# Feeling Heads:

# Phrenology and Emotion in the United States, 1820-1850

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**Abstract**

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of phrenology to the United States. First developed in Europe by Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Spurzheim, phrenology was the theory that the mental characteristics of an individual were reflected in the shape of their brain and skull. Phrenologists believed that the brain was divided into numerous organs which were each responsible for a different mental faculty, roughly two-thirds of which were controlled what would today be regarded as emotions. By mid-century it had become a popular science within the United States, with numerous supporters and a vast array of publications on the topic. Despite this, phrenology has been largely absent in histories of emotion of this period, and histories of phrenology have rarely explicitly addressed how emotion was understood within the framework of the science.

This thesis analyses how emotions were conceptualised within phrenology, and through this the role phrenologists believed emotion played in individual life and nineteenth-century American society. The early nineteenth century saw widespread socio-political change in the United States. The expansion of suffrage to all white men meant the ability to participate in formal political processes became more explicitly drawn along the lines of race and gender, and the question of what role women and non-whites were to play in American society became a pressing concern. As a professedly empirical science, phrenology had the potential to both reinforce and dispute these boundaries by making comparisons between white and non-white, and male and female brains. Examining phrenological books, periodicals and lectures shows that these comparisons often highlighted the prevalence or lack of certain emotions across race and gender lines, focusing particularly on the sentiments—the group of organs seen by phrenologists to be responsible for higher, moral emotions. Phrenological texts make clear the central role emotion was seen to play in maintaining the American republic, and the potential for emotions to act as a marker for inclusion or exclusion from it.

## Statement of Originality

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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**Signature:** _____ **Date:** 10/11/21

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Although COVID-19 meant that archival work in the United States was largely impossible, I was lucky enough to have some primary documents scanned and sent to me by the staff at the Filson Historical Society in Louisville, Kentucky. I am incredibly grateful they were able to do so, as a document they held was able to provide further support for a small but important point in my thesis.

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# Introduction

In Walt Whitman's "Poem of Many in One" from the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman questions who is capable of understanding America.[1] "Who are you that would talk to America?" the poet asks,

> Have you studied out my land, its idioms and men?
> Have you learned the physiology, phrenology, politics, geography, pride, freedom, friendship of my land? its substratums and objects?[2]

In the list of aspects of the land that Whitman would have us study, one stands out as particularly archaic: phrenology, the nineteenth-century science which posited that the shape of the brain and skull reflected the personality of the individual. By the mid-nineteenth century, phrenology occupied a significant place in American society and culture. Whitman's own engagement with the science was not merely intellectual, but also a matter of business. The 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published by Fowler and Wells, a publishing house which had made its name through the commercialisation of phrenology.[3] In "Poem of Many in One," Whitman was writing for an audience which would have understood that to apply phrenology to the United States was to reach beyond the physical and into the intangible essence of the nation—to study its "substratums," the underlying structures which gave the thing its shape. Phrenology claimed to enable its adherents to look deeper than external appearance and into the innermost workings of the mind. To understand the phrenology of America was to understand how it thought, and—just as importantly—how it felt.

This thesis investigates how emotions were understood within phrenology, and the role emotion therefore played in its adherents' understandings of American society. Phrenology was introduced into the United States in a time of significant social change, when individual

[1] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn: Fowler and Wells, 1856), 180-201. This poem is better known by the title which it is given in later editions of *Leaves of Grass*, "By Blue Ontario's Shore."
[2] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 191-92.
[3] Nathan Mackey, "Phrenological Whitman," *Conjunctions* 29 (1997): 231-33.

character was increasingly prized over social status, and the right to political participation was hardened along race and gender lines. As a supposedly empirical way of determining mental capacities, phrenology had the potential to both reinforce and contest these ideals. Within their texts, phrenologists grappled with some of the key debates of this era. What was the value of democracy? Who was able to participate? What role should women and non-whites play in American society? Emotion played a part in the answers phrenologists formulated to all of these questions. Phrenology devoted a large portion of the physical structure of the mind to the faculties which were responsible for emotion, allowing it to be used as a factor of differentiation which delineated the part different social groups were expected to play in American society. As such, this thesis argues that emotion in phrenological texts, like the substrata Whitlam urged us to consider, functioned as a force which helped shape the society of the nineteenth-century United States.

## *Phrenology in Nineteenth-Century America*

Phrenology was a science and philosophy of the mind which emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century. It was first formulated by Franz Josef Gall, and then expanded upon by his pupil Johann Spurzheim. The basic tenets of phrenology were that the brain was a collection of smaller organs, each of which controlled a certain aspect of a person's character, which were known as faculties. The exercise of a certain faculty would cause its corresponding organ to grow, affecting the shape of the skull. Through an examination of the shape of a skull, a phrenologist could therefore determine the character of the individual based on which faculties were being exercised or, alternatively, underused. The faculties of the brain—which varied slightly with different phrenological models—controlled all aspects of a person's personality, ranging from love of one's children and self-esteem, to their perception of colour and musical ability. These faculties were often divided into three main groups: the propensities, responsible

for more instinctual feelings; the sentiments, which harboured more elevated emotions; and the intellect, which contained the reasoning faculties.

Proponents of phrenology were active in the United States from the 1820s. The first American phrenological text was physician Charles Caldwell's *Elements of Phrenology*, published in 1824 after Caldwell was exposed to the science in Europe.[4] In 1832, phrenology experienced a surge in popularity when Spurzheim embarked on a lecture tour of the United States. Although Spurzheim died a few months into his planned tour, interest in phrenology after his death prompted the founding of a number of phrenological societies across the country. In the late 1830s, the American phrenological movement was energised further with the visit of influential Scottish phrenologist George Combe, and the establishment of the publishing house Fowler and Wells, which specifically produced phrenological texts for mass audiences. By the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Colbert argues, phrenology's "terminology and tenets entered the language of daily conversation" to an extent analogous to that of psychiatry in the early twentieth century.[5]

Phrenology arrived in the United States at a time of widespread social and political change, which saw both the contestation of some established hierarchies and the further entrenchment of others. The abolition of property and taxation restrictions on the elective franchise in a majority of states by the late 1820s broadened political participation to the majority of white men.[6] At the same time, the United States was experiencing a rapid expansion of its market economy, enabled by dramatic improvements in communications which better connected it internally as well as to foreign markets.[7] These changes had widespread social

[4] Charles Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology* (Lexington: Thomas T Skillman, 1824).
[5] Charles Colbert, *A Measure of Perfection: Phrenology and the Fine Arts in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 23; Christopher G. White, "Minds Intensely Unsettled: Phrenology, Experience, and the American Pursuit of Spiritual Assurance, 1830-1880," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 236-37; Louise Michele Newman, "Health, Sciences, and Sexualities in Victorian America," in *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 216.
[6] Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 26-52; Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 213.
[7] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5-6.

ramifications. The hierarchical social norms and deferential politics of the post-revolutionary era were undermined by the democratic insistence on the inherent worth of the individual regardless of social distinction.[8] Yet despite the rhetorical championing of democracy, the view that only white men were worthy of political participation became increasingly explicit. As Rogers Smith has argued, the removal of property restrictions on enfranchisement required states "to make explicit various other exclusions that those requirements formerly achieved."[9] Demands for female suffrage continued to be ignored, while state constitutions were created or altered to explicitly deny the vote to non-whites.[10] Thus, as Daniel Walker Howe has characterised it, the Jacksonian era saw the emergence of "two rival political programs"—one which saw the shifting social and economic environment as an opportunity for social reform, and another which was satisfied with the autonomy of white men and wished to keep existing hierarchies intact.[11]

