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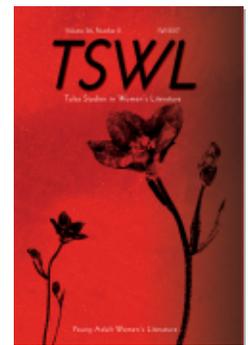
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Black Girls, White Girls, American Girls: Slavery and Racialized Perspectives in Abolitionist and Neoabolitionist Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT: Analyzing abolitionist and neoabolitionist girlhood stories of racial pairing from the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, this essay shows how children's literature about interracial friendship represents differently racialized experiences of and responses to slavery. The article presents fiction by women writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lydia Maria Child alongside Sarah Masters Buckley and Denise Lewis Patrick's American Girl historical fiction series about Cécile and Marie-Grace in order to show how such literature stages free children's relationships to slavery through their own racialization. While nineteenth-century abolitionist children's literature models how to present slavery and racism to free, white children, the American Girl series extends this model to consider how African American children's literature considers black child readers and black children's specialized knowledge about racism. The model of narration and scripting of reading practices in the Cécile and Marie-Grace stories promote cross-racial identification, showing how, because children read from already racialized perspectives that literature also informs, both black and white children might benefit from seeing alternating perspectives of slavery represented. By further re-thinking the boundaries of who might identify with other enslaved or enslavable child characters, we might unveil more radical antiracist potential in this children's literature.

In Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, the white Eva St. Clare insists on hearing about the violence enacted upon Prue, a woman enslaved on a nearby plantation, and her subsequent death. Eva asks, "And why shouldn't I hear it? It an't so much for me to hear it, as for poor Prue to suffer it."¹ The ultimate effect of slavery on this young abolitionist is her own death. In sentimental abolitionist literature, even a white girl can, essentially, die of slavery. This scene raises questions of how stories about slavery are told to children and about the implications of slavery for free children. The debate over whether or not Eva should learn what happened to Prue is an antecedent to present-day discussions about whether white children's "innocence" should be risked in exchange for their learning about the existence of racism and racial violence.² Such conversations ignore that black children and their

parents cannot and must not avoid learning about these things for their own safety and survival.

While enslaved children were not protected from slavery's worst horrors, in nineteenth-century children's literature, the stakes of slavery for free children varied, falling along decidedly racial lines. Experiences of antiblack racism have been and continue to be linked to the United States' history of black people's enslavability. For this reason, we must consider the different racial perspectives presented in children's literature about slavery and the different stakes of slavery for white and black readers. This article examines how representations of slavery in contemporary children's literature animate nineteenth-century discourses about race, racism, and childhood in the early twenty-first century. Taking up these issues, I turn to nineteenth- and twenty-first-century children's literature that deals with slavery's effects on interracial girlhood friendships.

These stories illustrate their characters' differently racialized relationships to slavery. Reading contemporary representations within the context of nineteenth-century antecedents widens our view of how children's literature represents racial difference and antiracism. American Girl's Cécile and Marie-Grace series can be categorized as what Paula Connolly calls "racial-pairing texts," depicting racial relations that "explore the role of free characters in a culture that allows slavery."³ The racial-pairing paradigm (and its particular iteration as interracial girlhood friendship) has roots in nineteenth-century antislavery literature. While some antebellum antislavery texts (such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) emphasized differences between white free and black enslaved characters, others explored interracial relationships between legally free white and black people. The protagonists of Lydia Maria Child's story "Mary French and Susan Easton" (1834) and the American Reform Tract and Book Society's *Harriet and Ellen: or, The Orphan Girls* (1856), like Marie-Grace and Cécile, are all free characters whose respective relationships to slavery are racially dependent. Moreover, these characters' relationships to slavery are explicitly tied to their experiences of either white privilege or other forms of antiblack racism. Stories about interracial friendship have the opportunity to represent differently racialized experiences of and responses to slavery rather than flattening out and equating positions of black and white freedom. They give historical depth to conversations about slavery's relationship to other forms of racial oppression: prejudice, discrimination, exposure to violence, and death. This relationship reveals not simply a dichotomy between enslaved and free children in these texts but foregrounds how even free black children have only precarious freedom in a white-supremacist society, which rendered free black people potentially enslavable.

These racial-pairing stories do not work primarily to generate white sympathy for black characters. Rather, their shifts in narrative perspec-

tive and explorations of how events affect white and black girls differently make clear how racialized violence and precarity are unequally distributed. Sympathy has traditionally been understood as the recognition of the self in the other. Problematically, in United States culture, literary models of interracial sympathy tend to universalize and prioritize whiteness and white life experience as normative positions of readerly identification. If these abolitionist and neoabolitionist racial-pairing stories model any form of sympathy at all, it is one that is based in the recognition of racial difference and the persistent problems of inequality even despite cross-racial friendship.⁴

In this article, I explore thematic and textual similarities between abolitionist and neoabolitionist genres in order to better understand the connections such stories make between race and slavery.⁵ In the American Girl books discussed here, free black children are aware of their racialized relationship to slavery and how it animates their own experiences of racism.⁶ As parents, educators, and scholars argue for and contemplate the work done by racially diverse children's books, American Girl books like the Cécile and Marie-Grace series model how African American children's literature might keep black characters and black child readers—and their specialized knowledge about racism—at the center of these texts.⁷

Reading these late twentieth-century books alongside abolitionist stories like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can illuminate, through both contrast and continuity, the potential of these children's writings to foster antiracist consciousness. Eva St. Clare, for example, finds a parallel in another popular character from Stowe's novel—Topsy, an enslaved and abused girl whose popular image circulated alongside Eva's. As a figure of American children's literature and popular culture, Topsy is a caricature of black girlhood that is informed by racist depictions of black women and contributes to racist assumptions about African American children. In stage plays of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Topsy was often performed in blackface. While Eva was depicted as cherubic with blond curls and a smiling face, Topsy's character accentuated racist disparagements of black people's bodies and questioned the capacity of even free African American people to be incorporated into an American nation. The pairing of Eva and Topsy is no coincidence but reveals the common trope of constructing childhood as white. I begin my discussion of racial-pairing stories with this prominent example of girlhood friendship in order to draw attention to these characters' racialized experiences and also to attend to interracial relations in light of different positions of white privilege and racial oppression. The construction of girlhood, too, is essential to my discussion. As scholars such as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Monique W. Morris have shown, black girls especially experience the racial disparities that extend from histories of antiblack racism and enslavement.⁸ Girlhood children's literature is an important site for

examining how both racial privilege and oppression play out. Attending to literary girl characters' racialized responses to racism, I argue, reveals the limitations and potential of these texts as models for promoting not only interracial friendship but also antiracist interracial alliances.

Friendship and Difference

Assertions of interracial friendship as proof of antiracism ought to be met with skepticism. The argument "but I have a black friend" is rightly ridiculed as insufficient evidence that the white speaker cannot be racist. If a friend is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, someone with whom one shares a "relationship of mutual trust and intimacy," we must consider how structures of inequality might thwart mutuality.⁹ With regard to interracial friendships, we do well to ask who avows friendship and from what position of power. In claims of friendship between slaveholders and enslaved people, such professions attempt to mask inequality. For example, in William Taylor Adams's 1853 moderately antislavery novel *Hatchie, the Guardian Slave; or, The Heiress of Bellevue*, we read that Hatchie was favored by his white mistress and "regarded more as a friend than a slave."¹⁰ One wonders at the nature of the relationship between a slaveholder and her "slave-friend" (p. 56). Alternately, literature that is more overtly antislavery often framed abolitionism as a form of interracial friendship, as in the American Anti-Slavery Society's children's magazine *The Slave's Friend* (1836-1838). As antislavery work was not always antiracist work, such alleged friendship did not necessarily call for racial, social, or political equality.

