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# Tables Turned: Harriet Jacob's Influence on Lydia Maria Child's *The Freedmen's Book*

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## Abstract

Lydia Maria Child's *Freedmen's Book* is a remarkable self-published work that ushered Child at the end of her life into an African-American publishing and activist world. In this paper, I use new research into the correspondence between Child and Harriet Jacobs to explore the former's growing familiarity and investment in the Brooklyn-based activist world that inspired Jacobs to move to Virginia. The editorial work that Child performed for Jacobs would produce not just *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* but *The Freedmen's Book*. In what ways did Jacobs teach Child, and in what ways did the former abolitionist remain connected to an earlier, asymmetrical antebellum partnership model that white women heralded as "women and sisters"? Using a review of literary scholarship elaborating the antebellum abolition movement's "feminist-abolitionist" coalition and new research and readings of *The Freedmen's Book*, this paper counterpoises a postbellum intellectual context for Child that stands in striking contrast to the antebellum abolitionist-sentimental context in which her mulatto fiction is read. *The Freedmen's Book* is transparent with the Civil War and postbellum relief priorities and public health concerns that would animate Jacobs's social work, and is as much Jacob's book as Child's. As such, *The Freedmen's Book* provides literary scholars with a postbellum, Reconstruction-era context for reading Child's intervention that affiliates her with post-bellum African-American women's initiatives.

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