Phrenology was able to serve both these interests. As Courtney Thompson notes, phrenology was adaptable enough to support varying points of view, offering "a mirror reflecting that which observers most desired—or most feared—to see, in themselves, in others, in science, and in society."[12] The basic understandings which stemmed from phrenology—that each individual had the capacity for self-improvement and perfection—resonated in the increasingly democratic political landscape of the United States, in which the individual was celebrated.[13] Yet within this environment phrenology could both challenge or reproduce racial and gender hierarchies, either by stressing commonalities across race and gender lines or

[8] Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 36-75; Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 14-16, 94-95; John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 34-37.
[9] Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 213-14.
[10] Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, 54-60; Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 215.
[11] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 62.
[12] Courtney E. Thompson, *An Organ of Murder: Crime, Violence, and Phrenology in Nineteenth-Century America*, Kindle ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 2.
[13] Susan Branson, "Phrenology and the Science of Race in Antebellum America," *Early American Studies* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 169; Wrobel, "Phrenology as Political Science," 128.

arguing for inherent differences along them.[14] Phrenology therefore became not solely a medical science, but a "rationalistic means for describing man's place in society and his relation to nature's laws."[15]

This thesis argues that emotion played a central role in this process of debating social divisions within phrenology. Phrenologists conceived of the emotions emanating from the sentimental faculties as a moral sense, which assured that even in a democracy individuals could be trusted to act in accordance with the public good. As such, the development in these faculties became a standard by which individuals could be marked as able, or unable, to be a functional part of American society. In focusing on phrenological sources, this thesis rectifies a previous lack of attention given to phrenological ideas about emotion despite its influence in this period of American history. It also contributes further to our understanding of the construction of race and gender in this period, by further adding to work which emphasises the internal aspects of these constructions, such as emotionality, in addition to their external factors.

### *Methodology and Theoretical Framework*

This thesis utilises a variety of phrenological sources to uncover how the science reflected and helped produce ideas about emotion in the early nineteenth-century United States. Phrenological publications were abundant through the nineteenth century. Often, these took the forms of books detailing the tenets of the science, along with explanations of each phrenological organs and their uses. Lectures were another form through which phrenological knowledge was disseminated. Those by prominent phrenologists, such as George Combe, were often later published as books, or within periodicals devoted to the science. These periodicals make up another large source of phrenological knowledge, particularly the *American Phrenological*

[14] Branson, "Science of Race," 170-84; Cynthia S. Hamilton, "'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?': Phrenology and Anti-Slavery," *Slavery and Abolition* 29, no. 2 (June 2008): 176-80; Justine S. Murison, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 62-63.
[15] Arthur Wrobel, "Phrenology as Political Science," in *Pseudo-Science and Society in 19th-Century America*, ed. Arthur Wrobel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 124.

*Journal*, which was the most successful of its kind in America. This thesis narrows its focus to texts which were produced between the years of 1820 to 1850. As Courtney Thompson explains, this span of time saw the introduction of phrenology to the United States amongst the intellectual elite, the emergence of practical phrenology which was targeted at a popular audience, and the resultant decline in the elite form of the science.[16] It was therefore represents a period in which phrenology could claim a significant measure of support both popularly, and within more elite scientific circles.

This thesis primarily focuses on three bodies of work with particular importance to the history of phrenology within the United States. The first is the work of George Combe, a phrenologist from Edinburgh who found popularity throughout the Anglosphere. The United States was no exception to this, with Combe undertaking a successful tour there beginning in 1838. The second is the work of physician Charles Caldwell, the earliest American to publish a phrenological textbook. Although first introduced to the science in Europe, Caldwell's interest in phrenology coincided with his time living in Kentucky and offers a distinct point of view from other phrenologists. Lastly, it focuses on the works of the publishing house Fowler and Wells, which found success through its publication of practical phrenology. Fowler and Wells turned phrenology into a business empire, run from their American Phrenological Cabinet in New York. Beyond being influential in their time, these three bodies of work also offer useful points of comparison: the Scottish Combe contrasting with the American phrenologists, Caldwell's pro-slavery perspective standing against the others' more progressive outlook, and Fowler and Wells' embrace of practical phrenology offering a comparison to the theoretical approach of Combe and Caldwell.

In examining phrenological texts as sources for understanding emotion, this thesis draws upon several foundational theories from the history of emotions. First, it considers phrenological texts in the context of Peter and Carol Stearns' concept of emotionology.

[16] Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 3-4; see also Robert E. Riegel, "The Introduction of Phrenology to the United States," *The American Historical Review* 39, no. 1 (October 1933): 77-78.

Emotionology is "the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains towards basic emotions and their appropriate expression; [and the] way that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes."[17] The emotionology of a society can be demonstrated from a wide range of sources, including scientific and popular literature on emotions—two categories into which phrenological texts might be placed.[18] By reading these phrenological texts as sources for emotionology, we can uncover which emotions were deemed to be acceptable, and under what circumstances.

This thesis then considers how these beliefs about emotion were used to delineate different social groups. A distinctive feature of phrenological texts was their claims to be able to read the emotions of individuals and social groups through physical appearance, and ability to therefore define who lies within, and without, an acceptable emotional range. As Barbara Rosenwein's theory of "emotional communities" suggests, different social communities harbor different "systems of feeling," which consist of

> what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognise; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.[19]

Rosenwein views emotional communities as "precisely the same as social communities," thus implying that emotions are epiphenomenal to the formation of social groups.[20] Others, however, have moved beyond Rosenwein to give emotions a primary role in creating and maintaining group boundaries. Margrit Pernau has used encyclopaedia sources to argue that from the seventeenth century the concept of civility, which implied certain emotional standards, became a "crucial criterion of social difference," meaning that "the feelings that an individual was able

[17] Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (October 1985): 813.
[18] Stearns and Stearns, "Emotionology," 824-25.
[19] Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 842.
[20] Lisa Mitchell, "Whose Emotions? Boundaries and Boundary Markers in the Study of Emotions," *South Asian History and Culture* 12, no. 2-3 (2021): 346-47; Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions," 842.

to credibly express determined inclusion or exclusion, [and] assigned that individual a place in society."[21]

More recently, Lisa Mitchell has drawn upon both Rosenwein and Pernau to interrogate the different kinds of "boundary work" done by emotion, arguing that "representations and performances of emotion work to establish boundaries around communities, identities, or subsets of actors."[22] Mitchell identifies five types of boundary work, two of which have a particular relevance to this thesis: the ability for performances and representation of emotion to establish memberships in groups and to mark social distinctions.[23] The performance or representation of certain emotions can be used to claim membership in a particular group, Mitchell argues, either by those seeking to establish their own membership or by members of the group seeking to incorporate others.[24] Conversely, the marking of distinctions between groups is used to "patrol boundaries," and often involves negative emotions being "projected onto a group as a way of silencing or discrediting their communication efforts, or represented in ways that create and maintain distinctions and hierarchies."[25] Mitchell's argument accords with that of Sara Ahmed, who writes that claims about the emotionality of individuals or collectives are "dependant on relations of power, which endow 'others' with meaning and value."[26] I argue that phrenological texts are sources of evidence for these kinds of emotional boundary work. By representing the emotions of others through the supposed reading of their skulls, phrenologists could make claims for the inclusion or exclusion from the community of different social groups, often along the lines of race and gender.