With these limitations in mind, I seek to identify the work interracial friendship narratives might do even while insufficient in themselves to correct United States cultures of racism. Katharine Capshaw observes that mid-twentieth-century "children's books conspicuously aim to eliminate prejudice through friendship," noting also the limitations of friendship's radical potential for addressing institutionalized racism or socioeconomic disparities.¹¹ Still, Capshaw identifies the ways in which many texts "push toward civil rights intervention by playing on the surface the game of racial liberalism while at the same time employing images and narration that render open-ended questions of structural and economic injustice" (p. 7). The interracial friendship stories on which I focus here function similarly in their presentation of free black and white children's racialized relationships to slavery. I am therefore less interested in the exact nature of friendship in these texts than I am in what these comparisons of white and black children reveal through the device of interracial friendship. Friendship can expose how affective mutuality and structural inequality work against one another in children's racial-pairing literature.

Ultimately, I will discuss how these texts open up questions of racism beyond slavery for their readers. This literature addresses racism from characters' relative positions of racial identification, some presenting models for readers' own racially specific antiracist practices. Reading nineteenth-century abolitionist literature alongside American Girl's twenty-first century historical fiction, I address similarities in how these texts of girlhood friendship address racially specific responses to racism. While most scholars writing on the American Girl line focus on the materialism of its doll collection, they seldom attend to the literature, particularly ignoring American Girl's treatment of black girlhood in their arguments about the line's white, middle-class conservatism.¹² Placing these stories alongside one another, we can see similar representations of black and white children's relationships to slavery. Because slavery was a race-based system of oppression, its legacies continue to influence contemporary antiblack racism. Thinking about how children's literature treats the relationship between slavery and racial difference therefore helps us to understand how these texts model racially specific experiences of and responses to racism.

American Girl's representation of race is more complex than the multiculturalist message of diversity-through-sameness that most discussions of the company's products suggest. As children's literary scholars and educators have argued, children benefit from racial diversity in literature not only when nonwhite children see themselves reflected there but also when such diversity reflects "the true nature of the world around them," providing children with models for how to interact with a racially diverse world.¹³ In discussions of race, the "true nature of the world" must include some explanation of the historical and contemporary realities of racial inequality. Philip Nel puts it rather convincingly: "one of the places that racism hides—and one of the best places to oppose it—is books for young people."¹⁴ American Girl's historical fiction about black characters addresses antiblack racism by explicitly depicting themes of slavery and other antiblack racism. In their racial-pairing stories, we also see the workings of white privilege, as white and black characters' experiences of the world are explicitly compared. This comparison reveals that free black and white characters have different relationships to slavery even though neither have been enslaved themselves. As one prominent and persistent strand of racism denies slavery's efficacy for generations who have not experienced enslavement themselves, this connection is important for understanding the continued resonances of slavery in other and later forms of antiblack racism.

On the surface, American Girl's marketing of the Cécile and Marie-Grace dolls presented these nineteenth-century characters on equal footing in a way that threatened to mask historical racial inequality. Marie-Grace, who is white, and Cécile, who is African American, live in New Orleans in the 1850s. Both girls are free. Their friendship is perhaps ahistorically

egalitarian, but their stories present a complex historical setting of class and racial segregation that complicates the similarity of these girls' social positions. To the extent that literary characters are models for readers, characters positioned in earlier eras contend with historically specific problems with which modern readers can only partially identify. A common narrative of American racial progress relegates slavery to the past, counting it as something the nation has overcome or moved beyond rather than acknowledging its continued influence on contemporary forms of racial oppression, from racist microaggressions and segregation to mass incarceration and police murders of unarmed black people. Assumptions about contemporary readers' historical distance from the experiences of enslaved people risk masking racialized experiences. That is, as black readers experience slavery's continued effects, they may relate differently to reading about slavery than white readers, who do not experience slavery's legacy of antiblack racism. Because abolitionist literature predicated itself on the relevance of slavery for its readers, it serves as one model for addressing that relevance. Children's literature experts, including Kenneth Kidd, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Philip Nel, have discussed how racism in children's literature might be productively addressed to antiracist ends, even as depictions of racism may be troubling to child readers.¹⁵ As with Eva's refusal to be sheltered from knowledge about slavery, abolitionist children's literature often refused to hide slavery and racism from its child readers. For this reason, this body of children's literature serves as a useful model for addressing racism head-on rather than softening descriptions of the effects of slavery and racism on black people as some children's literature has done.¹⁶ I read *American Girls'* historical fiction about slavery alongside antebellum anti-slavery children's literature for these reasons, in order to highlight the ways these stories similarly address connections between slavery and antiblack racism. Furthermore, free characters' racialized experiences of and reactions to slavery serve as models for child readers who may be distanced from personal experiences of slavery but whose relationships to slavery's legacy are similarly racialized.

To discuss how abolitionist and neoabolitionist stories represent things like racial difference, slavery, white privilege, and black enslavability, I work through the differently racialized relationships to slavery represented by these stories' interracial friendships. These texts present characters who acknowledge racial difference, privilege, and oppression, prompting readers to acknowledge rather than deny the ongoing yet differential effects of slavery and racism. Like the nineteenth-century literature I discuss, *American Girl's* interracial friendship stories do not simply represent a colorblind picture of United States multiculturalism; they acknowledge white privilege by presenting it as a problem with which interracial friendships must contend.

Interracial Non-Friendship

In the most popular antebellum depiction of girls' interracial friendship, slavery thwarts "mutual trust and intimacy." Eva St. Clare, the "flower of the South" and the enslaved, supposedly "wicked" Topsy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* might have been real friends under different circumstances, but their historical context forecloses this possibility.¹⁷ Despite Eva's angelic intentions, she and Topsy are not social or legal equals; one girl's family owns the other. Their relationship is more accurately described as one of stewardship rather than friendship, regardless of (or perhaps even because of) Eva's supposedly innocent pretensions. The relationship between Eva and Topsy illustrates the limitations of interracial pairings in abolitionist literature. Stowe's elevation and prioritization of the abolitionist white girl and her caricatured depiction of the enslaved black girl undermine the radical potential of the girls' friendship. As Robin Bernstein and others have shown, Stowe's novel "installed a black-white logic in American visions of childhood" through the pairing of Eva and Topsy.¹⁸ Eva and Topsy's circulation was extended by the larger popular culture surrounding *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, including print adaptations, stage-plays, and visual and material culture that reinforced Stowe's image of girlhood racial inequality—and antiblack racism—well into the twentieth century.

One popular picture-book adaptation of Stowe's novel, *Pictures and Stories from Uncle Tom's Cabin*, attributes Topsy's "naughty ways" to her enslavement and deprivation of formal education.¹⁹ Like other picture-book adaptations of nineteenth-century novels, *Pictures and Stories from Uncle Tom's Cabin* included an abridgement of Stowe's novel, illustrations, and poetry composed for the adaptation. Acknowledging white privilege, the poem "Topsy at the Looking Glass" contrasts Topsy with the assumedly white, privileged readers: "No home; no school, no Bible she had seen, / How bless'd besides poor Topsy we have been!" (p. 24). Still, Topsy is freed and educated by Eva's Aunt Ophelia while Eva suffers an untimely death, rendering the white girl rather than the black one as the ultimate casualty of slavery. Eva dies, seemingly, of an angelic sympathy for the enslaved, which mediates the antislavery sympathy of racist white readers (who may not care about black characters' suffering) through their responses to the death of a white girl. "Topsy Bringing Flowers to Eva" illustrates this reversal of victimhood, which allows Eva to both pity Topsy and usurp her position as the text's suffering child. Eva's position of privilege means that even from her deathbed, she can take a stance of stewardship rather than friendship:

And she like him [the blessed Savior] was kind to all,
And pity on poor Topsy had,
Because the rest would scold and call
Her names, for being black and bad. (p. 26)

Eva is not Topsy's equal but pities the girl her family holds enslaved from her own position of white, slaveholding privilege. Eva is angelic—Christlike even—and Topsy can only regard Eva from her own position among the “lowly” of Stowe's title. Stowe directs pity away from Topsy, however, as Eva becomes the focus of both Topsy's and readers' sympathy. Ironically—though fitting with United States histories of prioritizing white suffering over black suffering—Topsy's concern for Eva takes priority over her own enslavement and abuse. When Eva dies,

Poor Topsy tried to understand—
None had ever taught her so before—
And brought the sweet flowers in her hand,—
The negro girl could do no more. (p. 26)

Topsy cares for Eva more than she worries for herself. This adaptation, too, cares more for Eva than for Topsy. Once Eva dies, Topsy receives a lock of her hair, and this scene is the last we see of the enslaved girl in this version.

