<sup>844</sup> A few months after the child’s birth, however, Chopin describes how there was “an awful change in [Aubigny’s] manner, which [Désirée] dared not ask him to explain.”<sup>845</sup> Both Aubigny and Désirée realize that the growing child’s appearance suggested that he was of African descent, a revelation that moves Aubigny to accuse his wife of lacking the white racial purity that he

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<sup>841</sup> Ibid.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>843</sup> Kate Chopin, “*Désirée’s Baby*,” in *Bayou Folk* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, & Company, 1894), 148, accessed at Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chopinbayou/bayou.html>.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid., 152.

assumed she possessed. Estranged from her husband and in total despair, Désirée takes her baby and commits suicide by walking into the “deep, sluggish bayou,” perhaps a metaphor for the oppressive environment white women in her predicament faced during the late nineteenth century.

Reviews of “Désirée’s Baby” and the other stories in *Bayou Folk* were generally favorable; critics found Chopin’s stories thought-provoking, authentic, and, in the words of one columnist, “absolutely true to nature.”<sup>846</sup> Rather than creating stock characters that resembled the faithful, simple-minded slaves found in the tales of Page and Harris, Chopin developed multifaceted literary protagonists whose circumstances, sometimes troubled, mirrored those of white, black, and multiracial Southerners of the late nineteenth century. For instance, a reviewer writing for *The Critic* praised Chopin for the “photographic realism” with which she represented the residents inhabiting Louisiana’s bayous and for the “shrewdness of observation” she exhibited through her stories.<sup>847</sup> He found “Désirée’s Baby” to have been “flooded with more color” than many of the other sketches and delicately commented that Chopin’s “keen eyes see through the glooms of her prairies and cane brakes, and see things well worth bringing into the light.”<sup>848</sup> Like most late nineteenth-century reviewers of *Bayou Folk*, *The Critic*’s columnist did not directly reference Chopin’s careful descriptions of racial integration or miscegenation in her short stories; rather, he merely alluded to the controversial topics therein. Ultimately, Chopin’s short stories did not revolutionize public opinion about late nineteenth-century interracial relations; however, they

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<sup>846</sup> “Fiction,” *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household*, June 1894, page 31.

<sup>847</sup> “Bayou Folk,” *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts*, May 5, 1894, page 21.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid.

served as some of the first works to cast a soft light on shadowed subjects that were seldom discussed in popular fiction.

Chopin's *Bayou Folk* paved the way for a new set of fictional tales that boldly put forth controversial questions about the continued assimilation of African Americans and about multiracial identities in a society that prohibited interracial sexual relations. The author of these controversial works was Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858-1932), a man whose own experiences living in turn-of-the-century North Carolina informed his literary works. Chesnutt was born in Cleveland, Ohio, but migrated to Fayetteville, North Carolina, as a child with his parents after the conclusion of the Civil War.<sup>849</sup> Chesnutt descended from individuals whose familiarity with the institution of slavery differed significantly; his father was the son of a white slaveholder and his African-American housekeeper, while his black mother was never enslaved.<sup>850</sup>

Growing up in the South during Reconstruction, Chesnutt witnessed the transformation of a former slave state. He attended a public school for African Americans founded by the Freedman's Bureau, the Howard School, and worked alongside his father in the grocery store he owned in Fayetteville.<sup>851</sup> In his adolescence, Chesnutt taught several public schools and even published his first short story in order to generate additional income for his family.<sup>852</sup> Although African Americans like the Chesnutts made great strides in

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<sup>849</sup> Helen M. Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 1-4. Helen Chesnutt is the daughter of Charles Waddell Chesnutt.

<sup>850</sup> Richard H. Brodhead, ed., *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 2; and William L. Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 1-2.

<sup>851</sup> Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt*, 5.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10.

business, education, and politics during this era, they also experienced episodes of violence that served as reminders of the precariousness of their societal positions. For instance, as a child Chesnutt saw three white men publicly murder a black man in downtown Fayetteville for what they claimed was the crime of rape, a traumatic occurrence that reflected the animosity some whites felt toward free African Americans in post-emancipation North Carolina.<sup>853</sup> Although the murderers were convicted, President Andrew Johnson pardoned them in 1868, an event that Chesnutt biographer William Andrews argues taught the young boy “the subversion of law [was] a fact of life for the Afro-American in the postwar South.”<sup>854</sup> Events like these were frightening, but the Chesnutts did not waver in their decision to make a life for themselves in North Carolina.

As a young adult, Charles Chesnutt became increasingly aware of his unique situation as a biracial man living in the South and lamented the isolation he experienced as a result. In a diary entry from 1881, he reflected upon how his identity made him feel as though he was “neither fish[,] flesh, nor fowl—neither ‘nigger,’ poor white, nor ‘buckrah.’”<sup>855</sup> Furthermore, he continued, both black and white Americans excluded him from their communities; he was “too ‘stuck up’ for the colored folks, and of course, not recognized by whites.”<sup>856</sup> Although he was frustrated by his inability to find social acceptance, Chesnutt drew inspiration from his personal circumstances that would inform many of the themes in his works of fiction.

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<sup>853</sup> Ibid., 5-6; and Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*, 2.

<sup>854</sup> Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*, 3.

<sup>855</sup> Diary entry from January 3, 1881, in Brodhead, ed., *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, 157.

<sup>856</sup> Ibid., 158.

After marrying and starting a family, Chesnutt settled down in Cleveland and began writing in the hope of achieving literary success akin to that of Albion Tourgée, an Ohioan whose popular novel *A Fool's Errand* (1879) depicted black life in Reconstruction-era North Carolina.<sup>857</sup> Chesnutt's first collection of short stories, *The Conjure Woman* (1899), mirrored the tales of white author Joel Chandler Harris. *The Conjure Woman* was composed of a series of African folktales told in black dialect through the character of an elderly African-American freedman named Uncle Julius. One early twentieth-century reviewer astutely observed, however, that although "the trade edition of Chesnutt's book bore a picture of an aged Negro and a pair of rabbits, obviously designed to make those who were enraptured by Joel Chandler Harris' stories think that here was another book they would like . . . there are only two points in common between Chessnut's [sic] and harris' [sic] books, really—both are filled with folktales told by an aged Negro narrator; and both are in Negro dialect."<sup>858</sup> *The Conjure Woman* sold well enough that Chesnutt was confident in continuing to pursue his career in writing, and he published his second collection of short stories, *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line*, in 1899. These short stories differed significantly from those of *The Conjure Woman*, however, because of their emphasis on the contentious topics of miscegenation and multiracial identities. But Chesnutt was firm in his resolve to bring these subjects to public attention because, as one reviewer noted, "His sympathies

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<sup>857</sup> Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt*, 10.