This emotional boundary work had potentially severe consequences for the individuals and groups about whom these assessments were made. As Michael Woods writes, nineteenth-

[21] Margrit Pernau, "Civility and Barbarism: Emotions as Criteria of Difference," in *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling, 1700-2000*, ed. Ute Frevert and Thomas Dixon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 231.
[22] Mitchell, "Whose Emotions?" 346.
[23] Mitchell, "Whose Emotions?" 346-48, 50-51.
[24] Mitchell, "Whose Emotions?" 347-48.
[25] Mitchell, "Whose Emotions?" 350.
[26] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 3-4.

century Americans saw their political system as being bound together by fellow feeling and affection.[27] This belief, Woods argues, corresponded to "exceptionalist assumptions that the United States maintained citizens' loyalty through benevolent feeling rather than selfish interest or absolutist terror."[28] Woods points out that this belief, which he calls the "affective theory of the Union," was widespread across political and social divides.[29] While Woods uses this theory to interrogate the tenuousness of political bonds based in emotion, this thesis investigates its repercussions for social groups who were seen to deviate from the norm. As Nancy Stepan states, the liberal subject who was deemed to be endowed with rights was conceived as being implicitly white and male.[30] Stepan argues that sciences such as phrenology embodied other social communities as being "qualitatively different," and thus "communities of individuals were placed outside the liberal universe of freedom, equality and rights."[31] Given the importance placed on emotion in nineteenth-century American political thought, it is to be expected that phrenologists would see the embodiment of emotional difference as a key point of contention in debates about the rights of women and non-whites.

### *Historiography*

The primary contribution of this thesis is to give phrenology greater consideration as a science which helped form ideas about emotion in the nineteenth century. As Rob Boddice argues, medical professionals and scientists helped to shape the categories within which emotions were understood, and the texts they produced therefore play an important role in "unlocking the historicity of what it felt like to be there, then."[32] However, historians of emotion have generally touched upon phrenology only briefly, if at all. In considering the nineteenth century, they have

[27] Michael E. Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict in the Antebellum United States*, Kindle ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 21-24.
[28] Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict*, 22.
[29] Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict*, 26.
[30] Nancy Leys Stepan, "Race, Gender, Science and Citizenship," *Gender & History* 10, no. 1 (April 1998): 28-29.
[31] Stepan, "Science and Citizenship," 29-31.
[32] Rob Boddice, "Medicine, Science and Psychology," in *Sources for the History of Emotions*, ed. Katie Barclay, Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, and Peter Stearns (London: Routledge, 2021), 66.

tended to focus on what Boddice calls "canonical" scientific texts, such as those by Alexander Bain and Charles Darwin.[33] Thomas Dixon, in his monograph *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (2003), makes a significant contribution to rectifying this oversight by expanding his consideration to philosophers and moralists more broadly.[34] Even still, however, the sources of Dixon's analysis are primarily those which have—unlike phrenology—retained some sense of respectability to the present day. In accepting a presentist judgement on the worth of phrenology, we ignore a body of work which was influential in its time. By 1900, George Combe's *The Constitution of Man*, a widely read phrenological text, had outsold Darwin's *Origin of Species* by a significant margin.[35] While work on canonical texts has produced commendable and important scholarship, any effort to understand how science structured the emotional experience of historical actors must also contend with those avenues of scientific enquiry that have not earned legitimacy in hindsight.

Where historians of emotion have engaged with phrenology, its mention has often been brief. In her work on historical conceptions of the bodily location of emotions, Fay Bound Alberti identifies phrenology as a key development in the shift towards viewing the brain as the seat of emotions, rather than the heart.[36] This forms the endpoint of Bound Alberti's study, however, and as such the potential implications of this shift fall beyond the scope of her discussion. Phrenology has also been considered in the context of attempts to discern the legitimacy of emotional performances. In her dissertation on the emotional aspects of slavery in the United States, Erin Dwyer focuses on the use of phrenology as a tool for measuring sincerity, rather than its underlying assumptions about emotion.[37] Similarly, Katie Barclay argues that popular sciences helped people determine the "truth" of emotional expressions in

[33] Boddice, "Medicine, Science and Psychology," 71-72.
[34] Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7-11.
[35] James Poskett, *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race, and the Global History of Science, 1815-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 2.
[36] Fay Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart: History, Medicine, and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 143.
[37] Erin Dwyer, "Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Politics of Slavery" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012), 212-15.

nineteenth-century Irish court rooms.[38] Barclay focuses her analysis on physiognomy, the reading of character in the face to which phrenology was closely related. Yet while physiognomy pre-dated phrenology, and would indeed outlast it, in the mid-nineteenth century United States interest in phrenology readily eclipsed that of physiognomy.[39]

Considering phrenology more seriously adds depth to our understanding of emotion at the time of its greatest popularity, a period which has been somewhat underexplored in histories of emotion. The Jacksonian era has a tendency to be subsumed between studies that look back to the role of emotion in the Revolution, and those which look forward to its role in the Civil War. Those who do consider it emphasise the changes in emotional norms and expression due to the shifting social and political factors of the time. Nicole Eustace, in her monograph on the War of 1812—often seen as the beginning of the Jacksonian period—argues that the democratisation of American society led to an understanding of emotions as fluid and changeable, rather than determined by social rank.[40] Susan Matt has emphasised the role of the shifting economic environment in encouraging Jacksonian Americans to move about geographically and therefore expose themselves to feelings of homesickness.[41] In his book charting the role of emotion in politics from the late Jacksonian period to the beginning of the Civil War, Michael Woods integrates emotional factors into the increasing sectionalisation between North and South which eventually led to the Union's rupture.[42] Yet despite the importance these historians place on emotional change in the period, there is little comprehensive work on Jacksonian-era emotions. The investigation of phrenology offers an entry-point to understanding the role emotion played in Jacksonian society.

In examining social attitudes towards emotion within the science, this thesis continues a long trend of focusing on phrenology's social aspects. Until the latter half of the twentieth

[38] Katie Barclay, "Performing Emotion and Reading the Male Body in the Irish Court, c. 1800-1845," *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 2 (Winter 2017): 293-94.
[39] Christopher J. Lukasik, *Discerning Faces: The Culture of Appearance in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 187.
[40] Eustace, *1812*, 38-39.
[41] Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40.
[42] Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict*.

century, phrenology was still mostly considered a fad by social historians.[43] While some earlier works did challenge this perception, particularly John Davies' *Phrenology, Fad and Science: A 19th-Century Crusade* (1955), the most significant shift in the historiography of phrenology came in the 1970s with the emergence of a new contextualist paradigm in the history of science.[44] This historiographical trend of close integration between the study of a science and its social context can be traced, Helge Kragh argues, to a sequence of 1975 papers by G. N. Cantor and Steven Shapin which examined debate over phrenology's legitimacy as a science in early nineteenth-century Edinburgh.[45] In the initial paper, Cantor focused on the intellectual dimensions of the debate, describing the "incommensurability" between the two sides on issues such as theology, theories of the mind, and scientific methodology, which prevented pro- and anti-phrenologists from agreeing.[46] In response, Shapin argued that the primary focus should be on the social context which caused these differences to emerge.[47] As such, Shapin explained the debate by mapping phrenology's proponents and detractors onto the social structure of nineteenth-century Edinburgh.[48] Although criticised by Cantor as concentrating too heavily on social factors, to the detriment of others, Shapin's approach proved highly influential for histories, not just of phrenology, but of science more generally.[49]

Studies of phrenology from the 1970s have, for the most part, embraced this approach and view phrenology primarily from a social perspective. Continuing to the present day, historians have characterised phrenology as "almost totally socially constructed."[50] In doing