While Topsy's concern is framed as a model of Christian care for others, the criticism of black writers such as William G. Allen and James Baldwin, who denounced Stowe's *Uncle Tom* as an unrealistic model of Christian goodness, could also apply to Topsy.²⁰ Eva's death overshadows Topsy's enslavement and abuse, and this overshadowing masks the racial privilege Eva articulates in the comment about Prue's suffering with which this article began. Additionally, Eva displaces any hope for something like racial reciprocity to the afterlife. In *Pictures and Stories from Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she tells her mother that “it might chance that we / Would bring poor Topsy flowers in heaven” (p. 26). Topsy's concern for Eva cannot be returned in this world, where there are no reciprocal interracial exchanges.

Eva and Topsy's relationship renders both girls susceptible to injury from the system of slavery, but the injury that Eva bears is somehow worse. Only the white girl dies from slavery's effects that “sink into my heart,” as Eva tells Tom in Stowe's original text (p. 200). The larger implication here is that as a white child, Eva cannot endure simply learning about slavery, but as a black child, Topsy can endure enslavement itself. Topsy's witness to Eva's death obscures her own suffering as an enslaved child. In this artificial projection of slavery's worst dangers onto the child of a white, slaveholding family, race and slavery are misleadingly divorced from one another. Eva and Topsy illustrate the limitations of interracial friendships that prioritize white feelings over black suffering. This girlhood friendship story is a metaphor of sorts for the phenomenon of this prioritization in United States literary culture. Eva's death hyperbolizes the danger that simply hearing about racial oppression poses for white children. This hyperbole and Eva's prioritization illustrate a failure of interracial friendship, suggesting it is impossible because acknowledging and responding to racial oppression is too much for white children to bear.

Precarious Black Girlhood

Other nineteenth-century antislavery children's literature about interracial friendship more clearly illustrates the fuller stakes of racialized relationships to slavery—and particularly, the precarious nature of free black girls' freedom. In this section and the next, I discuss texts that are more radical than Stowe's in representing egalitarian interracial friendships that move beyond Eva's stewardship over Topsy. While Eva's love for Topsy fails to transcend stewardship and Topsy has only limited interiority in Stowe's novel, other nineteenth-century children's stories depicted egalitarian friendships between black and white girls. Lydia Maria Child's children's story "Mary French and Susan Easton," for example, was first published in the *Juvenile Miscellany* in 1834 and in *The Slave's Friend* in 1836. The story begins with an interracial friendship between two free girls, both of whom are kidnapped into slavery. Child mentions the girls' racial difference, but this difference is not an impediment to their friendship. At the start of Child's story, Mary and Susan are shown playing near their parents' homes, and we learn that "Mary French had no other playmate than little Susan; and they had joyful times together."²¹ Then a traveling peddler arrives upon this scene, lures the children away from their home, and disrupts the childhood joy of "these innocent playmates" (p. 186). Mary and Susan are abused and traumatized by their kidnapper and are sold into slavery, never to see one another again. The kidnapper dyes Mary's skin in order to make her appear black and, therefore, enslaveable, but when the dye wears off, she is discovered to be white and, therefore, necessarily free. Mary's father searches for her, and she is restored to her family. Susan's father, a black, formerly enslaved man, who is himself in danger of being kidnapped by slave traders, is not safe wandering the country in search of his child, and Mr. French never thinks to offer him assistance. Susan is never recovered. Child writes at her story's end, "The only difference between Mary French and Susan Easton is, that the black color could be rubbed off from Mary's skin, while from Susan's it could not" (p. 202).²²

For black people in the nineteenth-century United States, freedom was precarious. As Etusko Taketani writes, Child's story "should be differentiated from . . . *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other children's antislavery literature in that it specifically addresses the plight of free people of color."²³ "Mary French and Susan Easton" reveals that under a white supremacist system of enslavement, no black people's freedom could be taken for granted.²⁴ What the story ultimately challenges is, as Karen Sánchez-Eppler concludes, the conflation of blackness and slavery.²⁵ It recognizes historical connections between blackness and enslavability that bear on free African American people. In the context of the girls' interracial friendship, this connection suggests not only antislavery sentiment but an ideal of racial equality.

As Sánchez-Eppler explains, however, the girls' "equality in difference becomes impossible to maintain" (p. 30). Although the trauma of kidnapping and enslavement extends to the white child, her recovery is predicated on her racial difference from enslaveable people. This contrasts with Eva's death from slavery, which is purely sympathetic. Although Eva dies, she never approaches any danger of long-term enslavement as Mary does.

Differing significantly from the power relations between Eva and Topsy, Child's story suggests that Mary and Susan's relationship is one of equality up until the point of their enslavement. Taketani writes that Mary and Susan's friendship before their kidnapping illustrates "an egalitarian utopia founded on the sisterhood between the white girl and the black girl" (pp. 32-33). The girls' kidnapping illustrates one way equality might prove dangerous for white girls, however. If free children can be kidnapped into slavery, perhaps even white children might be kidnapped. As Child's story and other later writing illustrates, in a world in which racial ancestry is not always apparent, visible whiteness is not protection against enslavement. This kidnapper colors Mary's skin to suggest her enslavability, but later antebellum fiction would show that this step is not necessary, given the social acceptability of enslaving even "white" looking mixed-race people. In this children's story, however, Mary's apparent whiteness proves her freedom. The girls' shared vulnerability is not complete, as Mary and Susan prove to be equally kidnappable in action but not enslaveable in law. Mary's recovery is a literal enactment of white privilege as the revelation of her skin color renders her body necessarily free. Likewise, Child's refusal of a similar recovery for Susan illustrates the social and legal connections between blackness and slavery that threaten even free black children. The story leaves Susan once she is separated from her companion. Her loved ones are left to weep "without hope" of her return, and her enslavement is not visible even to readers, who are told only that "she is no doubt a slave, compelled to labor without receiving any wages for her hard work, and whipped whenever she dares to say that she has a right to be free" (p. 202). This decidedly unhappy ending refuses to highlight enslaved people's resilience, as Connolly calls out some literature for doing to downplay racial oppression (p. 172). Instead, Child offers a bleak picture of even Mary's freedom, for which readers cannot be completely happy because freedom is not universal. Child tells us that "when anything [Mary] said reminded her of her lost playmate, she sobbed aloud" (p. 202). We assume Child desired a similar affective response from her readers regarding both slavery's violence and the unfairness of this race-based system. With this story's reprinting in an explicitly abolitionist context, we might understand the readers to position themselves as "the slave's friend," modeling their own indignity at inequality after Mary's sadness at the loss of her friend.

Describing Susan's permanent blackness as her only difference from Mary is Child's explanation of white privilege. As Carolyn Karcher writes, "the French and Easton families' contrasting reactions to their children's disappearance indicate how dangerously oblivious whites are to the threat slavery represents to their own liberties" (p. 166). Readers who identify with Mary and her freedom are meant to recognize that the benefits of whiteness are unfair. Karcher proposes the children's awareness of racial privilege, as Mary's recourse to whiteness suggests that "she already senses that the easiest means of saving herself lies not in identifying with Susan, but in differentiating herself from her black friend" (p. 167). Once she and Susan have been separated, Mary articulates her freedom by telling people that "*she was a white child*, whom a wicked kidnapper had stolen from her home" (p. 195, emphasis added). Once she is saved, Mary begs someone to go find Susan as well but is told that black people are "used to being slaves" (p. 198). When Mary points out that Susan is free and not used to being enslaved, a white boy tells her, "she'll soon get used to it, though" (pp. 198-99). The story here contends with arguments that slavery is appropriate for black people while showing that white people are protected from it. These facts of both racial oppression and white privilege ultimately end the girls' friendship; Mary and Susan will never see one another again. The supposed equality of their childhood friendship has been disrupted by the harsh reality of racial inequality.

