INTRODUCTORY READING


Adaptation

Opened in 1847, Plymouth Church was a well-known church in Brooklyn during the 19th Century. Reverend Henry Ward Beecher was Plymouth’s first preacher. Beecher became very popular because of his sermons and abolitionist beliefs. Beecher’s powerful preaching and outspoken opposition to slavery filled the pews to overflowing, so it was a blessing in disguise just two years after it was founded when fire damaged Plymouth’s original church. A new red brick sanctuary seating 2,800 was quickly constructed behind the ruined original. The original building was later rebuilt to house offices and Sunday school rooms.

Under Beecher’s influence, Plymouth Church was connected with the Underground Railroad – the secretive network of people who helped slaves escape to the North and Canada. It even had the nickname "Grand Central Depot" and it was well known that members of Plymouth helped runaway slaves escape to freedom. They gave them food, clothing and a place to hide.

Beecher’s sermons impressed the country. Sunday morning ferries or “Beecher Boats” from New York City to Brooklyn (the Brooklyn Bridge was not built yet) brought thousands over to see him preach. Beecher created public events to support the fight against slavery. He even staged mock “auctions” in Plymouth, persuading the congregation to buy freedom for the slaves. The most famous auction occurred on February 5, 1860, when Beecher urged them to buy the freedom of a pretty 9-year-old from Washington, D.C., Sally Maria Diggs, called Pink for her light complexion.

After the service he called her to the platform and they passed the collection plate and raised $900, which is about $10,000 in today’s dollars. Individuals gave jewelry as well as cash. Beecher fetched a ring from the collection plate, slipped it onto Pink’s finger and declared, “With this ring, I thee wed to freedom.”

During another service, he trampled the chains that had bound John Brown. He invited famous anti-slavery advocates to speak at Plymouth, including William Lloyd Garrison, Sojourner Truth, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and Frederick Douglass.

Many celebrated Americans became a part of Plymouth’s history. In February 1860, future U.S. president Abraham Lincoln was invited to speak at Plymouth Church. The Young Men’s Republican Union, perhaps fearing that few people would cross the icy East River, moved the speech at the last moment to The Great Hall of The Cooper Union in Manhattan. This momentous speech, in which Lincoln stated his position against slavery, is credited with winning him the Republican nomination for the presidency. In spite of the relocation, Lincoln did make a point to attend church at Plymouth the day before, and his pew is now marked with a silver plaque. Three weeks later, after campaigning in New Hampshire, Lincoln again worshiped at Plymouth. Plymouth is the only church in New York City Lincoln ever attended.
1. Describe what you see happening in this image.

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2. Why did the preacher, Henry Ward Beecher, hold slave auctions? What does that say about his belief in slavery?

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3. Why do you think the crowd is so large?

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4. Who do you think attended the auctions? What does this tell you about their beliefs?

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**Document 1 - Mr. Beecher Selling a Beautiful Slave Girl in his Pulpit. 1856. Print. Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library.**

1. What are the two photographs in Documents 2 and 3 of? How do you know?

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2. Describe how the building and the surrounding area changed between 1910 and 1954. Why do you think the building and/or the area around the building changed?

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1. Most freedom auctions were held for slaves with light skin. Why do you think this was the case?

2. What did Henry Ward Beecher do for Pink (take a look at the introductory reading if you need help)? Why is her story important?

3. What do you think Henry Ward Beecher meant when he took the ring, gave it to Pink and said, “With this ring I do wed thee to freedom?”

4. Pinky returned to the Church for their 80th anniversary and donated the ring Henry Ward Beecher gave her. Why do you think she did that?