[43] Richard H. Shryock, review of *Phrenology, Fad and Science: A 19th-Century American Crusade*, by John D. Davies, *The American Historical Review* 61, no. 3 (April 1956): 660.
[44] John D. Davies, *Phrenology, Fad and Science: A 19th-Century Crusade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955); Helge Kragh, "Problems and Challenges in the Historical Study of the Neurosciences," *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 11, no. 1 (March 2002): 59; Shryock, "Review," 661.
[45] Kragh, "Problems and Challenges," 59; the three papers in question are G. N. Cantor, "The Edinburgh Phrenology Debate: 1803-1828," *Annals of Science* 32, no. 3 (April 1975); Steven Shapin, "Phrenological Knowledge and the Social Structure of Early Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Annals of Science* 32, no. 3 (April 1975); and G. N. Cantor, "A Critique of Shapin's Social Interpretation of the Edinburgh Phrenology Debate," *Annals of Science* 32, no. 3 (April 1975).
[46] Cantor, "Edinburgh Phrenology Debate," 217.
[47] Shapin, "Phrenological Knowledge," 220.
[48] Shapin, "Phrenological Knowledge," 226.
[49] Cantor, "Critique," 255-56; Kragh, "Problems and Challenges," 60.
[50] Michael M. Sokal, "Practical Phrenology as Psychological Counseling in the 19th-Century United States," in *The Transformation of Psychology: Influences of 19th-Century Philosophy, Technology, and Natural Science*,

this, they have followed Shapin's designation of phrenology as a reform science—that is, a science whose proponents were more interested in utilising it to enact social change than in any actual scientific endeavour.[51] Historians such as Roger Cooter and David de Giustino offered detailed histories of phrenologists and their work which emphasised their social background.[52] In the United States, work on phrenology has likewise focused on integrating it into understandings of the social and cultural contexts of its period. In this vein, American studies of phrenology have focused on such varied aspects as its reception in antebellum Boston and Charleston, ties to the evangelical movement, use in education and the arts, and influence on criminology and the legal system.[53]

The characterisation of phrenology as a reform science has been challenged in recent years, however, by John van Wyhe.[54] Van Wyhe disputes this generalisation on two counts. First, he points to the fact that many phrenologists did not explicitly advocate for social reform.[55] Second, he argues that proponents of phrenology more explicitly saw the science as a means of establishing certain knowledge of the human mind, which phrenologists then used to establish their own personal authority.[56] Van Wyhe sees the use of phrenology in social reform as secondary to this aim of "epistemological certainty," citing phrenology's political ambiguity and use in opposing arguments.[57] This re-evaluation of phrenology has been somewhat contentious. James Poskett takes particular issue with Van Wyhe's narrow definition

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ed. Christopher D. Green, Marlene Shore, and Thomas Teo (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2001), 43.

[51] Shapin, "Phrenological Knowledge," 231-34.

[52] Roger Cooter, "Phrenology: The Provocation of Progress," *History of Science* 14, no. 4 (December 1976); Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organisation of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); David de Giustino, *Conquest of Mind: Phrenology and Victorian Social Thought* (London: Croom Helm, 1975).

[53] Anthony A. Walsh, "Phrenology and the Boston Medical Community in the 1830s," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 50, no. 2 (Summer 1976); Peter McCandless, "Mesmerism and Phrenology in Antebellum Charleston: 'Enough of the Marvellous,'" *The Journal of Southern History* 58, no. 2 (May 1992); White, "Minds Intensely Unsettled"; Stephen Tomlinson, *Head Masters: Phrenology, Secular Education, and Nineteenth-Century Social Thought* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Colbert, *Measure of Perfection*; Thompson, *Organ of Murder*.

[54] John van Wyhe, "Was Phrenology a Reform Science? Towards a New Generalization for Phrenology," *History of Science* 42, no. 3 (September 2004).

[55] Van Wyhe, "New Generalization," 315-17.

[56] Van Wyhe, "New Generalization," 317-19.

[57] Van Wyhe, "New Generalization," 317, 23-25.

of politics. Political languages such as phrenology, Poskett convincingly argues, can be utilised by a number of opposing ideologies, and the fact that this was the case with phrenology should not undermine its role in social reform.[58] This thesis accepts Poskett's broader definition of politics, and takes his position that the reform aspects of phrenology should not be too readily dismissed.[59]

The geographical scope of this thesis also takes into consideration recent approaches made by historians to phrenology. Poskett has argued that phrenology was a global movement which should be approached from a transnational perspective.[60] While the transnational approach is valuable, however, and European influences on American phrenology should not be ignored, there still remains much to be gained from viewing phrenology in a predominantly American context. Of importance is the fact that contemporary sources often saw American phrenology as having a unique influence and style. British travellers to the United States, such as Charles Dickens and Harriet Martineau, noted its particular popularity there, and American phrenologists like the Fowler brothers marketed their work as distinctly American, in contrast to those emerging from Europe.[61] In her work on the relationship between phrenology and understandings of criminality, Courtney Thompson too acknowledges the "unique circumstances" of its adoption in the United States, while stressing that a transnational lens should not be abandoned entirely.[62] As phrenology was perceived to take particular hold in the United States, it remains useful to study it in this national context, while not ignoring its transnational influences.

[58] James Poskett, "Phrenology, Correspondence, and the Global Politics of Reform," *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (June 2017): 413-14; Poskett, *Materials of the Mind*, 3.
[59] Courtney Thompson has recently taken a similar position, arguing that the uses of phrenology to assert status and promote reform were too entangled to separate: Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 78-79.
[60] Poskett, "Global Politics of Reform," 409-12; Poskett, *Materials of the Mind*, 3-5.
[61] Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 82; Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, vol. 2 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 188-89; Orson Squire Fowler and Lorenzo Niles Fowler, *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated, and Applied*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1837), iii-iv.
[62] Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 4.

This thesis situates itself within the broader study of Jacksonian society and politics, and its relationship to race and gender. The study of the Jacksonian period has a lengthy historiography, dating back to the late nineteenth century. Studies have, in particular, often revolved around the nature of Jacksonian democracy, the expansion of suffrage to most white men which saw widespread political participation for the first time in the American republic. A significant tension in this field has emerged between those historians who view Jacksonian democracy as a key point in the development of political equality, and those who instead view it as enshrining an exclusionary political culture.[63] This underlying tension is best exemplified by two recent major scholarly works on the Jacksonian period: Daniel Walker Howe's *What Hath God Wrought* (2007) and Sean Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy* (2005). Howe rejects the term Jacksonian democracy, arguing that the Jacksonian Democrats' support of slavery, actions towards Native Americans, and opposition to non-white and female suffrage make its usage "inappropriate."[64] Wilentz, on the other hand, sees the Jacksonian expansion of suffrage as a key part of the progression from Thomas Jefferson to Abraham Lincoln towards universal political rights.[65] More recently, Joshua Lynn and Harry Watson have suggested a turn away from regarding these two perspectives as mutually exclusive, and note instead a trend to view racism, sexism, and democracy as deeply intertwined.[66]

The relationship between the popularity of phrenology and Jacksonian political culture has been most explicitly elucidated by Arthur Wrobel. In keeping with the characterisation of phrenology as a reform science, Wrobel argues that it emerged in the United States resembling "a social science, its bright and cheerful patchwork of scientific, religious, and moralistic doctrine promising a rationalistic means for describing man's place in society and his relation to nature's laws."[67] Many advocates of phrenology argued that it proved the mind could flourish

[63] Joshua A. Lynn and Harry L. Watson, "Introduction: Race, Politics, and Culture in the Age of Jacksonian 'Democracy,'" *Journal of the Early Republic* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 82.
[64] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 4.
[65] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005), xx-xxi.
[66] Lynn and Watson, "Introduction," 82-83.
[67] Wrobel, "Phrenology as Political Science," 124.

only under a democratic system of government. They argued that in order for man to reach his full potential, the government should not pass laws which impeded on the exercise of any faculty, supporting the Jacksonian ideal of small, non-interfering government.[68] Such an approach meshed well with what Wrobel describes as "Jacksonian Romantic optimism."[69]

Following Wrobel, historians have continued to make connections between the rise of phrenology and that of Jacksonian democracy. Peter McCandless, in his study of the reception of phrenology in antebellum Charleston, has noted that it resonated with democratic sentiment at the time as it was widely accessible and appealed to the Jacksonian notion that humans and society were perfectible.[70] Daniel Thurs concurs with this, adding that phrenology was a system which gave the "common man" more agency by giving him knowledge of his own mind.[71] In comparison to these depictions, Justine Murison also notes the appeal of phrenology to democratic sentiment, but focuses instead on the fact that phrenology claimed only whites could be mentally suited to self-government.[72] A similar tension to that which characterises the broader study of Jacksonian politics can therefore be found in literature on phrenology, between those who emphasise the capacity of phrenology to help deconstruct social hierarchies, and those who instead focus on it racial and gendered aspects. In focusing on the construction of emotional norms in phrenological texts, this thesis seeks to integrate these two perspectives arguing that the phrenological view of emotion was integral to belief in the expansion of democracy as well as the policing of its borders.