Antiracist Friendship

While Mary and Susan present a more egalitarian model of interracial friendship than Topsy and Eva, a more sustained depiction of interracial friendship appears in *Harriet and Ellen: or, The Orphan Girls*, an abolitionist children's novel published in 1856 by the American Reform Tract and Book Society. This story presents an egalitarian interracial friendship that rivals Mary and Susan's, coupling its antislavery message with antiracism while also acknowledging differently racialized relations to slavery. In *Harriet and Ellen* (attributed simply to "Lois"), the main characters' childhood friendship is supported by their white, northern community. Both girls are adopted—Harriet by her grandparents and Ellen by the Quaker-raised couple who sheltered her fugitive mother before her death. Both Harriet and Ellen are model Christian children and models of Christian friendship. The text acknowledges their differences—"though they loved each other so dearly, [they] were in some respects entirely unlike"—but does not ascribe them solely to race, instead attributing their difference to common variations in personality: "It was just such a difference, children, as you have noticed in your playmates."²⁶ The experience of racial prejudice, however, adversely affects "gentle and loving, . . . sensitive" Ellen (p. 38). Although

her adopted parents try to shield her from racism, and she is presumably light-skinned enough to pass as white in some circumstances, Ellen does not pass in her northern town where her race is commonly known. Ellen is also aware of her black ancestry and the existence of racism: “She knew the history of her mother’s sickness and death, and had accidentally learned that she was colored. She knew the deep-seated prejudice that is entertained almost every where against colored people” (p. 39). Her feelings are hurt when she hears a white, Southern boarding-school classmate Julia, “speak of her servants, of the colored people in general, as if they were made on purpose to serve the whites” (p. 39). Back home in the South, Julia’s discussion with her family (who happens to have been the family that held Ellen’s mother enslaved) about northern racial egalitarianism results in Ellen being enslaved by her mother’s former enslaver.

This story’s antiracist love extends beyond Ellen’s adoptive parents to the relationship between Harriet and Ellen, whose care for one another does not resemble Stowe’s representation of Eva’s stewardship and Topsy’s adoration but—similarly to Mary and Susan—is described as sisterly. The author relates that “the children had grown up together, and were the dearest friends in the world . . . these orphan girls loved each other very much, so much that if they had been sisters, I doubt if they could have loved any better” (pp. 14-15). This sisterly attachment leaves Harriet devastated when Ellen is enslaved and ultimately dies from the physical abuse she suffers, destroying the girls’ utopian childhood. After their community mourns Ellen (whose body has been retrieved by her father and brought north), the narrative concludes by showing the effects of Ellen’s enslavement and death on her white friend. Harriet tells her parents just before her own death (caused presumably by grief), “I am going home. Nelly [Ellen] is there, and we shall never more be separated” (p. 120). Beyond this expectation to meet her childhood friend in heaven, Harriet continues, characterizing racial equality as a Christian value and asking that the words “Jesus loves the poor slave” be written on her own tombstone (p. 121).

Harriet—a free white girl who dies of grief over a friend’s enslavement—echoes Eva but with a difference. Ellen’s prior death—a direct result of the violence she experiences while enslaved—makes the racialized stakes of enslavability clearer; Harriet’s sympathetic death occurs in relative comfort. While Harriet’s death reinforces the story’s sad ending, it does not take the place of (even if it may overshadow) Ellen’s. Lest we understand both girls’ deaths as simply equalizing slavery’s effects on black and white girls alike, the author emphatically presents Harriet’s death not as an occasion for celebrating the angelic white child but as a reminder to readers of the continued enslavement of black people. Slavery “has not only crushed [Harriet’s] young life, but is, to-day, crushing its thousands and tens of thousands of precious human souls, for whom Christ has died”

(p. 120). As Harriet dies, the people around her imagine a community of formerly enslaved people in heaven: “‘Yes,’ replied Mr. Mason, ‘not only will Nelly be there, but myriads more, who have toiled as slaves while here below, walking with Christ, in white, for they are worthy. They have suffered with him, and now they reign with him’” (p. 120). This imagined celestial African American community mirrors the predominantly white northern town in which Harriet and Ellen lived and marks a space in which the girls’ interracial friendship can continue uninhibited by white racism. Like “Mary French and Susan Easton,” *Harriet and Ellen* refuses to mitigate slavery’s violence for its child audience. Lois writes rather unapologetically, “And now, my dear children, my story is ended. It is a sad one, I know, but slavery is a sad thing. I would not willingly fill your young minds with images of sorrow, but this world is not all sunshine; sin has made its mark upon it, and where sin is, there must be misery” (p. 121). She then calls readers to join in antislavery efforts.

The friendships between black and white girls in these antebellum stories illustrate racial injustice as a clear impediment to interracial friendship. As I will later illustrate, *American Girl*’s pairing of Cécile and Marie-Grace resonates with these early depictions of interracial girlhood friendships. Their stories, however, do not depict racial injustice as an unequivocal impediment to interracial friendship between free characters. Instead, they offer a model for understanding and navigating the important racial differences inherent in their characters’ different relationships to slavery and related forms of racial oppression. One effect of this narrative is to call attention to free girls’ relationships to enslavement as predicated on their differently racialized embodiment. When slavery comes into question for these nineteenth-century characters, race supersedes wealth, social standing, or legal status in the United States. Connolly shows that neoabolitionist stories tend to “critique slavery while interrogating the relationship between black slave and free white identity” (p. 175). Although Cécile and Marie-Grace’s stories end much more happily than the antislavery children’s literature I have discussed, they still produce an unresolved discomfort around the topic of slavery, exhibiting what Connolly describes as “the failure, even the inability, of individual intervention” in slavery in neoabolitionist narratives (p. 175). In historical fiction, this discomfort is accompanied by the distance of modern-day readers from the history of enslaved people. Cécile and Marie-Grace’s neoabolitionism resembles earlier children’s literature in which interracial friendship lays a setting for antislavery sentiment. Unlike the abolitionist texts, however, *American Girl* represents slavery in a way that acknowledges how racial difference matters while still representing an egalitarian interracial friendship between free main characters. These twenty-first-century stories refuse to ignore racial

difference or white supremacy, but they also show how a friendship might navigate and acknowledge racial difference and positions of relative power, inviting readers to do the same. While some contemporary readers may hope or even expect that contemporary children's literature would embrace interracial equality more wholeheartedly and effectively than nineteenth-century texts, such assumptions ignore the persistent resonances of slavery in other forms of antiblack racism, which affect children.

American Girl emphasizes the persistence of antiblack racism by featuring racism experienced by free black characters. In addition to Marie-Grace and Cécile's stories from 1853 New Orleans, American Girl's historical fiction addresses antiblack racism with Addy Walker's books (set primarily in 1864 Philadelphia, following Addy's self-emancipation) and Melody Ellison's books (set in 1964 Detroit). Taken together, this arc of American Girl's historical fiction offers a more historically accurate narrative of slavery's legacies rather than a simple progress narrative from slavery to emancipation. I will argue below that American Girl's presentation of Cécile and Marie-Grace's interracial friendship models antiracism for readers by acknowledging slavery's racialized effects on their free black and white characters. These texts perform antiracist work by representing diverse racial experiences, acknowledging racism's systemic violence, refusing to prioritize white feelings and experiences, respecting racial expertise, and modeling interracial friendship as antiracist collaboration.²⁷

White Dolls, Black Dolls

Since their introduction in 1986, American Girl dolls have become a prominent marker of childhood's implication in American consumerism. Often critiqued for their high cost and the consumer culture produced by their wide range of accessories, American Girl has created a brand that simultaneously constructs the notion of American girlhood that it markets. The company's original and continued focus on a line of historically contextualized dolls that are accompanied by historical fiction about each character illustrate the close relationship between children's literary and material culture. American Girl characters become icons of American girlhood even as the company pushes against common understandings of America's national, temporal, and geographic boundaries. The historical fiction provides a model for girls' interactions with the dolls, as the characters themselves have dolls that are featured at various points of the stories and are also reproduced among the accouterments available for purchase. A box of Cécile's accessories, for example, includes a cage and parrot, a facsimile newspaper, a children's book, and a set of Jenny Lind paper dolls. These dolls and their array of objects are what Bernstein calls "scriptive

things,” as these objects’ relationships to one another suggest (even while they do not dictate) the doll play of American Girl’s child customers (p. 12).