<sup>858</sup> Elrick B. Davis. "Du Bose Heyward's 'Mamba's Daughters' and Republication of Chesnutt's 'The Conjure Woman' Makes This 'Negro Literature Week,'" *Cleveland Press*, February 2, 1929, page 10. Box 1, Folder 9, PC7, Charles W. Chesnutt Archive, Fayetteville State University.

[were] all with the race which suffers so grievously from Anglo-Saxon pride and prejudice both North and South.”<sup>859</sup>

“The Wife of His Youth,” the first story in Chesnutt’s collection, recounts a black man’s crisis of identity as he struggles to reconcile his past decisions with his dreams for the future. Chesnutt describes the protagonist, Mr. Ryder, as possessing “features . . . of a refined type, his hair was almost straight; he was always neatly dressed; his manners were irreproachable, and his morals above suspicion.”<sup>860</sup> He lived in an African-American community but surrounded himself with light-skinned men and women whom he subconsciously believed to be superior to those with darker complexions. A bachelor in his forties or fifties, Mr. Ryder planned to host a ball for the woman he hoped to marry.

The object of his affection was a widow named Mrs. Dixon, and Mr. Ryder found many of her qualities appealing; she “was whiter than he, and better educated. She had moved in the best colored society of the country, at Washington, and had taught in the schools of that city.”<sup>861</sup> Indeed, Mr. Ryder believed that his marriage to Mrs. Dixon would help fulfill his social aspirations by “further[ing] the upward process of absorption he had been wishing and waiting for.”<sup>862</sup> Although he claimed to lack any form of “race prejudice,” he sincerely believed that his destiny as a mulatto rested in assimilation by

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<sup>859</sup> William Hudson, “A New Delineator of Southern Life,” *Self Culture Magazine*, no. 11, July 1900, pages 409-11, accessed at <http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/reviews/OthersReviews/other7.html>.

<sup>860</sup> Charles W. Chesnutt, *Stories, Novels, and Essays* (New York: Library Classics of the United States, 2002), 102.

<sup>861</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

“the white race and extinction in the black.”<sup>863</sup> Through his description of Mr. Ryder’s fears and aspirations, Chesnutt revealed to readers the difficulties experienced by biracial American citizens. Mixed-race citizens like Mr. Ryder found themselves caught between two unwelcoming worlds, a phenomenon that few white Americans understood or sympathized with during the late nineteenth century.

Through a remarkable plot twist, however, Chesnutt embedded a radical message about racial identity in “The Wife of His Youth.” On the day of the ball, Mr. Ryder receives a visit from a “little woman” who was “very black,—so black that her toothless gums . . . [were] blue,” who appeared as “a bit of the old plantation life, summoned up from the past by the wave of a magician’s wand.”<sup>864</sup> He pities the woman, who narrates her sad history to him. A former slave, the woman had spent her life searching for her long-lost love, a mulatto from whom she had been separated when she was sold down river by her master. For twenty-five years she faithfully searched for him in vain, convinced that he, too, longed to be reunited with her. Through Chesnutt’s vignette, a revisionist version of tales of faithful former bondsmen like Page’s “Ole ‘Stracted” or Salias’s “The Last Soul,” the former slave demonstrates her admirable fidelity to the man she deeply loves and with whom she hopes to be “as happy in freedom as [they were] in de ole days befo’ de wah.”<sup>865</sup> Mr. Ryder promises to look into the matter for the woman, however, before she departs to continue her search.

In the story’s final pages, Mr. Ryder and his community come to terms with their multiracial identities and the burden of history as the descendants of slaves. During the tale’s

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<sup>863</sup> Ibid.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>865</sup> Ibid., 107.

concluding scene, set during the ball hosted by Mr. Ryder, Chesnutt emphasizes the perceived distance between emancipation and the late nineteenth century by focusing on black achievement. He describes how the guests comprised “a number of school teachers, several young doctors, three or four lawyers, some professional singers, an editor, [and] a lieutenant in the United States army,” a list that likely impressed upon white readers the extent to which African Americans had advanced in their careers since the abolition of slavery.<sup>866</sup> Indeed, for the guests themselves, the pre-emancipation era seemed far removed from their present circumstances.

Mr. Ryder calls up their memories through his retelling of the visit from the elderly ex-slave, revealing that he was in fact her long-last love before introducing the woman to the waiting crowd. Chesnutt describes how the story “awakened a responsive thrill in many hearts” because “There were some present who had seen, and others had heard their fathers and grandfathers tell, the wrongs and sufferings of this past generation, and all of them still felt, in their darker moments, the shadow hanging over them.”<sup>867</sup> Thus, the former slave’s appearance changes Mr. Ryder’s aspirations; he gives up his dream of becoming increasingly assimilated with the white community through his marriage to Mrs. Dixon by deciding to formally marry the former slave. In addition, the woman’s visit alters the way in which the members of a multiracial community perceived themselves by forcing Mr. Ryder’s guests to recall and internalize the difficult elements of their collective history. The “wife of his youth” may even have served as a metaphor for the African-American freedpeople whom

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<sup>866</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>867</sup> Ibid., 110.



Chesnutt urged a younger, multiracial generation of readers to remember as they assimilated into a modernizing nation.