The links between phrenology and nineteenth-century views of race have been well explored, both within the context of the United States and internationally. Numerous scholars have written on how phrenological works helped both reinforce and challenge notions of racial and gender difference, particularly in the role it played in the early development of the

[68] Wrobel, "Phrenology as Political Science," 133-36.
[69] Wrobel, "Phrenology as Political Science," 123.
[70] McCandless, "Mesmerism and Phrenology," 200, 224.
[71] Daniel Patrick Thurs, *Science Talk: Changing Notions of Science in American Popular Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 30.
[72] Murison, *Politics of Anxiety*, 60, 62-63.

American school of ethnography. Comparing phrenology to physiognomy, Christopher Lukasik argues that phrenology had a much greater emphasis on establishing racial difference.[73] Bruce Dain has highlighted ethnologist Samuel George Morton's use of phrenology in early work, in which he sought to establish "race [as] a fixed entity and racial inferiority as a fact."[74] In her study of the American school of ethnography, *The Skull Collectors: Science, Race, and America's Unburied Dead* (2010), Ann Fabian argues that phrenological studies of race gave scientific authority to common racial prejudices.[75] Cameron Strang has similarly found that phrenology was used to justify the violent dispossession of Native American groups such as the Seminoles.[76]

Yet recent work on phrenology complicates the notion that it only reinforced racist assumptions. Britt Rusert has argued that many African Americans "latched onto phrenology as a radically inclusive, if even democratic science."[77] Rusert notes the existence of African-American phrenologists, who challenged contemporary views of race through their lectures.[78] Likewise, by analysing the reception of phrenological lectures in an Australian Aboriginal community, Alexandra Roginski has found that such lectures were nuanced interactions from which non-white audiences gained value, despite their rehashing of racial ideologies.[79] Roginski goes on to warn against "transferring contemporary discomfort into the period of phrenology's greatest popularity," pointing to the fact that both Indigenous Australians and Maori in New Zealand engaged with phrenology to their advantage.[80] While phrenology certainly aided in reproducing oppressive social structures, these cases show its potential to be

[73] Lukasik, *Discerning Faces*, 26-27.
[74] Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 197-200.
[75] Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2.
[76] Cameron B. Strang, *Frontiers of Science: Imperialism and Natural Knowledge in the Gulf South Borderlands, 1500-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 287-88.
[77] Britt Rusert, "The Science of Freedom: Counterarchives of Racial Science on the Antebellum Stage," *African American Review* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 303-04.
[78] Rusert, "Science of Freedom," 302-03.
[79] Alexandra Roginski, "Talking Heads on a Murray River Mission: Phrenological Lectures and their Aboriginal Receptions Decoded," *History Australia* 16, no. 4 (December 2019): 717.
[80] Roginski, "Talking Heads," 719.

adopted by those wishing to improve their own social standing. Although these studies acknowledge the differences in mental capacity seen to exist between whites and non-whites, including those differences in emotional capacity, they do not significantly investigate why emotions held such explanatory power.

One of the few examples to engage at any length with phrenological understandings of emotion is Cari M. Carpenter's study of nineteenth-century Native American literature, *Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians* (2008). Phrenology, Carpenter argues, was "a primary vehicle of the racialization and gendering of anger."[81] Comparative phrenology depicted Native Americans as possessing large organs of Destructiveness, a faculty closely associated with anger, while also emphasising the undesirability of this faculty, particularly in women.[82] As such, works of phrenology constructed a stereotype of the angry Native American. In investigating how a group of female Native American writers protested their ill treatment at the hands of the government, Carpenter examines how they had to negotiate this emotional stereotype in order to be heard.[83] Carpenter's work provides an excellent example of how phrenological texts might be read for emotion, yet there clearly remains much work to be done in developing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between phrenology and emotion.

More broadly, scholarship on the relationship between emotion and race in the nineteenth century has been focused on sentimentalism and abolition movements. By the end of the eighteenth century, the growth of sentimentalism had given antislavery arguments a strongly emotional tenor. This shift has long been recognised in the historiography of race in America. Winthrop Jordan credits sentimental literature with propagating the idea that people of African descent "had feelings as deep and as legitimate as white men."[84] Yet Jordan is broadly critical

[81] Cari M. Carpenter, *Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 18.
[82] Carpenter, *Seeing Red*, 19, 23.
[83] Carpenter, *Seeing Red*, 24-25.
[84] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 368-69.

of sentimentalism, calling it a "retreat from rational engagement with the ethical problem" of slavery and arguing that, as it pertained to the future condition of African Americans, "the contribution of sentimental antislavery literature was to cloud it with tears."[85] However, the binary between reason and emotion relied upon here by Jordan has been complicated by recent work on emotion. Rather than merely standing in the way of reason, the language of sentiment could be used to communicate more effectively with others. As Phillip Troutman explains, sentiment "comprised a kind of lingua franca" which could overcome the barriers of "gender, race, class, and region" by working under the assumption that "everyone had loved and had experienced the pain of loss."[86]

Troutman's stance on emotion is supported by other recent work on its intersection with slavery and abolitionism. In his study of anti-slavery texts in the British Caribbean, Ramesh Mallipeddi has argued for a more nuanced view of the relationship between sentimentalism and the power structures of slavery. Disputing claims that sentimentalism upheld slavery by focusing on the feelings of white observers rather than encouraging structural change, Mallipeddi has noted that the sentimental mode was utilised by the enslaved themselves to garner the sympathy of white readers. Instead, Mallipeddi argues that sentimentalism should be seen as an attempt to challenge the commodification of enslaved people by establishing an emotional relationship with slaves as fellow human beings. Through this, he writes, sentimental abolitionist writers were able to take "affective property in the slaves in opposition to the claims of legal proprietorship assumed by the slaveholders."[87] Such a view of sentimentalism accords with Richard S. Newman's findings that the more emotional tenor of American abolitionism which emerged in the early nineteenth century was first pioneered and driven by African-American writers. Earlier eighteenth-century anti-slavery societies, Newman argues, had

[85] Jordan, *White Over Black*, 371.
[86] Phillip Troutman, "Correspondences in Black and White: Sentiment and the Slave Market Revolution," in *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, ed. Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 215.
[87] Ramesh Mallipeddi, *Spectacular Suffering: Witnessing Emotion in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 1-9.

allowed only white members, meaning non-whites were shut out of the formal process of petitioning for legal aid. As such, African-American activists turned to more literary forms of persuasion including sentimentalism.[88] When these traditional abolitionist societies began supporting colonisation in the 1820s, African-American activists and dissatisfied white abolitionists began forming alliances which led to the adoption of the sentimental style in the broader movement.[89] Like the Caribbean writers studied by Mallipeddi, these activists sought to overcome indifference to the suffering of enslaved people by establishing an emotional connection with white readers.