Transcription:

"To all persons whom it may concern:

Whereas on the fifth day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher of the city of Brooklyn state of New York presented to the congregation of Plymouth church of said city of which congregation he is Pastor the case of Sally Maria Diggs—usually called Pink who was then a slave child offered for sale in the city of Washington District of Columbia and whereas the said Beecher and congregation were desirous that the said slave child should be set free in order that she might not be separated from her Grandmother with whom she had lived up to that date and Whereas a contribution of money was made by the said congregation on the day above mentioned for the purpose of securing the freedom of the said slave child which money was put into my hands by the said Preacher with instructions to take the manner of servitude or service to me—my Executors Administrators heirs and assigns forever.

In testimony whereof I have hereto set my hand and seal this Eleventh day of February one thousand eight hundred and sixty

Signed sealed and delivered in presence of
Charles Naylor
Thomas Donne
John F. Blake (SEAL)"

Document 5 – Bill of Sale for Sally Maria Diggs aka Pink. 8 Feb 1860. Print. Brooklyn Collection Brooklyn Public Library.
1. When was Pink sold?

2. According to this letter, where would Pink live when freed?

3. Why do you think it was important to draft a letter stating Pink was free?

4. Where was Pink a slave?

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Document 5 – *Bill of Sale for Sally Maria Diggs aka Pink*. 8 Feb 1860. Print. Brooklyn Collection
Brooklyn Public Library.

Caption: Mrs. Rose Ward Hunt and another woman, both wearing hats, standing at left of (Mrs. Hunt is looking directly at) statue of Henry Ward Beecher on pedestal with two smaller statues at base of pedestal, right (one woman comforting another) at Plymouth Church, 75 Hicks Street. At left, column, and far left, bas-relief sculpture of Abraham Lincoln.
1. Why do you think a statue was built for Henry Ward Beecher at Plymouth Church?

2. Look at the two women to the left of the statue. It is said that one of the women was Rose Ward (Pink). How do you think Rose Ward felt when she returned to the site where she was freed from slavery?

3. Who is the man engraved on the church (see left side of photograph)? Why do you think he is memorialized at Plymouth Church?
Purchase of a Slave in Plymouth Church—Yesterday the usual religious exercises of Plymouth Church were varied by an episode always interesting to the congregation, the purchase of a slave. The object of interest was a little girl nine years old, nearly white, having only one sixteenth of negro blood, or half an octoroon, a gradation of amalgamation not specifically designated. This interesting chattel, said to be the daughter of a physician at Washington, was held to be worth $800, which sum was of course raised accompanied by a good deal of enthusiasm. Mr. Beecher took the child into the pulpit with him, and quite regained the confidence of the ultra portion of his congregation whose faith in him had been somewhat shaken by his recent outspoken conservative views on slavery.
1. Summarize the article in three sentences:

2. According to the article, what is an octoroon?

3. What were people’s feelings toward Beecher before this incident? How do you know?

Give The Negro The Ballot.

I say, enfranchise the negro, not because it’s polite, nor on the ground of safety, but first because it’s his right as a man. Every man who is under the law has a right to assist in training it, every man under the magistrate has a right to a voice in his election. This right goes with all faces and belongs to all men, and on this ground I advocate the black man’s right to vote. Grant that he is not prepared for it. When will he be? How will he become so? Let him try it, as a boy tries his skates; he may tumble once or twice. What if he does, he will learn by the effort. I would give the privilege to everybody, to the Irishman, and to all foreigners who come here to live; although I believe that in a majority of cases the negro would vote more intelligently and conscientiously than they. It’s safe to give the privilege to everybody, and then to teach them.

1. What is this article about?

2. What does he say about the intelligence of an African American’s vote?

3. What was Beechers’ stance on African Americans voting?

GLOSSARY

**Abolitionist:** person who is in favor of ending slavery

**Amalgamation:** making one thing out of lots of different pieces

**Chattel:** a piece of property, in this case a slave girl

**Conscientiously:** using or done with careful attention

**Congregation:** a group of people gathered for religious worship

**Enfranchise:** to set free

**Magistrate:** a local official

**Octoroon:** a person of one eighth (1/8) black ancestry

**Sanctuary:** building or room for religious worship

**Training:** changing