Reviewers remarked upon the sensitivity with which Chesnutt depicted the biracial characters of “The Wife of His Youth.” A critic writing for *The Bookman* commented that Chesnutt had “a firmer grasp than any preceding author has shown in handling the delicate relations between the white man and the negro from the point of view of the mingling of the races,” an observation that reveals Chesnutt’s efficacy in using fiction as a vehicle to gently bring controversial subjects to public attention. The reviewer also praised Chesnutt’s literary talents and expressed his hope that the author’s “philosophical grasp . . . imaginative power and literary skill may combine to give us an expression of the life of his people not yet realised by any writer either white or coloured in the States” in a forthcoming novel.<sup>868</sup> A second critic, writing on behalf of the *Worcester Evening Gazette*, acknowledged how Chesnutt’s story “brought into high relief” for readers “the effects of the ante-bellum days upon the lives of the negro, in the tragedies for which the war was directly responsible.”<sup>869</sup> Unlike the fictional works of Page and Harris that portrayed freedpeople longing to return to the pre-emancipation era, “The Wife of His Youth” demonstrates that the legacy of bondage still affected African Americans as they sought to advance their careers and assimilate into the nation that had once enslaved them. In this way, Chesnutt’s story mirrors that of Russian author P.B., whose protagonist Soshnikov wrestles with the memories of his troubled past

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<sup>868</sup> Anon. "Review of 'The Wife of His Youth,' and bio note." In: Chronicle and Comment, *The Bookman*, 7 (August 1898): 452, accessed at Charles W. Chesnutt Archive, <http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Reviews/WifeReviews/wife2.html>.

<sup>869</sup> "Tales of Negro Life" in "Reviews of Many New Books that are Well Worth Reading," *Worcester Evening Gazette* 11 Dec. 1899: 4, accessed at <http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Reviews/WifeReviews/wife39.html>.

and long-lost love, reminiscences that prevent him from becoming fully integrated as a liberated serf.

Additional stories within Chesnutt's collection similarly give voice to the unique experiences of mixed-race African Americans during the late nineteenth century. Two tales, "Her Virginia Mammy" and "The Sheriff's Children," received particular attention from reviewers who praised their subject matter and Chesnutt's skill in crafting emotionally complex portraits of biracial characters. The first, "Her Virginia Mammy," describes the dilemma faced by a young woman, Clara, who wishes to marry her lover. Orphaned during a steamboat accident which took the life of her parents, Clara hesitates to marry without knowledge of her familial roots for fear of embarrassing her future husband. Through a conversation with an acquaintance, the maternal Mrs. Harper, Clara learns of her supposed parents' blue-blooded origins. Mrs. Harper claims that she served as Clara's former mammy, that Clara's father was "a Virginia gentleman," and that her mother was "a Virginia belle."<sup>870</sup> Overjoyed, Clara shares the news with her future husband who congratulates her but does not admit that he has "noticed the resemblance between [Mrs. Harper and Clara]," a likeness that points to Clara's mixed-race parentage.<sup>871</sup> Indeed, Mrs. Harper's own intense love for Clara, a feeling only visible to the reader, confirms Mrs. Harper's status as Clara's birth mother. Like "The Wife of His Youth," "Her Virginia Mammy" challenges readers' assumptions about what it means to have white and black parents by blurring the "color line." For the better part of the story Clara appears as a middle-class white woman who harbors her own prejudices toward "the dark faces of whom Americans always think when 'colored people'

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<sup>870</sup> Chesnutt, *Stories, Novels, and Essays*, 126, 127.

<sup>871</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

are spoken of.”<sup>872</sup> Although Clara never realizes her own biracial identity, readers are encouraged to confront their own suppositions about whether or not the protagonist’s familial origins truly shape her character.

A second story, “The Sheriff’s Children,” similarly treats the subject of racial identity, but it does so through a dramatic plot that prompts readers to sympathize with biracial Americans who had limited choices during the late nineteenth century. Set in a rural town in North Carolina, Chesnutt’s harrowing tale depicts a white sheriff who strives to carry out his legal duty by defending a mulatto prisoner named Tom. Accused of murdering a Confederate veteran, Tom awaits his trial in jail but is confronted there by an angry mob of white men who threaten to hang him. Although the sheriff protects Tom, the prisoner attempts to murder him in an attempt to escape after the mob departs. During the stirring confrontation between the two men, Tom reveals that he is the sheriff’s son; decades ago the sheriff raped his mother, a former slave, before selling them both down river. Tom explains to his father how slavery had “crushed” his “spirit” and that in the post-emancipation era he was “free in name, but despised and scorned and set aside” by white Americans.<sup>873</sup> Fearing a trial that would find him guilty in spite of his claim that he did not kill the Confederate veteran, Tom believes he has no choice but to escape from prison. Seething with resentment toward his father, Tom prepares to kill him but is instead wounded by the sheriff’s daughter, Polly. The sheriff subsequently locks Tom in prison for the night but when he returns the next day, filled with guilt for his past crime of rape, he discovers that Tom has committed suicide.

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<sup>872</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid., 144.

“The Sheriff’s Children” contained several unusual elements that made a powerful impression upon readers. First, Chesnutt addressed the controversial topic of lynching, a subject primarily reported in newspapers or discussed by activists like Ida. B. Wells during the late nineteenth century. His description of the white mob’s attempted murder in a new medium, fiction, drew attention to a phenomenon that plagued the nation at the time of the collection’s publication through its account of the struggle for power in the rural South. In addition, “The Sheriff’s Children” is unique in its fictional portrayal of the numerous hardships facing biracial Americans, difficulties Chesnutt knew well from his own experiences. In a notable scene, Tom confesses to his father that he believes “no degree of learning or wisdom will change the color of [his] skin and that [he] shall always wear what in [his] own country is a badge of degradation.”<sup>874</sup> By listening to his son’s explanation of his situation, the sheriff begins to understand his predicament and ultimately repents for his own misdeeds. Alas, the sheriff’s revelation comes too late, and he is unable to prevent his son from killing himself out of desperation. Chesnutt may have hoped that, like the sheriff, readers would similarly grow in their comprehension of how white society’s exclusion of African Americans could produce tragic consequences.