Whereas these studies have focused on the rhetorical uses of emotion within the anti-slavery movement, this thesis instead focuses on how emotion was read into bodies as part of the construction of race in this period. In doing so, it contributes to a body of work which has begun to emphasise the ways in which race was understood as an internal characteristic, as much as an external one. In his sensory history of race, Mark M. Smith has criticised the tendency to "treat race as an exclusively visual phenomenon."[90] As the enslaved population became increasingly mixed race by the mid-nineteenth century, Smith argues, southern whites turned away from vision as the main authenticator of racial identity.[91] In addition to utilising other senses, this also entailed a shift towards the examination of internal attributes, such as bodily structure and feeling.[92] Ezra Tawil argues that the frontier romances of the nineteenth century produced a theory of "racial sentiment," which he described as "the notion that members of different races feel different things, and feel things differently."[93] Tawil himself dismisses phrenology as a source of this racial sentiment, arguing that phrenology saw race as too mutable to create stable racial categories.[94] This thesis disputes this by pointing the disparity

[88] Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 87-93.
[89] Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 96-102.
[90] Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2.
[91] Smith, *How Race is Made*, 5, 39-47.
[92] Ezra Tawil, *The Making of Racial Sentiment: Slavery and the Birth of the Frontier Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 49-50.
[93] Tawil, *Racial Sentiment*, 2-3, 50.
[94] Tawil, *Racial Sentiment*, 83-84.

of opinions which existed amongst phrenologists, highlighting Charles Caldwell as an example of a phrenologist who did see race as immutable, in opposition to many of his peers. In phrenology, we therefore find not only further proof of Tawil's racial sentiment, but also an illustration of how this theory emerged as racialisation became increasingly biologised throughout the nineteenth century.

Another important intervention in the focus on sentimentalism and antislavery has come from Erin Dwyer, who in her PhD dissertation "Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Politics of Slavery" (2012) seeks to move away from this focus on sentimentalism and antislavery.[95] Dwyer argues that the performance of emotion in the Antebellum South was shaped by slavery, and that enslaved people and slaveholders alike had a hand in constructing these emotional norms.[96] In arguing this, Dwyer rejects a top-down model of the shaping of emotional norms, such as William Reddy's concept of emotional regimes, instead viewing emotional norms as shaped in a multidirectional manner through everyday interaction between different groups.[97] While this thesis returns to sentimentalism, in arguing that phrenology placed great importance on moral emotions, it also investigates how these norms were contested and developed through the lived experience of those who argued for them, particularly in its consideration of the work of Charles Caldwell.

As in regards to race, much work has been done on the intersection of phrenology and gender in nineteenth-century America. Historians have similarly found that phrenology could be used to contest gender roles, as well as uphold them. Carla Bittel, for example, has noted that though phrenologists saw men and women as differing in the development of their mental faculties, they nonetheless regarded male and female brains as fundamentally similar.[98] This led, Bittel argues, to the embrace of phrenology by nineteenth-century women's rights activists

[95] Dwyer, "Mastering Emotions," 4-5.
[96] Dwyer, "Mastering Emotions," 3.
[97] Dwyer, "Mastering Emotions," 3-4, 87-88.
[98] Carla Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself: Producing and Using Phrenological Knowledge in 19th Century America," *Centaurus* 55, no. 2 (May 2013): 108.

such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott.[99] In the same vein, Erica Lilleleht has traced the career of female phrenologist Abigail Fowler-Chumos, showing how she used phrenological knowledge and public presentations to provide "a powerful, productive, public image of womanhood."[100] With this in mind, this thesis' exploration of the gendering of emotion looks not only at how emotions reinforced difference, but how they could also be used to argue for similarities.

In this sense, phrenology fits within shifts which were simultaneously occurring in the broader understanding of women's place in nineteenth-century America. In 1966, Barbara Welter influentially identified the "cult of true womanhood" which dominated in the period, arguing that women were required to adhere to the standards of "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" and were held "hostage in the home."[101] Welter's analysis, based as it was in a clear binary division between male and female spheres, went on to be increasingly scrutinised. Linda Kerber argued that the extensive discussion around separate spheres in the nineteenth century was in fact a reflection of the breakdown of that social structure, rather than its ascendancy.[102] Kerber called for historians to no longer be "constrained by dualism," and to focus instead on how men and women worked together to construct and contest social power relations.[103] Likewise, Amy Kaplan noted that studies of middle-class women in the nineteenth century have mostly "revealed the permeability of the border that separates the spheres."[104] This thesis argues that the phrenological understanding of emotion supported the blurring of border between these spheres, as the discourse of sentiment which defined the boundaries of race could not so easily be used to police those of gender.

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[99] Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself," 118-22.
[100] Erica Lilleleht, "'Assuming the Privilege' of Bridging Divides: Abigail Fowler-Chumos, Practical Phrenology, and America's Gilded Age," *History of Psychology* 18, no. 4 (August 2015): 428.
[101] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151-52.
[102] Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 20-22.
[103] Kerber, "Separate Spheres," 37-39.
[104] Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," in *No More Separate Spheres! A Next Wave American Studies Reader*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 183.

*Chapter Summary*

The first chapter of this thesis establishes how emotion was understood by phrenologists, and the numerous strands of thought they were influenced by, through an examination of the work of George Combe. By tracing Combe's influences, from the phrenologists Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Spurzheim who preceded him to Enlightenment and Scottish Common Sense philosophy, it reveals phrenology to be the carrier of a host of older ideas about emotion, albeit repackaged in the language of scientific empiricism. Combe believed emotion emanated from the faculties known as the sentiments, and provided a humanity with a moral sense. It was capable of reconciling the pursuit of individual and social happiness, and given further legitimacy by its physical location in the brain. This view of emotion was particularly relevant in the United States, where democratic freedoms gave a great deal of power to the individual. While concern over placing political power in the hands of the masses abounded, phrenology appeared to point to the potential for all people to properly carry out their role as citizens so long as they allowed themselves to be led by their sentiments. Therefore, much like the affective theory of the Union described by Woods, phrenologists saw the social and political cohesion of the United States as being highly dependent on the cultivation of proper feeling.

With this established, the following two chapters investigate how different social groups were seen to measure up to this standard. Chapter Two examines the role played by emotion in phrenological conceptions of race, with a particular focus on its relationship to slavery. First, it examines how race was understood within Combe's phrenology, and argues that he saw the sentiments as playing a key role in dictating the "civilisation" of racial groups. At the same time, Combe viewed these differences as socially determined and therefore theoretically possible to overcome. It then turns to the work of early American phrenologist Charles Caldwell. After establishing Caldwell's own involvement in slavery, it argues that Caldwell depicted the "savage" propensities as being overdeveloped in people of African descent.

Caldwell claimed these strong propensities outbalanced the sentiments, rendering African people unable to maintain political freedom. Caldwell's belief in polygenesis meant that, unlike Combe, he believed these differences to be fixed. His writings therefore depicted these racial emotional boundaries as harder and less porous, presaging the scientific racism which would later gain prevalence in American culture.

Lastly, Chapter Three examines gender and the implications of phrenological understandings of emotion for women's role in American society. It first examines prominent editor Sarah Josepha Hale's engagement with phrenology, noting her belief that the importance it gave to emotions could be used to elevate women's station in society. It then turns to the work of the practical phrenology firm Fowler and Wells, whose rise to prominence in the 1840s coincided with the early emergence of an organised women's rights movement. While Fowler and Wells' published works often promoted a domestic ideal for women, many men and women involved in or associated with the firm also actively campaigned for women's right to vote. This chapter argues that emotion was a key place where these two viewpoints overlapped. The emotions which were seen to make women excel in the domestic sphere—again the sentiments—were the very same that suited them to political life. This chapter thus demonstrates how the phrenological framework of emotion could also be utilised to challenge and negotiate boundaries, rather than merely enforce them.

Phrenology helped inform the way that nineteenth-century Americans viewed the world, and as such the ideas it promoted about emotions deserve scrutiny. By depicting the sentiments as providing the feelings necessary for a democracy, phrenologists used emotionality as a standard by which the ability to participate in society could be measured. In this way, ascribing emotional qualities to groups and individuals was used to patrol the boundaries of American society, as well as to challenge them. To understand the powerful role that emotion played in the phrenological mind we must first look to its beginnings, and the various intellectual and philosophical strands from which it emerged.

