



## AMALGAMATION POLKA LESSON

**Purpose:** Political cartoons provide a visual format to express an idea. This lesson leads students through an inquiry process of interpreting a cartoon that carries a strong message about Abby Kelley Foster and the racial prejudice of her day. As the students go through the guided discussion and reflective writings, their interest will be heightened into wanting to know more about the subject of the cartoon.

**Timeframe:** 2-3 periods, excellent block lesson. *Suggestions: We feel it is necessary to follow the procedures for this lesson in its entirety for the greatest impact on the students. It is designed as the launch pad for all the other lessons. To save paper, run back to back: sets of questions, ID with wrap-up activity, and reading with student copy.*

### Materials:

- Amalgamation Polka Transparency
- Amalgamation Polka Guided Questions
- Amalgamation Polka Inferential Questions
- Amalgamation Polka Portrait ID (copy on photo setting)
- Student Copy of Amalgamation Polka (copy on photo setting)
- Amalgamation Polka Background Reading
- Amalgamation Polka Wrap-Up Letter
- Amalgamation Polka Poster

### Procedure:

1. Hand out plain paper and project the transparency of the Amalgamation Polka.
2. Ask students to look at the cartoon for two minutes without talking or asking questions. Provide them with no information or clues about the cartoon.
3. Direct students to sketch the cartoon (they could do the whole scene or just one section of it). Again, encourage the students not to discuss what they see or what they think is going on while they are drawing.
4. Have students free write for 4 minutes about what they see and what they think is going on in the cartoon. Encourage them that there are no wrong answers. They only need to write about what they see.
5. Have students share their observations from the sketch and free write. Teacher should not comment on correctness. (It is interesting to see if students notice the racial aspect of the cartoon, and if so, how they interpret it).
6. Distribute Student Copy of Amalgamation Polka and Amalgamation Polka Guided Questions to complete, individually or as a cooperative activity. When students are done, go over possible answers as a class.



7. Distribute and complete Amalgamation Polka Inferential Questions, individually or as a cooperative activity. Direct students to the definitions on the paper. When students are done, go over possible answers as a class. Activity #8 can be given to fill time until all have finished.
8. Distribute Amalgamation Polka Portrait ID. Explain that political cartoons often have no names to identify the subjects. Rather, they rely on the reader's ability to recognize well-known figures of the day. For this activity, we have selected six of the leading abolitionists of the day as possible choices for identification of the people in the cartoon. Students will match the portraits to the caricatures in the cartoon.
9. Distribute Amalgamation Polka Background Reading. This works well when read aloud and then individually or cooperatively write a statement that describes the message and intent of the cartoon. If time allows, generate a class conclusion.
10. Distribute and complete Amalgamation Polka Wrap-Up Letter in class or as homework

#### **Extensions:**

- Students could search magazines and the Internet to collect images that show interracial/multicultural groupings of people (advertisements would be perfect). As a class, assess how the messages in the modern images are similar or different from the message of the Amalgamation Polka.
- Do further research on the abolitionists depicted in the cartoon.
- Do further research on Edward Clay's "Amalgamation Series".
- Do a lesson on the polka, a popular dance of the time.

