we have a full test of what the African is in the enjoyment of civil liberty, or of his capacity for self-government, at least in the midst of a people with whom he cannot amalgamate. The result is daily before our eyes, and may be known and read of all men. After a few honorable exceptions, the multitude are by no means as well fed or clothed, and otherwise provided for, as the slaves in their vicinity. They make but little provision against the inclemency of winter, and in sickness are often the objects of public charity. A disposition to live by petty depredations upon society, instead of by honest industry, and a general depravation of morals, are characteristic of the caste. Their retrograde tendency is so obvious, that no doubt is entertained among men of reflection that, but for the props and checks thrown around them by the laws and usages of civilization, they would soon relapse into the savage state...

[A] number of the States of this Union have been supplied with a population who cannot be absorbed by the body politic, but must exist among us, and for so long a time, in a distinct and mental position, provided the means of safety to the whole Union in the coming conflict which is already awakening the fears of the country. If we do not greatly mistake the signs of the times, it is to these States that all eyes and all hopes will be turned as the great bulwarks of American liberty. The African race in these States will give them this advantage of position.

Review the facts of the case. As to that class of population coming into the country with that liberty of choice which intelligence and pecuniary means afford them, the whole land is before them, and few are more welcome than they, whatever may be their errors in religion. But relatively, they make but a small portion of the whole number. The great mass of this coming population necessarily seek the mental offices of society as the only means of living. This evil is already sorely felt in some portions of our country, and as our unoccupied lands shall be filled up by Western as well as Eastern immigration, this will be still more generally and deeply felt. For all these are absorbed by the body politic, and form a part of the sovereignty of the country.

But what portion of our country is it which now suffers, and is chiefly threatened in future with this heavy calamity? Not the South! This is evident. Our mental offices are already occupied by a race which cannot be absorbed, and who therefore can never form a part of the sovereignty of the country. Hence, there is no room for the menials of either Europe or China. The door of Providence is closed against their admission. The foreign population which finds its way into the South are, for the most part, a valued and welcome class of society. No: it is in the midst of the Northern States, and those new States which repudiate the African race, that these shoals of vice, superstition, and ignorance—these hordes of modern Canaanites—are gathering, "thick as the frogs and flies of Egypt." Upon these States, and not upon the South, this great and increasing calamity is to display its strength.

6. George Fitzhugh Defends Wage Slavery (1857)

By levying charges of "wage slavery" against Northern industrialists, Southern planters sought to deflect criticism of their own coercive labor arrangements. But

B. The White Southern View of Slavery

Few went as far as writer George Fitzhugh, who argued that white workers would actually be better off in bondage. In a searing indictment of capitalist society, Fitzhugh lauded the virtues of Southern paternalism and predicted that eventually all society would be composed of masters and slaves. While Southerners generally applauded his effort to put slavery on a higher moral plane, Northerners reacted to Fitzhugh's treatise with near-universal disdain. Prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison called the author "crack-brained" and "demonical," taking ample space in his Liberator to refute Fitzhugh's vitriolic pronouncements. What might Northerners have found most objectionable in the following excerpt? Does Fitzhugh offer an accurate portrait of Southern slavery? Are his criticisms of wage labor valid?

Until the lands of America are appropriated by a few, population becomes dense, competition among laborers active, employment uncertain, and wages low, the personal liberty of all the whites will continue to be a blessing. We have vast unsettled territories; population may cease to increase slowly, as in most countries, and many centuries may elapse before the question will be practically suggested, whether slavery to capital be preferable to slavery to human masters. But the negro has neither energy nor enterprise, and, even in our sparser population, finds, with his improvident habits, that his liberty is a curse to himself, and a greater curse to the society around him. These considerations, and others equally obvious, have induced the South to attempt to defend negro slavery as an exceptional institution, admitting, nay asserting, that slavery, in the general or in the abstract, is morally wrong, and against common right. With singular inconsistency, after making this admission, which admits away the authority of the Bible, of profane history, and of the almost universal practice of mankind—they turn round and attempt to bolster up the cause of negro slavery by these very exploded authorities. If we mean not to repudiate all divine, and almost all human authority in favor of slavery, we must vindicate that institution in the abstract.

To insist that a status of society, which has been almost universal, and which is expressly and continually justified by Holy Writ, is its natural, normal, and necessary state, under the ordinary circumstances, is on its face a plausible and probable proposition. To insist on less, is to yield our cause, and to give up our religion; for if white slavery be morally wrong, be a violation of natural rights, the Bible cannot be true....

The world at large looks on negro slavery as much the worst form of slavery; because it is only acquainted with West India slavery. Abolition never arose till negro slavery was instituted; and now abolition is only directed against negro slavery. There is no philanthropic crusade attempting to set free the white slaves of Eastern Europe and of Asia. The world, then, is prepared for the defence of slavery in the abstract—it is prejudiced only against negro slavery. These prejudices were in their origin well founded. The Slave Trade, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and West India slavery were enough to rouse the most torpid philanthropy.

But our Southern slavery has become a benign and protective institution, and our negroes are confessedly better off than any free laboring population in the world.
Chapter 16  The South and the Slavery Controversy, 1793–1860

How can we contend that white slavery is wrong, whilst all the great body of free laborers are starving; and slaves, white or black, throughout the world, are enjoying comfort?

We write in the cause of Truth and Humanity, and will not play the advocate for master or for slave.

The aversion to negroes, the antipathy of race, is much greater at the North than at the South; and it is very probable that this antipathy to the person of the negro, is confounded with or generates hatred of the institution with which he is usually connected. Hatred to slavery is very generally little more than hatred of negroes.

There is one strong argument in favor of negro slavery over all other slavery: that he, being unfitted for the mechanic arts, for trade, and all skillful pursuits, leaves those pursuits to be carried on by the whites; and does not bring all industry into disrepute, as in Greece and Rome, where the slaves were not only the artists and mechanics, but also the merchants.

C. The Abolitionist Crusade

1. William Lloyd Garrison Launches The Liberator (1831)

Mild-appearing William Lloyd Garrison, the most impassioned of the abolitionists, began publication of his incendiary weekly newspaper, The Liberator, with the following trumpet blast. Despite a subscription list of not more than three thousand and embarrassing annual deficits, he continued the journal for thirty-five years—until slavery was legally ended. The rude woodcut at the top of the front page showing a slave auction near the Capitol infuriated the South; the state of Georgia offered $5,000 for Garrison’s arrest and conviction. Jailed in Baltimore for libel, mobbed in Boston, and jeered at while on the lecture platform, he not only outraged the South but also angered northern conservatives and even moderate abolitionists. What specific measures did he advocate? Did he address his appeal exclusively to the South? Has posterity vindicated him, as he claimed it would?

During my recent tours for the purpose of exciting the minds of the people by a series of discourses on the subject of slavery, every place that I visited gave fresh evidence of the fact that a greater revolution in public sentiment was to be effected in the free states—and particularly in New England—than at the South. I found contempt more bitter, opposition more active, detraction more relentless, prejudice more stubborn, and apathy more frozen, than among slaveowners themselves. Of course, there were individual exceptions to the contrary.

This state of things afflicted but did not dishearten me. I determined, at every hazard, to lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation, within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birthplace of liberty. That standard is now unfurled;

1The Liberator (Boston), January 1, 1831.