## Chapter One

"An Entirely Different Moral World": George Combe and American Democracy

### *Introduction*

On 25 September 1838, George Combe landed in the harbour of New York City, having travelled across the Atlantic from his home country of Scotland. As he left his ship and observed the dock and surrounding streets, his first impression was poor. The streets in the lower part of the city, he wrote in the published journal of his American travels, were "narrow, dirty, and adorned by large fat swine" and he formed the suspicion that "there is no efficient police attending to the general welfare of the town." As it grew dark many of the lamps remained unlit, making the city seem "dismal and unsafe."[1] However, over the next day—as he moved to the upper parts of the city—he began to feel more comfortable, to the extent that he felt he had hardly left Britain. "The time since we left Bristol," he wrote, "appears to be so short, and the dress, manners, and language of the better classes are so similar to those of the same rank in England that it is difficult to 'realize,' as the Americans express it, the idea of being so far from home." Yet some differences continued to make an impression on Combe. One was the unwelcome, ever-present pigs, which "even here … are seen roaming at large." Another, more important difference was in "the activity and intensity of the minds of the people." As he listened in on conversations and read American newspapers, Combe felt he had found himself in "an entirely different moral world."[2]

The minds of the people were of particular concern to Combe, who by the time of his arrival in New York was the most prominent phrenologist in the Atlantic world. Having first discovered the science while attending a lecture by Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, a key figure in phrenology's early development, Combe founded the Edinburgh Phrenological Society and

[1] George Combe, *Notes on the United States of North America During a Phrenological Visit in 1838-9-40*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1841), 25.
[2] Combe, *Notes* 1, 28.

became the science's leading advocate. On his American tour, which would last until early 1840, Combe lectured to large audiences, and further entrenched his influence in America. Combe's position as one of the most prominent codifiers of phrenology within the United States makes his work an ideal starting point for uncovering its basic ideas about emotion. This chapter will therefore examine the works of Combe and his theories on the role of emotion in human life, focusing in particular on three of his most relevant and influential works: *The Constitution of Man*, *Elements of Phrenology*, and the two-volume *Notes on the United States of North America*.

First, it will place Combe's phrenology in the context of the intellectual tradition from which it emerged. Phrenology had first been developed in the late eighteenth century in the form of Franz Joseph Gall's organology. Gall's organology, although closely connected to Romanticism, involved a radical shift away from previous theories of the mind by being based on empirical anatomical investigation rather than philosophy. Yet as phrenology passed down from Gall to his protégé Spurzheim, and from Spurzheim to Combe, it moved away from Gall's initial vision. Abandoning Gall's strict empiricism, phrenology became an amalgam of Gall's anatomical investigation and more traditional mental philosophies, with a particular debt to the Scottish Enlightenment tradition. Combe's phrenology therefore fits within what Thomas Dixon has described as a "'halfway house' category between Christian psychology and thoroughly secular psychology," which emerged amongst some theorists in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.[3]

Having established the continuities between previous theories of the mind and phrenology, this chapter will then turn to phrenology's most important distinction: its embodiment of emotion within the brain. As Fay Bound Alberti notes, competing cardio- and craniocentric models of emotion have existed since antiquity.[4] Phrenologists claimed that,

[3] Dixon, *Passions to Emotions*, 9-10, 93.
[4] Fay Bound Alberti, *This Mortal Coil: The Human Body in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 120.

through anatomical investigation, they had proven that emotions were localised entirely in the brain. The location of emotion in the brain, Combe argued, showed it to be a "legitimate" function of the mind which had been endowed upon humans by God. In arguing this, Combe was closely following eighteenth-century theories that believed certain types of emotions functioned as God-given "mechanisms."[5] More specifically, Combe viewed the sentiments as providing a moral sense that rewarded moral behaviours with positive feelings, thus compelling individuals towards virtue. Using phrenology, Combe therefore argued that the pursuit of private pleasure could be reconciled with that of public good—an idea which had particularly strong implications within the United States.

Lastly, this chapter examines how Combe applied phrenology to his criticisms of American society. As he travelled through America, Combe took a particular interest in the workings of American society. In his published journal of his travels, and in the lectures he gave during his stay, we see how Combe envisioned emotions operating within America's democratic institutions. These observations dovetailed neatly with American concerns about the longevity of their own institutions, and seemed to offer a way of navigating the unruly emotions of a democracy. Armed with the knowledge from phrenology that the happiness of the self and the happiness of others were closely intertwined, Combe saw hope for America's future prospects. While Combe worried about the state of democracy in America, he ultimately believed that phrenology proved the masses could be capable of self-governance with the proper training. This belief was reflected by his audience, as well as the American phrenologists over whom he was influential.

## *Combe's Phrenology and Its Influences*

More than any other phrenologist, George Combe was responsible for the spread and popularity of phrenology around the world. The most popular of Combe's works was *The Constitution of*

[5] Dixon, *Passions to Emotions*, 22.

*Man Considered in Relation to External Objects*, first published in 1828, which became one of the best-selling books of the nineteenth century. According to Harriet Martineau, writing after Combe's death, its circulation was close to the level of "the three most ubiquitous books in our language—the Bible, 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and 'Robinson Crusoe.'"[6] By 1854, its sales had risen to over 300,000 copies worldwide, and in the United States, Martineau claimed, it was "in almost every house."[7] In addition to the publication of *The Constitution of Man*, Combe's establishment as the world's pre-eminent phrenologist was aided by the untimely death of his mentor Johann Gaspar Spurzheim in 1832, only a short time in to his own tour of North America. With Spurzheim's death, Combe became the most senior leader of the phrenological movement and was held in high regard internationally, particularly in the United States.[8]

In his phrenological works, Combe divided the brain into thirty-five different organs (Figure 1). Each of these organs was responsible for a different mental faculty, from the desire for sex (Amativeness) to the perception of causation (Causality). These faculties were grouped into different orders, with the most basic division being between the feeling or affective organs, and the intellectual. Within each of these two categories was another division—in the affective faculties, this was between the propensities and the sentiments. The propensities were essentially instincts, while the sentiments occupied a higher position, being "a propensity, joined with an emotion, or feeling of some kind."[9] Within the sentiments was yet another division between those that were common to both humans and animals (Sentiments 10-13 in Figure 1), and those which were unique to humans.

In his division of the brain into a number of different organs, Combe was following in the footsteps of Franz Joseph Gall, the German physician who had first developed phrenology in the late eighteenth century. Yet while Gall had envisioned organology—as he preferred to call it—as a strictly anatomical endeavour, the phrenologists who followed him began to

[6] Harriet Martineau, *Biographical Sketches: 1852-1875* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1885), 265.
[7] Anthony A. Walsh, "George Combe: A Portrait of a Heretofore Generally Unknown Behaviorist," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 7, no. 3 (July 1971): 269; Martineau, *Biographical Sketches*, 272.
[8] De Giustino, *Conquest of Mind*, 25-26; Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 46; Tomlinson, *Head Masters*, 227.
[9] George Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, 2nd American ed. (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1834), 59.