According to reviews printed in numerous journals, Chesnutt achieved his goal of raising awareness about the plight of African Americans through fiction. For instance, the *Boston Courier* declared that “the color problem is one that demands grave consideration and even apprehension for the future” and that “the color line is as strong, or almost as strong as

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<sup>874</sup> Ibid., 147.

when the Dutch brought the first cargo of blacks to be sold as slaves.”<sup>875</sup> Chesnutt effectively tackled this problem not by presenting “the solution of the problem of what to do of an inferior and a superior race,” but by showing that “the Negro is a being with emotions, even as is the white man, that for all the prejudice against him, he has with in him, sympathies, affections, which can be utilized to his improvement better than the White man’s perpetual menace.”<sup>876</sup> Other critics agreed with the *Boston Courier’s* assessment that Chesnutt’s representations evoked empathy in readers; for example, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* observed that “there is a pathos to the life of these people, with whom the author is in such kindly sympathy. . . . The agoni[zi]ng of [the] ‘Old Mammy,’ the despair [sic] of the black son of the white sheriff[,] makes one feel that after all the world is akin in that a matter of emotion is not dependent upon the pigment of one’s skin.”<sup>877</sup> Ultimately, Chesnutt’s depictions of African Americans did much to challenge the flat, stereotypical representations of slaves and freedpeople that gained so much popularity during the 1880s. As the *Cambridge Tribune* put it, “Heretofore we have been dependant [sic] for any knowledge . . . of the negro in the South . . . from the pens of Mrs. Stowe, Thomas Nelson Page, Hopkins Smith, Joel Chandler Harris, or some other writer of the Caucasian race. . . . But with the advent in literature of . . . Chesnutt . . . the romantic and dramatic darkey, so long familiar to

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<sup>875</sup> Review of *The Wife of His Youth* in “Books and Authors,” *Boston Courier*, January 21, 1900, page 2, accessed at <http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Reviews/WifeReviews/wife22.html>.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

<sup>877</sup> Review of *The Wife of His Youth* in “Notes on New Books,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 16, 1899, page 13, accessed at <http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Reviews/WifeReviews/wife25.html>.

us, is to be displayed by the real flesh and blood negro, with his own thoughts and aspirations, his joys and sorrows, as he is known to those of his own race.”<sup>878</sup>

### **Resisting Assimilation in the United States and Russia**

American and Russian authors like Chesnutt, Chopin, Chekhov, and others successfully countered many of the nostalgic literary representations of previous decades by creating realistic, sympathetic portrayals of African Americans and peasants that resonated widely. But they were not successful in swaying a smaller group of writers and artists who resisted the assimilation of peasants and freedpeople through critical imagery in literature and illustrated journals. In the United States, Thomas Dixon, Jr., most effectively turned public opinion against African Americans through his inflammatory depictions of freedpeople as a violent group of people who threatened white society. Dixon, a North Carolinian, lawyer, and prolific writer, is best known for his popular trilogy about the Ku Klux Klan that was published between 1902 and 1907.<sup>879</sup> The three novels portray the post-emancipation South as a place in which savage African-American freedpeople, freed from the civilizing restraints of slavery, disrupted white Americans’ way of life and endangered the purity of Southern women. The second novel in the series, *The Clansman* (1905), was adapted into film as David Wark “D.W.” Griffith’s controversial production, entitled *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a pro-Klan movie which shattered records as the highest grossing silent film of its day.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>878</sup> Review of *The Wife of His Youth* “Among the Books,” *The Cambridge Tribune*, December 23, 1899, page 2, accessed at <http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Reviews/WifeReviews/wife6.html>.

<sup>879</sup> Together the novels sold millions of copies. Jeremy Wells, *Romances of the White Man’s Burden: Race, Empire, and the Plantation in American Literature, 1880-1936* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>880</sup> Akiyo Ito Okuda, “‘A Nation Is Born’: Thomas Dixon’s Vision of White Nationhood and His Northern Supporters,” *Journal of American Culture* 32, no. 3 (2009): 218.

Dixon's crude representations of African Americans in his literary trilogy exacerbated racial tensions and sparked significant debate among critics and readers during the early twentieth century.

There is little evidence of Dixon's internal animosity toward African Americans prior to the publication of the first book in the Klan trilogy, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (1902).<sup>881</sup> Dixon tried out different careers as lawyer and later a Baptist minister during the 1880s and 1890s, but changed tack by deciding to devote his energies to the production of literature that criticized racial relations in the post-emancipation United States. *The Leopard's Spots* thrust Dixon into the national spotlight as a divisive figure whose political and racial views appealed to many but repelled others. An examination of correspondence and reviews pertaining to *The Leopard's Spots* reveals that Dixon's writing struck a powerful chord among Americans who believed the assimilation of African Americans was an undesirable solution to the problems of the post-emancipation era.

Disguised as a romance, *The Leopard's Spots* is in fact a condemnation of black civil rights and miscegenation. An examination of the book's original, unpublished introduction reveals that Dixon intended that his work would serve as the mouthpiece of "the Silent South," a voice that "scorns public opinion, defies proper laws, and lives her own life."<sup>882</sup> The novel takes place in rural North Carolina where carpet baggers, planters, and freedpeople struggle for wealth and political power. The story centers on the relationship between two white Southerners, Sallie Worth and Charlie Gaston, but also describes dramatic events such

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<sup>881</sup> James Kinney, "The Rhetoric of Racism: Thomas Dixon and the 'Damned Black Beast,'" *American Literary Realism* 15, no. 2 (1982): 146.

<sup>882</sup> "To the Reader," Original sketch of title page, preface, and dedication of *The Leopard's Spots*, Thomas Dixon Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

as the lynching of a black man who raped a white woman, a crime that Dixon claimed was “unknown absolutely under slavery” and the founding of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>883</sup> Dixon’s freedpeople confirmed early twentieth-century Americans’ worst prejudices and fears: They behaved brutishly after emancipation by “terrorising the country, stealing, burning and murdering;” by raping white women, and by working with the Republican Party to reduce whites’ political and economic power.<sup>884</sup> As a result, *The Leopard’s Spots* resonated not only with disaffected white Southerners who mourned their loss of societal influence, but also with white Northerners and immigrants who resented the African-American migrants with whom they competed for jobs and political and social status in the nation’s growing metropolises.

Reviews from a host of newspapers show how Dixon’s representations of the post-war era deeply appealed to Southerners and Northerners alike. Numerous critics particularly admired the verisimilitude of Dixon’s South; the *Nashville American* declaring that “it is his intentness, his earnestness, and the simple truths he tells which hold us spellbound;” Chicago’s *Evening Post* called the work “so obviously sincere, so undeniably true from the point of view, so righteously wroth, so passionately prophetic,” and the *Atlanta Journal* argued that it was “true to the very letter.”<sup>885</sup> One explanation for the reviewers’ shared opinions lies in the way Dixon artfully blended fact and fiction to appeal to readers’ emotions. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* explains, Dixon produced a love story that was “a

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<sup>883</sup> Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden--1865-1900* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1902), 381.