As Bernstein and others have shown, children’s material and literary culture are interrelated. By representing its historical characters’ doll play, American Girl’s literature acknowledges the connections between dolls and texts upon which its marketing also builds. American Girl’s historical characters are represented simultaneously as both literary figures and dolls, with the books comprising one possible script for doll play. (I will return to the connections between the American Girl dolls and literature, particularly with regard to race, below.) This connection between literary and material culture is not new; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for example, inspired the production of an array of material ephemera in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including dolls, games, and other items marketed to children.²⁸ In the case of doll play associated with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Bernstein provides accounts of white girls’ alignment with white dolls and literary characters, as both playing and reading are activities in which children simultaneously are racialized and contribute to the production of race. Reading Eva and Topsy as polarized figures of girlhood, Bernstein shows how the topsy-turvy doll serves as a material representation of this oppositional relationship (pp. 15-16, 81-91; see fig. 1). The topsy-turvy doll is constructed as the torso of two dolls—in this case, one black and one white—joined at the waist with their mid-section connected by a skirt that can be flipped to cover either the white or black doll, hiding one while revealing the other. Shirley Samuels compares Mary and Susan to two sides of a topsy-turvy doll, figures that cannot be aligned because of their distinct and oppositional racialization.²⁹ While this opposition seems to suggest the kind of racial antagonism Bernstein discusses in white girls’ violent, racialized play with black dolls (in which white girls report whipping or lynching black dolls), the topsy-turvy doll’s material form dictates that these characters cannot be engaged with simultaneously (p. 87). Eva and Topsy do not interact with one another in this configuration; one can only alternate between them. With opposing sides of the same object, the topsy-turvy configuration is distinctly different from having two, separate dolls. The production of Cécile and Marie-Grace as an interracial doll pairing, therefore, differs from this scripted model of play.

The significance of racialization for doll play has been addressed in various contexts, from analyses of Kenneth and Mamie Clark’s doll tests of the 1940s, in which both black and white children were shown to prefer white dolls to black ones, to fictional representations such as Claudia’s hatred of (rather than longing for) a blue-eyed baby-doll in Toni Morrison’s 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*. In both of these cases, as in Bernstein’s discussions, we see how children’s doll play has been linked to their own racial



Figure 1, A cloth topsy-turvy doll representing Eva and Topsy from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ca. 1855-1880, from the Collection of the New-York Historical Society, object number 1961.30.

performance and identification. American Girl's racial pairing of literary and doll characters adds an interesting case to this discussion of scripted doll play. As scholarship suggests, racialized play is informed by children's racial identification and reflected in the relationship between dolls and literature. When first introduced in 2011, Cécile and Marie-Grace dolls could be purchased separately along with their respective introductory books, *Meet Marie-Grace* and *Meet Cécile*. In a departure from American Girl's previous model, however, these dolls could also be purchased together as the Cécile and Marie-Grace Best Friends Collection, which included both dolls, an accessories set, and both books. Throughout the history of American Girl catalogs, doll play has been most often represented as aligning with racial representation. Overwhelmingly, the girl models in these catalogs are paired with dolls that resemble them, most obviously in terms of racialized traits such as skin tone and hair color and style. American Girl's historical line is comprised mostly of white characters, so white girl models are most prominent throughout the catalogs. However, when American Girl's few nonwhite characters appear, they are most often paired with models who physically resemble them. American Girl followed this trend of racially matched girl and doll pairings in its presentation of Cécile and Marie-Grace. The September 2011 toy catalog's cover shows two girl models, one black and one white, holding Cécile and Marie-Grace dolls, respectively.³⁰ The girls' skin tones and hair types resemble those of the dolls they hold, suggesting something of racial identification in their doll choices. This catalog presents a general idea that girls are supposed to desire dolls that look like themselves.

The intertwining of Cécile's and Marie-Grace's stories (the content of which I will discuss in the following section) work in parallel with the coupling of their dolls. The original format of American Girl's historical fiction was a series of six sequential books written for each character. Cécile and Marie-Grace's stories depart from this format, merging the stories of two main characters. Neither girl is positioned as a supporting character subordinate to the other's story; both are represented on equal footing. American Girl introduced the pair by describing this series' difference from their other historical characters' book formats:

For the first time ever, the stories of two American Girl historical characters weave together in one six-book fiction series! Their friendship begins in *Meet Marie-Grace* and *Meet Cécile*, and the girls' intertwined storyline continues through all six books in the series. Cécile's stories are authored by Denise Lewis Patrick, and Marie-Grace's books are brought to life by Sarah Masters Buckley. This unique format offers the reader alternating perspectives of both characters.³¹

The series alternates perspectives with three books focusing on each character. *Meet Marie-Grace* appears chronologically before *Meet Cécile* in the

book's ordering although the latter's name appears before the former more often in American Girl's marketing of the pair. Catalog descriptions alternate between this ordering of the characters.

Within this equality of representation, however, the racialized pairing of dolls and girls persists, as the catalog pictures a white girl reading *Meet Marie-Grace* and a black girl reading *Meet Cécile*.³² This racial alignment is complicated, though, by the marketing of alternating books in a single series of intertwined stories. If the doll pairing suggests a more complicated kind of scripted play than the catalog representations, this complication is reinforced by the intertwining of Cécile's and Marie-Grace's books. On the aforementioned American Girl toy catalog's cover, the two girls hold their respective dolls but only read a single book, *Meet Cécile*, which the white girl holds as both girls examine it as though reading silently. Despite the catalog's suggestion of racialized doll play, this image shows that Cécile's and Marie-Grace's stories might be read by children who do not identify racially with their protagonists. Notably, this image shows American Girl's scripting of reading practices in which African American children's literature is consumed by both black and nonblack children. The intertwined series of books further opens up the possibility that a single child might identify alternately with Marie-Grace or Cécile or with both characters.

This modeling of interracial reading, with a potentially powerful impact on young readers, is worth stressing here. As Ebony Elizabeth Thomas writes, "African American children's and young adult literature is one such space for exploring . . . strategies of selfhood, not just for black youth, but also for all young people everywhere."³³ As Thomas and others have argued, the importance of black child protagonists for black children who might see themselves reflected in the literature they read is one impetus for activist campaigns like We Need Diverse Books.³⁴ All people benefit from diverse books. White children who see an array of nonwhite characters (and not only those representing a single story) have opportunities to form more complex ideas about race. Thomas explains, "It is through these stories that children and teenagers first form critical consciousness around issues of race, racial difference, diversity, and equality" (p. 37). Fewer than 8 percent of children's and young adult books published in 2015 featured characters of African descent.³⁵ We therefore cannot afford to ignore the American Girl Company's prominent black protagonists in historical children's fiction.

Scholars of children's literature have attended not only to the need for racially diverse characters in children's literature but also have acknowledged the need for racially diverse authors and illustrators producing these texts.³⁶ The racialized authorial position of the various women writers I have discussed is significant to my discussion.³⁷ I have, so far, only addressed interracial friendship literature by white abolitionist

women writers. Sarah M. Buckey, the author of Marie-Grace's stories, is a white woman writer also known for penning several of American Girl's Historical Mysteries books. Cécile's stories were written by Denise Lewis Patrick, an African American woman writer. Patrick would go on to write for American Girl's first post-1864 African American historical character, Melody Ellison, introduced in 2016.³⁸ Patrick is the only African American author I discuss here, importantly qualifying Cécile's books not only as stories with a black protagonist but as African American children's literature—both written by an African American writer and intended (at least in part, according to American Girl's catalogs) for African American children.³⁹ The need for both diverse characters and authors is reflected in American Girl's decision to alternate authors in the Cécile and Marie-Grace series and correlates with the ways racial identification among readers, characters, and authors might align.