#### **Answers:**

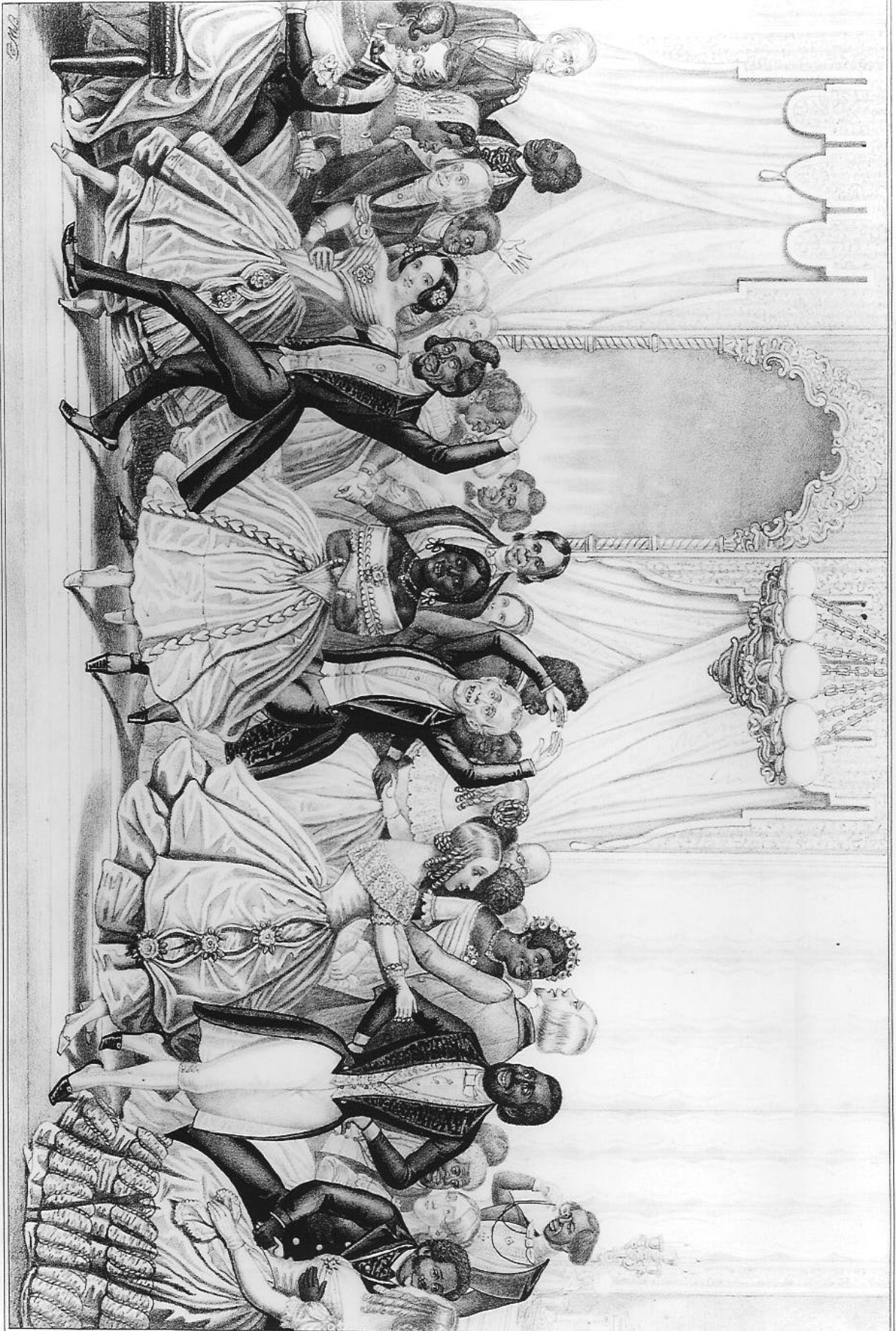
Guided Questions: 1) a party, a ball, a dance; 2) dancing, talking, having a good time; 3) about 36; 4) An Amalgamation Polka, Respectfully dedicated to Miss Abby Kelley, sold at 98 Nassau St. NY, Published at A. Donnelly, Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1845 by A. Donnelly in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Southern District of NY; 5) fancy clothes, formal, frilly, party clothes; 6) white and African-American people

Inferential Questions: 1) 1840s; 2) to celebrate, have a good time, dance; 3) answers will vary. Students may point out the goofy expressions on the people's faces 4) answers will vary. The artist absolutely chose to depict a scene of interracial couples as a way to incite fear and worry. 5) No, this scene would not have happened in the 1840s; 6) This is facetious and suggests that the artist believes that this scene is a direct result of the what Abby Kelley advocates; 7) Abby Kelley's desire for an end to slavery and equality between the races would lead to the pairing of white and African American people. *NOTE: Quakers don't dance or wear fancy dresses. Abby's "come hither" look implies she is a "Jezebel" running around-- unmarried --with men and speaking before mixed audiences of men and women. She married Stephen S. Foster at the end of the year this was published. Garrison was very serious so having him looking goofy was an insult.*

Portrait Identification (from left to right): Abby Kelley Foster; Frederick Douglass; Theodore Weld; William Lloyd Garrison; Maria Weston Chapman; Robert Purvis



Published by J. Bonnelly.



Amalgamation Polka, or the Dance of the Amalgamation, from the Amalgamation, published by J. M. S.