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>885</sup> “The Points of View: What is Said about ‘The Leopard’s Spots,’ by Thomas Dixon, Jr.” *Clipping*, Box 1, Folder 2, #23, “Miscellaneous Items: Photos, Clippings, 1902-1903,” Thomas Dixon Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.



welcome relief in its spiritual beauty from the realistic passion seen in so many novels of the day,” a tale devoid of “that realism which coarsens.”<sup>886</sup> Thus, Dixon’s representations appealed to readers because he pursued a strategy employed by literary predecessors Page and Harris, that of using historical fiction that eschewed literary realism to shape popular memories of the South. But while Page and Harris encouraged readers to adopt a more sentimental view of the past, Dixon sought to deepen contemporary divisions between blacks and whites. *The Leopard’s Spots* was indeed, as one reviewer warned readers, “a live wire; mind how you tread on it.”<sup>887</sup>

*The Leopard’s Spots* was but the first of three novels that made a powerful impact in American popular culture during the early twentieth century. One of the most controversial authors in U.S. history, Dixon played upon Americans’ deepest anxieties about racial differences to sell millions of books. There is no parallel to *The Leopard’s Spots* in Russia’s literary history, no author who with corresponding effectiveness fortified the existing divisions between former serfs and the members of other estates during the post-emancipation era. But while the American color line was more difficult to cross than the traditional categories that separated Russian aristocrats, merchants, and peasants, educated Russians still harbored their own concerns and biases about the urban peasants who strove to become increasingly integrated into metropolitan life in the 1900s. Censors may have prevented authors from giving voice to these views in writing, but one place where Russians were permitted to express their opinions with a greater degree of freedom was in satirical illustrated journals.

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<sup>886</sup> Ibid.

<sup>887</sup> Ibid.

Russia's foremost satirical journal, *Strekoza*, was the nation's self-proclaimed "artistic and humorous magazine." Founded in 1875, *Strekoza* published on a weekly basis and targeted a mass urban readership through its stories and cartoons. As a publication that purported to focus on humorous topics, *Strekoza*'s artists had the unique ability to address controversial issues of contemporary relevance through satire. An examination of poetry and illustrations from *Strekoza*'s late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century issues reveals that the magazine published some of the nation's boldest and most critical representations of the peasantry. There are four general categories of illustrations that disparaged the peasants; these typically depicted men and women as drunk, violent, idiotic, or unable to assimilate into urban life. Such representations drew from contemporary stereotypes of the peasantry, some of which reflected real problems such as alcoholism and poverty, and they served not to evoke sympathy in readers but to elicit their contempt.

Images of brawling male peasants were exceedingly common in *Strekoza*'s pages during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries. For instance, a cartoon from the April 15, 1890, issue entitled "Methods of Treatment" included an illustration of three urban male peasants punching and kicking one another under the heading "Electricity."<sup>888</sup> A sketch from March 18, 1890, sent a similar message that suggested peasants were constantly engaged in senseless violent activity; the "Lunch Menu" cartoon depicts the faces of members of different Russian estates and the male urban peasant, the "meatball," sports a black eye. Such behavior was classified under the label of "hooliganism," the catch-all term for urban crime in Russia between 1900 and 1905. Through her analysis of Saint Petersburg newspapers, Russianist Joan Neuberger has found that members of the upper classes believed

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<sup>888</sup> "Sposoby lecheniia," *Strekoza*, no. 15, April 15, 1890, no. 15, page 5.

hooliganism was on the rise during this period; they “perceived an increase in rowdy public drunkenness,” particularly on holidays or other days of rest, and worried that hooliganism “had become a sign of urban social disintegration and a symbol of the ‘degeneracy’ and ‘danger’ of the urban lower classes.”<sup>889</sup> Cartoons depicting violent confrontations between urban peasants serve as additional evidence of these cultural anxieties.

*Strekoza*’s illustrators also depicted the peasantry’s abuse of alcohol both in modern cities and seemingly backward, stagnant villages. A series of silhouettes called “Topical Terms” depicts different urban groups engaging in activities that illustrated phrases like “Shorter Working Hours,” “Improving the [quality of] life,” “Strike,” and “Increase of Contentment.”<sup>890</sup> Here, *Strekoza* pokes fun at new vocabulary expressing the labor concerns of the working classes that were increasingly used in public discourse following the Revolution of 1905. Under the phrase “Holiday Break,” an urban peasant lies unconscious on a park bench while his compatriot chugs alcohol from a flask, *Strekoza*’s interpretation of how peasants might use their newfound leisure time. In an additional scene, “Shorter Working Hours,” two peasants bring home a friend who lies unconscious in their wagon. Depictions of peasant alcoholism were not limited to cities where fears of “hooliganism” abounded.

An illustrated poem entitled “Holiday in the Countryside” mocks the peasantry through text and illustrations that parody idyllic representations of tranquil rural life. The poem begins in a romantic style, introducing readers to a village where “the whole of nature

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<sup>889</sup> Joan Neuberger, “Stories of the Street: Hooliganism in the St. Petersburg Popular Press,” *Slavic Review* 48, no. 2 (1989): 177.

<sup>890</sup> “Zlobodnevnye terminy,” *Strekoza*, October 16, 1905, no. 42, pages 8-9.

is breathing blissfully,” before focusing on the town’s wretched inhabitants.<sup>891</sup> One drunken peasant sleeps under a wagon, oblivious to the noisy fight between two married peasants, while others stand about smoking or singing tunes. At the far end of the village, the poem concludes, “A crowd of peasants drink vodka, and, with stomach full of porridge, the peasant Sebastian lies asleep in a ditch.”<sup>892</sup> This unflattering portrait of rural life ridiculed the concept of the noble peasant promoted by Slavophiles and Populists at different moments during the preceding century. *Strekoza*’s representations ultimately showed readers that, rural or urban, unassimilated peasants posed a problem to Russian society.