While there has been some scholarly focus on the American Girl dolls and their attendant material culture of consumerism, much of this work has been done to the exclusion of discussing American Girl's historical fiction.⁴⁰ The integration of dolls and books in American Girl's marketing undoubtedly influences how their stories are read and experienced by some children. It is also the case, however, that many children necessarily read American Girl books without participating in their culture of doll play. The exclusionary price of the dolls (which critics are always keen to point out as too expensive for many, if not most, American children) dictates that many children read the books alone. American Girl's historical dolls are marketed in sets that include introductory books, but the books and dolls can also be purchased separately. At \$39.95, the Cécile and Marie-Grace boxed set of paperback books is significantly less expensive than a single \$119 doll, making the books more widely accessible.⁴¹ As with other American Girl literature, these stories can stand alone, and the literature continues to exist in library circulation even after American Girl retired or "archived" these characters in 2014.⁴² Toni Fitzgerald's 2010 infographic listed "eighteen million American Girls dolls . . . purchased since their debut in 1986" but an amazing "132 million books sold"—more than seven times as many.⁴³ The presence of American Girl books in public libraries and schools increases this readership.⁴⁴ The fact that many American Girl books remain in circulation even after their dolls are no longer available ensures that some children experience the stories without access to their accompanying doll culture. While I acknowledge that the dolls and books cannot be wholly divorced from one another, the literature on which I will focus in the next section merits closer examination on its own.⁴⁵ For this reason, we should attend to the racial-pairing story as scripting a more complex relation of racialization and power than the dolls alone suggest.

Antiracist American Girls?

The Cécile and Marie-Grace books are set in 1853 New Orleans, where Marie-Grace has newly returned after living in the northeast and Cécile lives with her family of free, francophone black people. Despite the fact that these stories are not centered on slavery, their representation of race, interracial friendship, and free people of color illustrates slavery's complex relationship to racism. Unlike American Girl's books about Addy Walker and her self-emancipated family, there are no enslaved characters in Cécile and Marie-Grace's stories whose interiority becomes visible enough to readers to invite identification with them. However, as readers are invited to identify with the protagonists Marie-Grace or Cécile—or both—we perceive their differently racialized relationships to slavery, despite their similar class positions and similar (though not equal) legal freedom. The intertwining of the two girls' stories illustrates their respective racial perspectives as free characters who are distanced from enslavement and its dangers. Further, American Girl's focus on racial uplift and the normalization of interracial friendship creates antiracist discourse without necessarily divorcing the United States' history of antiblack racism from its history of enslavement.

These books represent differences not only between enslaved and free people but also between those who are enslavable and those who are not. In the series' first book, *Meet Marie-Grace*, Marie-Grace observes "a black boy of about fourteen or fifteen," who is accosted by two white men who tell him, "You look like the slave who ran away from Gray's Plantation" and demand to see his free papers.⁴⁶ The boy claims to be from a family of "*gens de couleur libres*" (free people of color), like Cécile, and the incident becomes an occasion to describe the complex race relations of mid-nineteenth-century New Orleans (p. 14). Marie-Grace's Uncle Luc explains, "In New Orleans, not all people of color are slaves. Many are free, and they have some of the rights that white people have. . . . People of color have to carry papers to prove they are free" (p. 14). Uncle Luc continues, "Some free people of color are wealthy They own businesses and big houses, and they have their own society. But many others are not rich and if they're suspected of being escaped slaves, they have to show papers to show they're free" (p. 15). While Uncle Luc seems fairly unconcerned about the African American boy, Marie-Grace remembers her father having expressed antislavery views in the past. Luc makes no move to intervene in the altercation, and he makes no expressly antislavery statements in this scene. Although he acknowledges that free people of color hold only "some" of the rights white people have, he mentions this as a point of information rather than as a critique. Marie-Grace seems to share her father's antislavery views, but she is confused about the connec-

tion between slavery and the oppression free people of color experience in New Orleans. She expresses concern for the boy only to the extent that she hopes he can produce papers. We never learn if the boy is able to produce free papers or whether he is subsequently enslaved, legally or otherwise. Readers do learn, however, how black children are susceptible to risks that never appear on white children's horizons.

Cécile's observations of racism and slavery differ in that slavery is not simply a matter of her concern for others but something that threatens to encroach upon her own life, as the same white racism that would hold some black people enslaved also produces hostility toward the black middle class. While Cécile is out shopping with her grandfather, two white men tell him, "Watch where you're goin', boy!"⁴⁷ Cécile is surprised by their comment that "these French don't teach their slaves much respect," thinking, "Surely that man didn't think her grandfather, Simon Adolphe Rey, was anybody's slave" (p. 25). Alarmed in a moment when she thinks her grandfather might be assaulted, Cécile confronts one white man, saying "'How dare you sir! . . . This is my grand-père and we are *gens de couleur libres!*' Her voice shook a little, but she held her back straight and her chin high, the way she might if she were onstage" (p. 26).

Rather than warning his granddaughter against this boldness toward white adults and the dangers white supremacist power might present to his family, Grand-père Rey joins her, stepping in to translate Cécile's French to "the Americans," as outsiders to New Orleans are called:

Grand-père put his hand on Cécile's shoulder. He was taller than the American, and so he looked down at him. 'My granddaughter is telling you, monsieur, that she, like myself, is a free person of color. The Rey family is very well known and well thought of in New Orleans, sir. Be careful whom you insult here. (p. 26)

The Rey's class position seems to give them some degree of protection from certain forms of racism. Articulating their position as free people of color seems to distance them sufficiently from the material dangers of antiblack violence and enslavement. However, this encounter of racial harassment shows that freedom does not divorce African American people from associations with slavery.

Later, Cécile's grandfather gives her a lesson in racism, which she seems not to have experienced directly until now. Attributing the episode to the white men's newness to New Orleans, her grandfather gestures toward the city's difference from other parts of America, where structural racism is described as having a harsher impact on the lives of free African Americans. He tells Cécile,

Some of them [the Americans] think there are too many people of color here. Especially free people of color. They don't like it that we own businesses and

homes and attend plays and concerts, just like everyone else. Colored people don't have so much freedom in other parts of our country. (p. 28)

In these scenes that reference slavery, we see that while Marie-Grace only observes racism in the form of recognizing the unnamed African American boy as an enslavable child, Cécile's stories present slavery as overlapping with the racism her family experiences. Thereby, the relation of blackness to slavery has the potential to infringe upon the rights of free people of color. Still, this instance of being briefly mistaken for an enslaved person is as close as Cécile's family members come to slavery's dangers.

The question of who is and who is not enslavable comes to the forefront of these stories in *Marie-Grace and the Orphans* (2011), in which Marie-Grace finds a baby on her family's doorstep. The baby's racial features are ambiguous, and the story explains that race is not always discernable: "The baby's skin was about the same color as her own. But in New Orleans there were so many different shades of skin color that it was sometimes hard to tell who was white and who was a person of color."⁴⁸ Because the woman Marie-Grace sees leaving the baby "had a kerchief around her head . . . like the ones the women in the market wear," her father, Dr. Gardner, fears that the child's mother was enslaved and has left him in an attempt to secure his freedom (p. 8). These fears prove warranted when a man visits Dr. Gardner's office claiming "the child is the rightful property of my employer. . . . A slave ran away a few weeks ago. She'd just given birth, and she took her baby with her. But it's likely she had to give up the boy to avoid detection" (p. 23). Dr. Gardner deters the man from claiming the child by arguing that to do so he would have to pay the baby's considerable medical bills and claiming (falsely) that the child is sickly, weak, and possibly close to death—that is, not valuable as an enslavable commodity.

Dr. Gardner still worries that slaveholders might search for the baby at the orphanage for children of color and decides he will attempt to send Philip (as they have named him) to the white orphanage. He explains to Marie-Grace that the child's admittance depends upon the assumption that he is white. Concerned that the priest who supervises the orphanage might decide the child is not white (and therefore unable to be admitted to a segregated institution), Marie-Grace and Cécile attempt to help the baby pass for white by clothing him in expensive garments unlikely to be worn by an enslaved child. What they realize but do not articulate here is that class and whiteness might be conflated. If the child is perceived to be from a wealthy family, he is more likely to be assumed to be white despite the presence of wealthy families of color like Cécile's in New Orleans. Ultimately, their plan works, and the baby is accepted at the white orphanage, the priest commenting that "he is obviously from a wealthy family" (p. 48). The baby's escape from slavery through passing might have been

the ultimate intention of an enslaved mother who decided to leave her light-skinned child with a white family, but we never hear of this woman again.