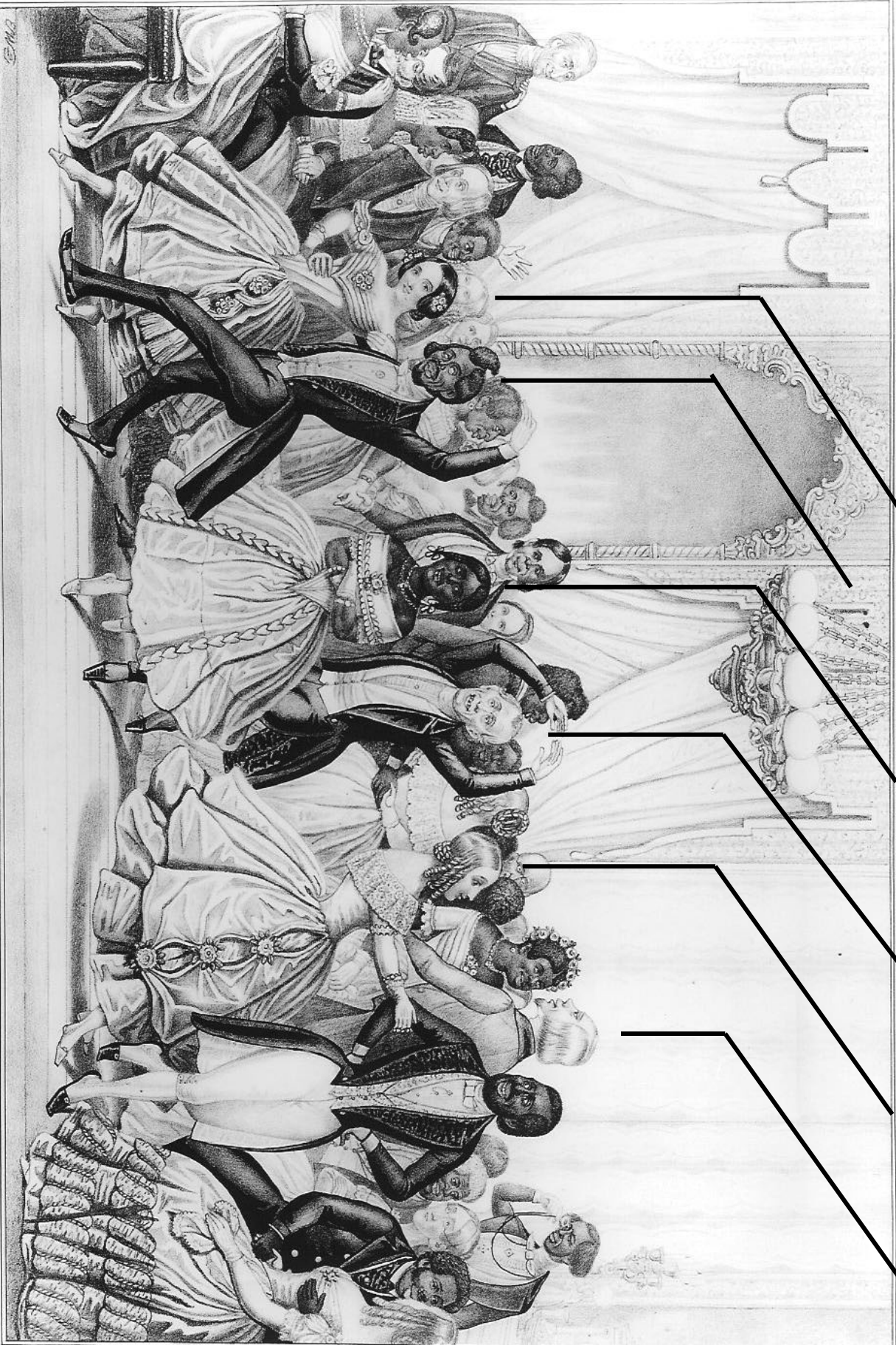
**AN AMALGAMATION POLKA.**  
*Respectfully dedicated to Miss ABBY KELLY.*

Sold at 28, Market St., N.Y.

POSTER (Image reduced from original 12" x 16")



Published by J. Donnelly.



Having awarded prizes of twenty and twenty-five dollars to the best dancer of the evening, the students of the Worcester Normal School were

### AN AMALGAMATION POLKA.

*Respectfully dedicated to Miss ABBY KELLY.*

Sold at 98 Nassau St., N.Y.

**Student Copy**



**AMALGAMATION POLKA: Guided Questions**

1. What is the setting of this event?
2. What are the people doing there?
3. How many people are there?
4. What words do you see on the drawing?
5. Describe the clothes the people are wearing.
6. What do you notice about the ethnicity of the people in the scene?



**AMALGAMATION POLKA: Inferential Questions**

Amalgamation: the mixing or blending of different races

Polka: type of ballroom dance popular in the 1800s

Abby Kelley: a prominent abolitionist of the 1800s

1. What time period do you think this cartoon depicts?
2. Why are all the people there?
3. Does the artist show the people in a positive or negative way? What gives you that impression?
4. Do you think race is important to this picture? Do you think the artist chose the race of the people specifically?
5. Do you think this is a scene that really happened in the time period? Why or why not?
6. Read the definitions at the top of this page. Why do you think the artist writes, "Respectfully dedicated to Miss Abby Kelley"?
7. What message is the artist trying to convey about Abby Kelley?



**AMALGAMATION PROPAGANDA: Wrap-Up Letter**

Based on what you have learned about Abby Kelley from this cartoon write a letter to her expressing what you know about her and what questions you have for her. Do the pre-writing questions first to help you organize your ideas. The letter should be at least two paragraphs long.