Urbanites in particular believed that peasant behaviors like drunkenness and violence diminished their quality of life during the early twentieth century, particularly in metropolitan areas where members of different estates intermingled in shared public spaces. But educated Russians perceived peasants as threatening in a third, important way that related to their anti-modern proclivities. During the late nineteenth century, ethnographers, anthropologists, Populists, and members of the Society of Traveling Art Exhibits viewed the peasantry’s traditions with great interest and sought to preserve their customs through collection, transcription, and art. But to urban elites living in metropolitan centers during the early twentieth century, a period when mass epidemics swept through cities, the peasantry’s instinctive resistance to change appeared to endanger public safety. Russia, a nation stricken by cholera more frequently than any other European country, experienced several notable

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<sup>891</sup> N.V.M., “Prazdnik v derevne,” *Strekoza*, June 5, 1905, no. 23, page 6.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

outbreaks that affected both rural and urban areas in 1892, 1904, and 1907.<sup>893</sup> Nancy Frieden has found that the epidemic of 1892 in particular “radicalized the medical profession” because the government, unable to cope with the scale of the disease on its own, cooperated with *zemstva*, regional medical groups, and doctors to provide care to the people.<sup>894</sup> Together, these organizations and individuals sought to educate the public about the ways in which they could reduce the likelihood of contracting cholera.

The illustrators of *Strekoza*, however, presented their modern advice as going unheeded in a cartoon that depicts urban peasants stubbornly refusing to follow good health practices. Entitled “Anti-Cholera Measures,” the cartoon features images and text portraying foolish men, women, and children deceptively behaving counter to the advice of the Sanitary Commission.<sup>895</sup> For instance, the text beneath a picture of an urban peasant selling fish with monstrous skulls to a middle class urban denizen reads, “All measures taken for live fish cages on the [river] Fontanka ensure that the fish sold to consumers have been of the highest quality.”<sup>896</sup> Behind the urban peasant stands a woman in a kerchief, possibly his wife, who fills with tap water a jug labeled “fresh milk.”<sup>897</sup> Beneath her, the text advises, “It is very healthful and especially recommended to drink a glass of pure, undiluted, untouched milk as an anti-cholera measure.”<sup>898</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> Charlotte E. Henze, *Disease, Health Care and Government in Late Imperial Russia: Life and Death on the Volga, 1823-1914* (London: Routledge, 2010), 4, 11.

<sup>894</sup> Nancy Mandelker Frieden, *Russian Physicians in an Era of Reform and Revolution, 1856-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 284.

<sup>895</sup> “Antikholernye mery,” *Strekoza*, September 25, 1905, no. 39, pages 8-9.

<sup>896</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>897</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>898</sup> *Ibid.*

A related image depicts a peasant boy similarly striving to deceive consumers through cost-cutting actions that had the potential to spread disease. The child dips his cup into the river in front of a factory in order to fill up a pitcher of “Raspberry Kvas;” he will dye the water fuchsia and sell it to customers seeking to follow the anti-cholera advice that drinking the juice is a healthy way to quench their thirst.<sup>899</sup> A final scene takes viewers inside an apartment where three disheveled peasants live in absolute squalor. The father eats soup at a filthy table, a mother snores on a fly-covered bed, and a child squats on the floor amid rats and trash, smoking a pipe. The textual description emphasizes the importance of keeping urban apartments clean so that the cholera virus will have nowhere to thrive.<sup>900</sup>

This substantive cartoon suggests that *Strekoza*’s illustrators viewed the peasantry as an uncivilized group of people who, in their desire to save money, put the health of their customers at risk. Refusing to adhere to modern recommendations about sanitary practices, men, women, and children alike deliberately lied to consumers about the quality of the goods they sold. *Strekoza*’s representations of the peasantry as simpleminded and deceitful likely confirmed some readers’ anxieties about the peasantry’s inability to serve as cooperative urban citizens. Although their status as an unprogressive people inspired artists and authors during the 1870s and 1880s, these qualities also troubled many educated Russians in the 1890s and 1900s, including the illustrators of *Strekoza*, whose views are manifested in their exaggerated, disparaging representations of peasants. As Chekhov lamented in a letter commenting on socialists’ conversations with the peasantry during the epidemic of 1892,

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<sup>899</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid.

“Why lie to the people? Why assure them that they are right to be ignorant and that their crass prejudices are the holy truth?”<sup>901</sup> For Chekhov and others, the time seemed right to discuss what they perceived as the peasantry’s flaws and to urge them to abandon their anti-modern ways.

## **Conclusion**

At the turn of the twentieth century, authors and illustrators produced a greater range of representations of Russian peasants and African Americans than ever before. The sentimental or oversimplified depictions of previous decades gave way to images that were sophisticated and multifaceted, particularly in their capacity to illustrate the experiences of newer groups like mixed-race communities of freedpeople or migrant peasants. Other portrayals, often created by Americans and Russians who felt threatened by the former bondsmen’s gradual rise and by their own loss of power, disparaged them in literature or cartoons. Although one might have predicted that greater diversity in the types of cultural representations would have led to better relations between disparate societal groups, historical events suggest otherwise.

In the United States, race riots between blacks and whites plagued Northern and Southern cities alike during the first decade of the twentieth century, with white mob violence against blacks occurring in New York, New Orleans, and Atlanta. Racial tensions were exacerbated by job competition between different ethnic groups and sensationalized newspaper reports about growing crime. Together, these dynamics contributed to an environment in which lower and middle-class whites jumped at the opportunity to unleash

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<sup>901</sup> Anton Chekhov to Alexei Suvorin, August 1, 1892, in Philip Callow, *Chekhov: The Hidden Ground* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001), 200.

their anger on black migrants. Early twentieth-century Russia was similarly unstable despite the absence of racial tension between the members of different estates. Rural peasants remained overburdened by redemption payments, while urban peasants labored under appalling conditions in factories, prompting both groups to protest their status as the lowest, most mistreated members of Russian society. The Revolution of 1905 brought about important policy changes, such as the abolishment of redemption payments, but did not prevent the Revolution of 1917 and its overthrow of the Romanov government. Thus, the range of cultural representations of peasants and African Americans may have led to growing awareness among educated Russians and Americans, but their newfound consciousness did not lead to peace.