This conflation of class, race, and free status stands in contrast to the scene in which Cécile's grandfather is taken to be an enslaved person. While markers of wealth may work to suggest free status, black skin is still a marker associated with slavery. The proximity of blackness to enslavement comes across most clearly in the girls' contrasting knowledge about slavery. Marie-Grace has been taught that slavery is wrong but does not know much else about it, indicating her privileged distance from slavery. She must learn about slavery from other characters: her uncle who is familiar with laws in New Orleans, her antislavery father, and Cécile, a free black child. Cécile, despite her position of class privilege, knows and understands basic facts about slavery, such as laws about slavery's matrilineal inheritance. She tells Marie-Grace, "The law says that if a baby's mother is a slave, then the baby is a slave, too. My grandfather says that the law isn't right. He says everyone deserves to be free.' Her face was serious. 'My family would never, ever keep slaves'" (pp. 35-36). This pausing to take account of Cécile's reaction deprioritizes Marie-Grace's experiences about slavery, but the inclusion of other black characters' more precarious relationships to slavery refuses the narrative of a homogenous black experience. While both Cécile and Marie-Grace distinguish themselves from slaveholders, Cécile must also distance herself and her family from enslaved people in ways that Marie-Grace never has to. Importantly, Marie-Grace's relationship to slavery is not the only—or the most important—relationship on display here. Cécile's superior knowledge about slavery is evidence of her racialized relationship to it; because she is likely to experience related forms of antiblack racism, she has had to gain racial expertise that white children have not. Moreover, Cécile's knowledge shows that black children cannot remain "innocent" about racism. Marie-Grace's learning about slavery not only from adults but also from a black peer provides one model for acknowledging racial difference and also racial experiential expertise, as both girls work together in this antislavery effort.

These books locate the topic of slavery on the margins of their stories, but their representation of differently racialized relationships to slavery refuses to simply downplay related forms of oppression. This recognition is more nuanced than suggested by multiculturalist arguments that American Girl's diversity simply universalizes American girlhood.⁴⁹ However subtly, Cécile and Marie-Grace's different understandings of slavery invite more complex conversations about racism's workings in America, facilitating not only antislavery but also antiracist discourse. Further, these stories present free characters' relative safety from the dangers of enslavement in parallel

to readers' removed historical distance from slavery. By removing their main characters from the dangers of slavery, these neoabolitionist stories echo abolitionist literature framed for white children who are, like contemporary child readers of the American Girl series, distanced from slavery.

Acting from outside slavery's bounds, these stories present their characters with dilemmas urging them to help others who face racial oppression. Set at a time when slavery is legal and accepted by much of white society, we see not only slaveholders and enslaved people but an array of characters whose responses to slavery range from support for extending the institution even to free black people (the men who harass Cécile's grandfather) to apparent neutrality (Marie-Grace's Uncle Luc) to outright disagreement (Dr. Gardner and Cécile). Moreover, as readers learn about slavery and other forms of racism (and their accompanying legality), they see characters break racist laws. Marie-Grace, Cécile, and Dr. Gardner harbor a child who is likely legally enslaved. Readers might, therefore, wonder what other illegal action may be appropriate in the face of unjust laws.

Another radical script suggested by the pairing of Marie-Grace and Cécile is that a single child might identify alternately with either character, not simply along lines of strict personal racial identification. By further rethinking the boundaries of who might identify with enslaved or enslavable child characters, we allow for more radical antiracist potential for these stories. Even while American Girl's catalog representations raise questions of whether and how dolls promote cross-racial identification, the alternating book series actively promotes such identification through its shifting protagonists.

Most scholarly analyses of white-authored abolitionist children's literature have prioritized white child audiences, even though African American children also read such literature.⁵⁰ Inviting or even encouraging readers to identify with both white and black characters asks them to consider different racial perspectives and to compare these perspectives. As they do so, children might better understand racial positions that are different from their own and, thereby, better interpret the relevance of slavery to other iterations of racism. These racial-pairing stories provide an opportunity to understand how literature stages children's relationships to slavery and ongoing racial prejudice with recognition of their own racialized experiences. In other words, campaigns such as We Need Diverse Books are necessary because black children benefit from seeing their perspectives represented and because black and white children read from already racialized perspectives that children's literature informs.

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NOTES

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¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2010), 200. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

² On the concept of racial innocence, see Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

³ Paula T. Connolly, *Slavery in American Children's Literature, 1790-2010* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 174, 173. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴ I have written elsewhere about how abolitionist culture explored sympathy across difference; see Brigitte Fielder, "Animal Humanism: Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionism," *American Quarterly*, 65 (2013), 487-514.

⁵ For discussions of actual rather than fictional enslaved black children in the nineteenth century, see Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future After Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); and Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). For a sustained discussion of nineteenth-century black girlhood, see Nazera Sadiq Wright, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

⁶ I do not intend to argue that children's literature exhibits a general model of progression toward antiracism over time. Though perhaps true, it would hardly be surprising that the American Girl company offers less-racist depictions of African American people than white-authored nineteenth-century texts might have. Rather, my comparison of nineteenth- and twenty-first century children's literature reveals similarities in how these texts depict racialized relationships to slavery.

⁷ “African American” refers to people of African descent in the United States, while “black” refers to people of African descent more generally (though black people’s skin color varies widely, as I discuss further below). I use both of these terms throughout this essay, as both are applicable to the characters I discuss here. I deliberately avoid more archaic—and often offensive—terminology (including the use of “black” as a noun) except where citing historical texts directly. For an excellent note on how one might address the presence of historical (including offensive) racial terminology in literature for children, see Denise Lewis Patrick, “A Note About Language,” in *No Ordinary Sound: A Classic Featuring Melody* (Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing, 2016), n. p.

⁸ See Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw with Priscilla Ocen and Jyoti Nanda, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected* (New York: Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies and African American Policy Forum, 2015); and Monique W. Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2016).

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. “friend, n. and adj.,” accessed 10 November 2016, <http://www.oed.com>.

¹⁰ Warren T. Ashton [William Taylor Adams], *Hatchie, the Guardian Slave; or, The Heiress of Bellevue* (Boston: Mussey and Fitts, 1853), 44. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹¹ Katharine Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 7. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹² A smaller array of work specifically focusing on American Girl’s Addy Walker and other nonwhite characters provide notable exceptions to this larger trend in American Girl scholarship. Such work includes Kim Chuppa-Cornell’s “When Fact Is Stranger than Fiction: Hair in American Girl Stories and Dolls,” *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children’s Literature*, 37 (2013), 107-25; and Ian Elliot, “Connie Porter: Telling it the Way it was,” *Teaching Pre K-8*, October 1994, 40.

¹³ “FAQ,” We Need Diverse Books, accessed 14 September 2017, <http://weneeddiversebooks.org/faq>.

¹⁴ Philip Nel, *Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children’s Literature and the Need for Diverse Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

¹⁵ See, for example, Kenneth Kidd, “‘A’ Is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the ‘Children’s Literature of Atrocity,’” *Children’s Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children’s Literature and the Children’s Literature Association*, 33 (2005), 120-49; Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, “African American Children’s Literature: Liminal Terrains and Strategies for Selfhood,” in *Diversity in Youth Literature: Opening Doors Through Reading*, ed. Jamie Campbell Naidoo and Sarah Park Dahlen (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2013); and Nel, *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?*

¹⁶ For an example of one such controversy about how twenty-first century children’s literature about slavery has softened depictions of black peoples’ experiences of enslavement, see, for example, the discussion of Scholastic’s publication and subsequent recall of *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* by Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, “Children’s Literature About Slavery: The Struggle Continues,” accessed

14 September 2017, <https://storify.com/Ebonyteach/children-s-literature-about-slavery-the-storm-cont>.

¹⁷ For Eva's appellation, see *Little Eva, the Flower of the South* (New York: Phil. J. Cozans, 1853), which was one of many anti-Tom, proslavery adaptations of Stowe's novel. Stowe continually refers to Topsy as "wicked" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see especially chapter twenty, "Topsy."