Pre-writing Questions:

- What type of work do you think Abby dedicated her life to?
- How did people feel about Abby's work?
- What did people fear about Abby?
- What did you imagine Abby's life was like?
- What did Abby stand for?
- What did people think about Abby?
- What would you like to know about Abby and her life? Think of three questions you have for Abby.

**How to start the letter...**

Dear Abby,

I saw a cartoon about you today. Although I don't know much about you, I'm beginning to get some ideas...



**AMALGAMATION POLKA: Portrait ID**

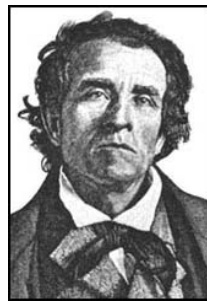
The Amalgamation Polka depicts caricatures of prominent abolitionists of the 1840s. Look at the portraits of the abolitionists below and try to match them to the caricatures in the Amalgamation Polka. Write the name of the abolitionist on the diagonal black lines provided on the Student Copy of the Amalgamation Polka.



Abby Kelley Foster<sup>1</sup>



William Lloyd Garrison<sup>2</sup>



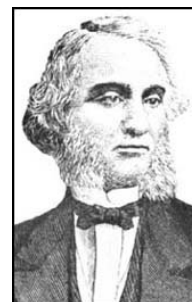
Theodore Weld<sup>3</sup>



Frederick Douglass<sup>4</sup>



Maria Weston Chapman<sup>5</sup>



Robert Purvis<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Worcester Women's History Project. [www.worcesterwomen.com](http://www.worcesterwomen.com) or [www.wwhp.org](http://www.wwhp.org).

<sup>2</sup> Spartacus Educational. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASgarrison.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Spartacus Educational. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASweld.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> The Frederick Douglass Museum and Cultural Center. <http://www.ggw.org/freenet/f/fdm/fd-36.jpg>.

<sup>5</sup> The Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography.

<http://www.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/mariawestonchapman.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Spartacus Educational. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASpurvis.htm>.





### **AMALGAMATION POLKA: Background Reading**

Amalgamation was the code word for a racially mixed marriage of a black and a white. In the south slaves were not allowed to socially mix with their white masters although their masters would sometimes sire (father) children by slave women. Throughout the nation there was great fear that interracial friendships would lead to mixed marriages. Evangelical (Fundamentalist Protestant) ministers often would send blacks to “nigger heaven”, the upper galleries of their churches, especially in New York. Many states passed Black Laws or Codes to maintain segregation (separation) of the races. Prejudice (judging someone without knowing them) based on the color of one's skin existed in all regions of the United States.

As the anti-slavery movement became integrated (blacks and whites mixed together), pro-slavery forces targeted these interracial friendships. At the Second Female Anti-Slavery Society Convention in Philadelphia in 1838, Abby Kelley took the public spotlight when she supported a strong resolution against prejudice. The resolution called on abolitionists (people who want to end or abolish slavery immediately) to identify themselves with blacks not only in public places, but ‘by visiting them in their homes and encouraging them to visit us, receiving them as we do our white fellow citizens.’ (Sterling, 66) Abby actively carried out her words, often traveling with American Anti-Slavery Society black lecturers like Frederick Douglass.

Abolitionist Aroline Chase took Abby's words to heart. In 1839 she and 785 ladies of Lynn presented signatures to the Massachusetts legislature. The petition asked “to repeal all laws which make any distinction among its inhabitants, on account of color including forbidding marriage between whites and blacks or Indians and denied blacks and Indians the right to serve in the militia.” (Sterling, 78) Massachusetts had ended slavery in 1783, but not miscegenation (interracial) laws until the law was overturned in 1843. The women's action kept the problem visible. Abby was on the sidelines during the four year campaign due to her mother's illness.

Edward W. Clay (1799-1857), a lawyer who worked as a lithographer (one who prints pictures from lines etched in a metal plate), drew on the anxieties of Philadelphians with cartoons mocking wealthy blacks' proper dress and manners as signs of black arrogance (self-importance). He also created images of interracial friendships and socializing which up to that point had only been hearsay or alive in people's active imaginations. Clay created seven prints in what is now known as “The Amalgamation Series”, including “An Amalgamation Polka” in 1845. These political cartoons bred fear that often led to riots and violence. The cartoons were an anti-abolition tool to sway opinions, especially of the uneducated lower class who often had to compete with blacks for job opportunities.

Works cited:

Burkett, Nancy. *An Amalgamation Polka*. American Antiquarian Society. Permission granted 9 February 2003.

Lemire, Elise K. *Miscegenation: Making Race in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Sterling, Dorothy. *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and The Politics of Antislavery*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.

“Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Media Culture.” *Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities*.

University of Virginia. 14 September 2003.

<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/gallamall.html>