## CONCLUSION

“As we gaze through the dark gloom into the past . . . and offer comparisons with other races condemned as [the African American] has been to a life of serfdom, all history suffers for a single sentence to prove that any other race so enchained . . . to all the graces . . . in fifty years challenge[d] . . . the makers of civilization themselves,” declared journalist Dr. M.A. Majors in the *Indianapolis Freedman* on the fiftieth anniversary of Lincoln’s issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>902</sup> Writing for the nation’s first illustrated black newspaper, Majors lauded the progress African Americans had made in education, business, and politics during the half-century that followed the abolition of slavery.

By contrast, other commentators reflecting upon the occasion emphasized the ways in which African Americans living in the United States remained oppressed. In a speech to the Massachusetts General Assembly, William H. Lewis, the first black Assistant Attorney General and the son of a freedman, argued that it was imperative for early twentieth-century Americans to continue fighting to secure civil rights for African Americans, proclaiming, “The duty of the hour is to unshackle him and make him wholly free.”<sup>903</sup> Lewis believed that Americans still viewed one another through the lens of race, a category enshrined in law that produced for African Americans what Lewis understatedly called “vexatious annoyances of

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<sup>902</sup> Dr. M.A. Majors, “Illinois National Half-Century Anniversary of Negro Freedom, 1865-1915,” *Freeman*, December 20, 1913, page 8.

<sup>903</sup> “William H. Lewis. Delivers a Masterly Address before the Massachusetts General Assembly,” *Washington Bee*, February 15, 1913, page 4.

color” that contributed to their “present disadvantages and inequalities.”<sup>904</sup> Nonetheless, he possessed an outlook oriented toward future accomplishment, claiming that he cared “nothing for the past” and predicting that “within the next fifty years all these discriminations, disenfranchisements, and segregation will pass away.”<sup>905</sup>

In Russia, the fiftieth anniversary of the issuance of the Emancipation Manifesto provided a similar opportunity for historical reflection, the assessment of contemporary problems, and prediction about the future. Illustrated magazines like *Novoe vremya* (New Time) and *Golos' Moskvy* (Voice of Moscow) featured photographs of former serfs, described as “living witnesses of the era of serfdom,” that were accompanied by text describing their prior positions or current occupations.<sup>906</sup> Other articles discussed Tsar Alexander II’s decision to emancipate the serfs and the consequences of the abolition of serfdom. For example, an article in *Gazeta-Kopeika* (Kopek Gazette) argued that emancipation not only benefited serfs, but also the nation as a whole.<sup>907</sup> Only after the peasants were “freed from the darkness of ignorance” could they “find themselves” and bring about Russia’s subsequent development as a modern nation.<sup>908</sup> The newspaper characterized the liberation of the serfs as “an important turning point” in the fields of “industry, commerce, law, science, and art, all areas that could only develop on the basis of free labor

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<sup>904</sup> Ibid.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid.

<sup>906</sup> *Novoe vremya*, February 19, 1911, vol. 40, page 18, and Supplement to *Golos' Moskvy*, February 19, 1911, page 8.

<sup>907</sup> “19 fevralia 1861g. – 19-fevralia 1911g,” *Gazeta-Kopeika* (*St. Petersburg*), February 19, 1911, no. 929, page 1.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid.

and humanity.”<sup>909</sup> Ultimately, *Gazeta-Kopeika* concluded, the emancipation of the serfs led to the creation of a “new Russia,” a country that could follow the path of modernization “traversed by the other civilized peoples of the world.”<sup>910</sup>

On the anniversaries of the issuance of the Emancipation Manifesto and the Emancipation Proclamation, Russians and Americans in both nations expressed gratitude for the events of the past and put forth hopeful statements about the future. Some intellectuals, like Lewis, acknowledged the important role of literature and art, particularly works produced by black citizens, which fostered an understanding of the black experience.<sup>911</sup> But other early twentieth-century commentators pointed out that authors and artists had been unable to solve the problems relating to post-emancipation assimilation. For instance, Reverend R.C. Ransom marked the centenary of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison’s birth in 1906 with a speech that lamented that the “vital and burning question” about “the place which the Negro is to occupy” remained unanswered.<sup>912</sup> Despite the fact that “The newspaper press and magazines are full of it; literature veils its discussion of the theme under the guise of romance . . . [and it had] invaded the domain of dramatic art,” the problems of the post-emancipation era—racism, political oppression, and more—persisted in the twentieth

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<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

<sup>910</sup> Ibid.

<sup>911</sup> Lewis praises poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and Henry Ossawa Tanner for their contributions to art and literature which “brought “new prestige and glory” to the United States. Dunbar’s poetry in particular “voice[d] the sorrows and griefs [of African Americans] with unrivalled lyric sweetness and purity” and “caught the ear of the world.” “William H. Lewis. Delivers a Masterly Address before the Massachusetts General Assembly,” *Washington Bee*, February 15, 1913, page 4.

<sup>912</sup> Reverend R.C. Ransom, “The Centennial Oration: W.M. Lloyd Garrison,” in The Garrison Centenary Committee of the Suffrage League of Boston and Vicinity, *The Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of William Lloyd Garrison, by the Colored Citizens of Greater Boston* (Boston, 1906), 57.

century.<sup>913</sup> Nineteenth-century authors and artists did not secure for freedpeople the rights of citizenship to which they were entitled, but their cultural representations of African Americans are nonetheless crucial to understanding the post-emancipation era because they shaped national memories of slavery and generated debate about the goals and consequences of abolition. In Russia, too, competing depictions of serfs did not produce unified attitudes toward the peasantry, but artistic portrayals contributed to a national discussion about collective identity and Russia's path of development.

During the late 1850s and early 1860s, poets, authors, and playwrights incorporated sentimental themes into their respective genres of literature to rouse ambivalent populations to action in the fight to abolish serfdom and slavery. Two decades later, when the descendants of planters came of age, these writers produced an abundance of historical fiction that idealized relations between masters and bondsmen and defended the prior generation's enslavement of large segments of the population. Artists also used visual representations of peasants and freedpeople to deliver messages to audiences about national identity and notions of citizenship, while businesses incorporated images in advertisements to convince particular consumer groups to buy their products. By the turn of the twentieth century, peasants and African Americans played a growing part in crafting and disseminating self-representations that drew from first-hand experience rather than imagination. This trend continued through the first half of the twentieth century as greater numbers of peasants and African Americans attended schools, succeeded in business, founded their own journals or newspapers, and made their voices heard in radio and film.