¹⁸ Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 15. Barbara Hochman also discusses the novel's—and especially Topsy's—implications for African American child readers in "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" and *the Reading Revolution: Race, Literacy, Childhood, and Fiction, 1851-1911* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 205-30. Subsequent references to Bernstein will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁹ *Pictures and Stories from Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: Jewett, 1853), 22. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁰ See William G. Allen, letter to the editor, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 20 May 1852, reprinted in Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Christopher G. Diller (Peterborough: Broadview, 2009), 566-69; and James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 13-28.

²¹ Lydia Maria Child, "Mary French and Susan Easton," *The Juvenile Miscellany*, May/June 1834. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²² The difference between Mary's whiteness and Susan's blackness proves important to a race-based system of enslavement, in which visual racial ambiguity presents a problem. Nineteenth-century abolitionists often demonstrated that race-based enslavement, accompanied by the possibility of racial ambiguity, renders everyone's freedom precarious. Child counters the idea that white-looking people were not permanently enslavable in her 1842 short story "The Quadroons," and this idea has been the subject of countless pieces of abolitionist literature, in which people with very little African ancestry and "white" people who are indistinguishable from "black" people might be enslaved. The historical appendix to *Meet Cécile* also explains the presence of mixed-race people, writing that "many families of color had both African and European heritage, and because of this, there was a wide range of skin colors among *gens de couleur libres* [free people of color], from very dark to very fair"; see Denise Lewis Patrick, *Meet Cécile* (Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing, 2011), 92.

²³ Etsuko Taketani, *U. S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825-1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 32. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁴ Child based her story on the kidnapping and enslavement of an actual white girl whose skin had been dyed black and on the real dangers free people of color faced during the antebellum period. See Carolyn Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 166. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁵ Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 31. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁶ Lois, *Harriet and Ellen: or, The Orphan Girls* (Cincinnati: American Reform Tract and Book Society, 1865), 38, 39. For more on interracial adoption in *Harriet and Ellen*, see Brigitte Fielder, "Those people must have loved her very dearly': Interracial Adoption and Radical Love in Antislavery Children's Literature," *Early*

American Studies, 14 (2016), 749-80. Subsequent references to *Harriet and Ellen* will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁷ These antiracist practices are among those Nel discusses in his “Manifesto for Anti-Racist Children’s Literature,” in *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?*, 202-24.

²⁸ On *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in children’s popular material culture, see Stephen Railton, “Playing Uncle Tom,” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture*, accessed 14 September 2017, <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/tomituds/games.html>.

²⁹ Shirley Samuels, *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 113.

³⁰ *American Girl Toy Catalog*, September 2011, cover. I owe great thanks to Mark Speltz, former senior historian at American Girl, for helping me to obtain the catalogs in which Cécile and Marie-Grace debuted.

³¹ *American Girl Publishing Catalog*, Fall 2011, 4.

³² *American Girl Publishing Catalog*, 1.

³³ Thomas, “African American Children’s Literature,” 34. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³⁴ For more on the We Need Diverse Books campaign and the history of the Twitter hashtag, see “We Need Diverse Books,” accessed 24 May 2017, <http://weneeddiversebooks.tumblr.com>.

³⁵ For this and further statistics on racial diversity in children’s literature in the United States, see “Publishing Statistics on Children’s Books about People of Color and First/Native Nations and by People of Color and First/Native Nations Authors and Illustrators,” Cooperative Children’s Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin, Madison, accessed 26 April 2016, <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>. The 2015 figure is actually higher than in previous years. In 2011 when the Cécile and Marie-Grace books were released, less than 4 percent of published children’s books were about black characters. To compare this representation in publishing to the general population, according to the United States Census Bureau, African American people comprised more than 13 percent of the population in 2014, not including mixed-race black people; see “Quick Facts: United States,” United States Census Bureau, accessed 26 April 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>.

³⁶ See, for example, Thomas’s call in “African American Children’s Literature” for “direct action” regarding the need for African American children’s and young adult literature authors (p. 39).

³⁷ While Cécile’s and Marie-Grace’s stories were alternately authored, the illustrator for the entire series, Christine Kornacki, is white. This fact may be of further significance for larger discussions of who produces popular representations of black characters for children.

³⁸ American Girl introduced Melody’s first books in February 2016. Her doll debuted in August of the same year.

³⁹ For more on African American child readers in an earlier context, see Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane, eds., *Who Writes Black Children: African American Children’s Literature before 1900* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). In my contribution to this volume, “‘No rights that any body is bound to respect’: Pets, Race, and African American Child Readers,” I argue for further attention to African American child readers of white-authored children’s literature.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Jan Susina, "American Girls Collection: Barbies with a Sense of History," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 24 (1999), 130-35; and Nana Osei-Kofi, "American Girls: Breaking Free," *Feminist Formations*, 25, No. 1 (2013), 1-7. Discussions in the popular media also tend to give little or no attention to the accompanying texts; see, for example, Alexandra Petri, "Even More Terrible Things are Happening to the American Girl Doll Brand than You Thought," *ComPost* (blog), *The Washington Post*, 23 April 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/compost/wp/2013/05/01/even-more-terrible-things-are-happening-to-the-american-girl-doll-brand-than-you-thought/>; and Amy Schiller, "American Girls Aren't Radical Anymore," *The Atlantic*, 1 May 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/04/american-girls-arent-radical-anymore/275199>. My own discussion follows, in part, Fred Nielsen's suggestion that "it is possible, perhaps even desirable" to separate the books from the dolls; see Nielsen, "American History through the Eyes of the American Girls," *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*, 25 (2002), 87.

⁴¹ These prices are from the *American Girl Toy Catalog*, September 2011, 4-5. The Cécile and Marie-Grace Best Friends Collection with both dolls, books, and accessories was priced at \$234.

⁴² The periodic archiving of historical dolls (and their historical accoutrements) from availability was not accompanied by the retirement of their books until very recently. Books about all American Girl's archived characters remained in print until late 2014 with the repackaging of some of the original American Girl stories into the longer book format of American Girl's BeForever series (a re-release of the historical fiction).

⁴³ Toni Fitzgerald, "American Girl by the Numbers," *Doll Reader*, November 2010, 8.

⁴⁴ In fact, while revising this piece for publication, I checked out copies of the Marie-Grace and Cécile books from my childhood public library, the Onondaga County Public Library System's Salina Branch in Syracuse, New York. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru and Peggy Kreshel's often-cited study of girls' interactions with the American Girl (AG) dolls notes, "An avenue of future research could be a study of girls who have been exposed to the AG books (in their schools or local libraries), but who cannot afford the AG dolls"; see Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel, "'I'm an American Girl . . . Whatever That Means': Girls Consuming Pleasant Company's American Girl Identity," *Journal of Communication*, 52 (2002), 156.

⁴⁵ In this vein, Chuppa-Cornell draws an important distinction between the cultural work done through American Girl's historical fiction and through their dolls (p. 121). Similarly, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has produced a comparable baggage of material culture, but this has not prevented scholars from reading the novel carefully for what the text itself does. My focus on the American Girl books therefore attempts to give them closer textual analysis that is not subsumed by their relation to American Girl's material culture.

⁴⁶ Sarah M. Buckey, *Meet Marie-Grace* (Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing 2011), 13. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁷ Denise Lewis Patrick, *Meet Cécile* (Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing, 2011), 25. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁸ Buckey, *Marie-Grace and the Orphans* (Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing, 2011), 11. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel, “I’m an American Girl . . . Whatever That Means”; and Adrienne Raphel, “Our Dolls, Ourselves: The History of American Girl,” *The New Yorker*, 15 October 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/currency/2013/10/history-of-american-girl-company-our-dolls-ourselves.html>. Chuppa-Cornell acknowledges that “the historical narratives seem to embrace a deeper understanding of diversity than demonstrated in the dolls” (p. 119).

⁵⁰ On black child readers of white-authored abolitionist children’s literature, see, for example, Hochman, “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” and the *Reading Revolution*; and Fielder, “No rights that any body is bound to respect.”