

## Practicing Sympathy: The Politics of Fellow-Feeling, Free Labor, and (Trans)Formative Tears in *The Slave's Friend*

A miniature magazine, *The Slave's Friend*, was fitted for children's hands and its few pages were packed with lessons for children's moral and political education. Composed and circulated in the second half of the 1830s by the American Anti-Slavery Society, *The Slave's Friend* used discourses of sentimentality and free labor ideology, as well as religious messaging, images of suffering, and emulable dialogues to encourage a specific formulation of the child abolitionist. Grounded in a belief in the power of practiced sympathy, "fellow-feeling," *The Slave's Friend* illustrated the possibility of a transformable self (through intellectual and material exercises). But how far might this transformation go? *The Slave's Friend* frequently included stories of the joyous move from slavery into freedom, seeming to offer a vision of a transformed society. However, it more often highlighted the transformation of the (white) abolitionist child.

White children's tears seem to usher them into moral subjectivity and a recognition of themselves as empowered agents. Their tears have a baptismal effect, but this power appears limited to the white subject.

*The Slave's Friend* is a complicated text with a more complicated legacy. The magazine emphasized the mobilizing power of *felt* suffering and positioned subjects without direct political or economic access (enslaved persons, women, and children) as potential actors in the effort to disrupt the material and ideological basis of slavery. It registered domestic labor as politically and publically important. But the pages of *The Slave's Friend* framed images of the suffering of enslaved persons as central tools in transforming white children's moral identity, provoking their tears, but also enabling them to recognize their own political and economic power. What does it mean to center the suffering of enslaved persons as the occasion for one's moral and political

transformation? How can we grapple with the legacy of a magazine that emphasized the power of women and children to operate as political actors, while still questioning its emphasis on the transformative power of white tears? This presentation investigates the complex formulation of agency, mutability, and (self)transformative sympathy in *The Slaves' Friend* and asks what purpose white tears can serve.