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<sup>913</sup> Ibid.

The 1920s saw the advent of the radio era in Russia (by then known as the Soviet Union) and the United States. It was a period defined by the instantaneous transmission of news, ideas, music, entertainment, and advertising messages to homes across both nations. The earliest radio shows were not designed for black or peasant audiences; in the Soviet Union, rural peasants experienced difficulty comprehending the formal speaking style of announcers and were more dissatisfied with the content of shows than members of the middle and upper classes.<sup>914</sup> Urban African Americans similarly did not hear their style of speaking reflected in radio shows, even in regional programming hosted by black Americans.<sup>915</sup>

As time passed, however, radio programming increasingly targeted the peasantry and African-American listeners, and both groups played greater roles in shaping content and messaging. In the Soviet Union, peasant listeners sent letters to broadcasters expressing their programming preferences, and the Communist state responded by encouraging stations to incorporate traditional instruments or play urban folk songs.<sup>916</sup> The free market and less state regulation played a greater role in shaping programming in the United States, where African-Americans like Jack Cooper (1888-1970) and Hal Jackson (1914-2012) led extremely popular broadcasts targeting black urban listeners during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>917</sup> Their shows contrasted sharply with those of white-owned channels that propagated offensive stereotypes about black Americans which pervaded advertisements and other types of mass

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<sup>914</sup> An analysis of listeners' letters in 1929 revealed the peasantry's comparative disappointment with radio programming. Stephen Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age: A History of Soviet Radio, 1919-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 66.

<sup>915</sup> "Radio Shows and Hosts," in Jessie Carney Smith, *Encyclopedia of African American Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 1176.

<sup>916</sup> Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 66.

<sup>917</sup> "Radio Shows and Hosts," in Jessie Carney Smith, *Encyclopedia of African American Popular Culture*, 1177.

media.<sup>918</sup> By developing and delivering content that reached audiences on a national scale, African Americans represented themselves in popular culture on a scale previously unreachd by their literary and artistic predecessors.

Images of serfs, peasants, slaves, and freedpeople also permeated Russian, Soviet, and American films during the first few decades of the twentieth century. In pre-revolutionary Russia, more than 1,600 silent movies were produced, although only several hundred remain in existence today.<sup>919</sup> Richard Stites has found that the majority of these had dramatic or comedic plots and often contained folkloric elements, while Louise McReynolds argues that early films were often “a medium for constructing an ideologically motivated narrative, a story that depended on the spectator to piece visuals together in the frame of social context.”<sup>920</sup> Some of these movies featured peasant characters; for instance, *The Peasant's Lot* (1912) reflected the early twentieth-century challenges that faced rural families through its depiction of a fire that ruins a bride's economic prospects and forces her to search for work in a city.<sup>921</sup> The film industry, relatively unrestricted during the imperial era, however, changed dramatically after it fell under Soviet control. To many in power, movies were instruments of propaganda used to indoctrinate workers and peasants with Soviet ideology. Regional groups, controlled by Party committees, brought educational films to

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<sup>918</sup> Ibid.

<sup>919</sup> Richard Stites, *Passion and Perception: Essays on Russian Culture* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2010), 290.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid., and Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 254.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid., 299.

rural villages, where they arranged viewings for the peasantry.<sup>922</sup> Most of these early Soviet films did not feature rural peasants or their experience; instead, Peter Kenez argues, they “reflected the intelligentsia’s condescension toward the masses” through inaccurate or stereotypical portrayals.<sup>923</sup> For some peasant viewers, the darker, more realistic films of the imperial era more accurately represented their experiences.

In the United States, African Americans were similarly represented in disparaging or offensive ways in the nation’s earliest films. Seeking to make inexpensive, successful movies, producers depicted the pre-war, Civil-War, or post-bellum eras on the silver screen. Popular films like *In Old Kentucky* (1909) romanticized the antebellum South, while *Birth of a Nation* (1915) portrayed freedpeople as a violent group that threatened to destabilize white society.<sup>924</sup> Other films drew from literature of the preceding century by recreating Sambo and Mammy characters that, Bruce Chadwick argues, not only “reflect[ed] America’s racist stereotypes; they intensified them and turned them into a new kind of black, a Hollywood black, who bore little resemblance to anyone’s history, black or white.”<sup>925</sup> For instance, the Rastus film series depicted a bumbling elderly black character whose comical mishaps entertained white audiences across the nation during the early 1900s.<sup>926</sup> Such representations had a widespread reach, Chadwick concludes, because they “dwarfed small-circulation

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<sup>922</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>923</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Archive, 1992), 93.

<sup>924</sup> Bruce Chadwick, *The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 79.

<sup>925</sup> Ibid.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid., 80.

magazines and hardcover books and visually entrenched . . . [the stereotypical characters] in the American psyche.”<sup>927</sup>

Nonetheless, African Americans directly challenged denigrating white representations by establishing companies like Lincoln Motor Picture Company and the Norman Film Manufacturing Company, two organizations that produced films featuring all-black casts and storylines that appealed to black audiences.<sup>928</sup> Movies like *The Crimson Skull* (1922) depicted cowboys living in an all-black city in Oklahoma, while *The Flying Ace* (1926) portrayed the adventures of a black World War One veteran. These representations of African Americans as protagonists and adventurers provided an important alternative to the paternalistic or critical portrayals in films produced by white-owned companies.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, peasants and African Americans appeared in new forms of media that reached more people than ever before. The abolition of serfdom and slavery seemed increasingly distant as the descendants of former bondsmen made significant achievements in numerous fields. Indeed, the literary, artistic, and advertising portrayals of white Americans and aristocratic Russians who purported to speak on their behalf or who denigrated them during the late nineteenth century still circulated in popular culture as evidenced by the reappearance of archetypical characters and tropes in radio and film. But these textual and visual images were joined by a growing number of representations produced by peasants and, to a greater degree, African Americans who increasingly shaped their own representations in radio, film, and more.

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<sup>927</sup> Ibid.

<sup>928</sup> “From Blackface to Blaxploitation: Representations of African Americans in Film,” *Duke University Libraries*, accessed at <http://exhibits.library.duke.edu/exhibits/show/africanamericansinfilm>.



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