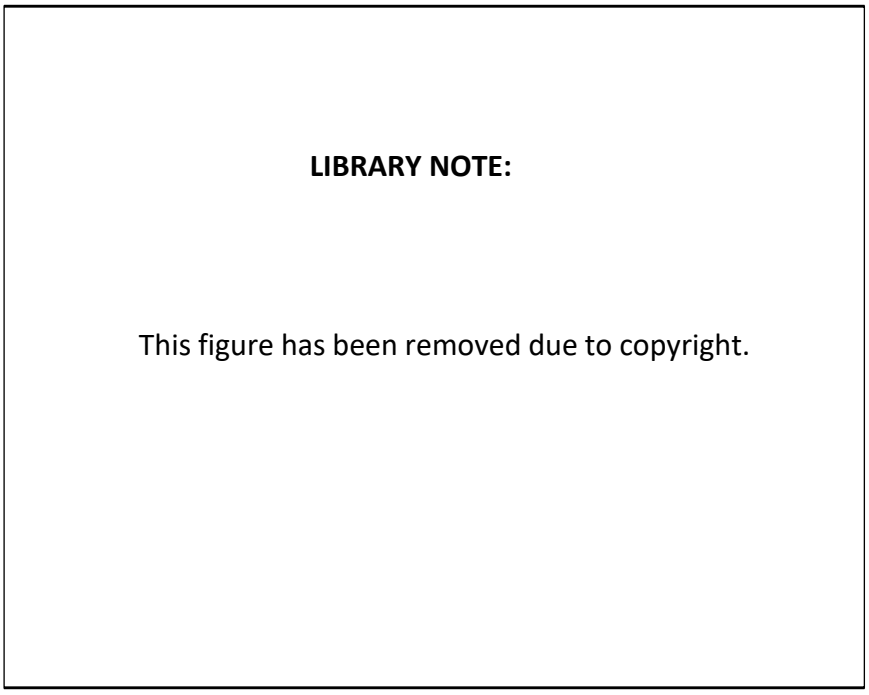


**Figure 1:** Diagram of the phrenological organs from Combe's *A System of Phrenology* (1835).

incorporate an increasing amount of philosophy. This shift began with Gall's protégé Johann Gaspar Spurzheim. The relationship between Gall and Spurzheim ruptured in the early

nineteenth century when Spurzheim relocated to Britain and began lecturing on his more philosophical form of the doctrine. As he learned of phrenology through Spurzheim, Combe's phrenology likewise sought to do more than merely describe the inner workings of the brain. The purpose of Combe's work, as stated by the American editor of *The Constitution of Man*, was "to show how the human race may be as happy as the constitution of man actually fits it to be."[10]

Examining Combe's works provides an entry point into understanding the intellectual strands from which phrenology drew. Some historians, such as James Poskett, have characterised phrenology as a rejection of previous mental philosophies.[11] Such a claim would be supported by Combe himself, who described previous moral philosophers as "investigating [the mind's] constitution by an imperfect method."[12] Yet focusing on phrenological understandings of emotion reveals a great deal of continuity between phrenology and previous systems of thought, according more with David de Giustino's estimation that phrenology "provided a new scientific certitude for a host of older notions about human behaviour and society."[13] Rather than charting a new path, Combe and his contemporaries instead enshrined older metaphysical theories of emotion in an emerging scientific paradigm. Combe's phrenology in particular draws from two major sources: the work of his predecessors Spurzheim and Gall, naturally, but also the Scottish philosophical tradition with which Combe, as a member of the Edinburgh intellectual community, would have been well acquainted. Scottish philosophy provided the metaphysical backbone for Combe's phrenological work, while Gall's—and to a lesser extent Spurzheim's—anatomical investigations gave it the veneer of empiricism.

A regularly told story in depictions of phrenology's early development was that the young Gall had noticed that his school friends with a particular aptitude for memorising language all

[10] George Combe, *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects*, 3rd American ed. (Boston: Allen and Ticknor, 1834), iv.
[11] Poskett, "Global Politics of Reform," 410.
[12] Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, 75.
[13] De Giustino, *Conquest of Mind*, 3.

had bulging eyes. It was this observation, nineteenth-century phrenologists often repeated, which caused him to realise that the area of the brain behind the eyes was responsible for language.[14] However, as Gall's only English-language biographers Stanley Finger and Paul Eling have argued, it is unlikely that these observations led directly to his development of organology.[15] It would seem instead that Gall first began working on his theory of the mind sometime after graduating from medical school in Vienna in 1785.[16] By 1796, Gall's theory seemed well-developed and he was beginning to give lectures on the subject, and in 1798 he published the first public explanation of his system in an open letter.[17] After touring around Europe to lecture and continue his research, Gall settled with his assistant Spurzheim in Paris in 1807, where he published his four-volume *Anatomie et Physiologie du Système Nerveux en Général, et du Cerveau en Particulier* ("*Anatomy and Physiology of the Nervous System in General and of the Brain in Particular*") between 1810 and 1819.[18]

As Finger and Eling have noted, Gall's scientific research took place in the context of both the Enlightenment and of the Romantic era.[19] The traditional view of the Enlightenment has been that it prioritised reason over emotion, hence its moniker as the "Age of Reason."[20] Recent work on the emotions, however, has shown how the Enlightenment emphasis on reason was closely tied to sensibility.[21] Sensibility came further to the fore alongside the development of Romanticism, which moved to give greater weight to individual emotion and imagination.[22] Gall's organology shows the clear influence of the Romantic mindset, although tempered by

[14] See, for example: "Biography of Dr. Gall," *The American Phrenological Journal* 2, no. 1 (October 1839): 3; Nahum Capen, *Reminiscences of Dr. Spurzheim and George Combe* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881), 64-65; George Combe, *Essays on Phrenology, or an Inquiry into the Principles and Utility of the System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim, and into the Objections Made Against It* (Philadelphia: H. C. Carey and I. Lea, 1822), xii.
[15] Stanley Finger and Paul Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall: Naturalist of the Mind, Visionary of the Brain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 9-10, 31-32.
[16] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 18.
[17] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 36, 43.
[18] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 283, 307. Spurzheim was credited as the co-author of the first two volumes, with Gall as the sole author of the final two published after their split.
[19] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, ix.
[20] Laura Mandell, "Enlightenment," in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Broomhall (London: Routledge, 2017), 269-70.
[21] Mandell, "Enlightenment," 271-72.
[22] R. S. White, "Romanticism," in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Broomhall (London: Routledge, 2017), 273-75.

the strict empiricism of his scientific method. Jason Hall identifies three key elements of Romantic thought which are reflected within Gall's work: organicism, striving, and uniqueness.[23] Gall's organicism, a belief that the individual can only be understood as a component of the whole, was reflected in his attempts to understand the human brain in relation to nature and the brains of other animals.[24] The Romantic idea of striving—the concept that struggle is an inherent part of human life—is reflected in the way the different organs find themselves competing for supremacy within the brain.[25] Lastly, Gall's organology was highly individualistic, focusing less on an overarching explanation of human nature, but rather on explaining the differences in character between individuals.[26]

In focusing on the variation of emotion between individuals, Gall was following on from another popular science of personality, physiognomy. In Gall's first published description of his system—his 1798 open letter—he had in fact described himself as a physiognomist.[27] Physiognomy had long been in existence, but experienced a surge in popularity in the eighteenth century due to the work of Johann Kaspar Lavater. Lavater's physiognomy taught people how to read character from the faces of individuals, and was written in such a way to make it readily accessible to all readers.[28] This desire to court a popular audience was adopted by Gall and would be a recurring, and often contentious, theme throughout the history of phrenology. Like phrenology, physiognomy could be used to make assumptions about character and read in to the legitimacy of emotions as they were expressed.[29] As a clergyman, Lavater's physiognomy had been highly religious in nature and sought to lead individuals to moral improvement.[30] In

[23] Jason Y. Hall, "Gall's Phrenology: A Romantic Psychology," *Studies in Romanticism* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 311.
[24] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 151-68; Hall, "Gall's Phrenology," 311-12.
[25] Hall, "Gall's Phrenology," 314.
[26] Hall, "Gall's Phrenology," 312-13.
[27] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*; Franz Joseph Gall, *On the Origin of the Moral Qualities and Intellectual Faculties of Man, and the Conditions of their Manifestation*, vol. I (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1835), 17-18.
[28] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 66-67.
[29] See, for example Barclay, "Performing Emotion."
[30] Richard Twine, "Physiognomy, Phrenology and the Temporality of the Body," *Body & Society* 8, no. 1 (March 2002): 73.

this aspect Gall departed from Lavater significantly, adopting a seemingly empirical approach which helped distinguish his ideas from physiognomy.[31]

Throughout his career, Gall would remain strictly tied to empiricism. This focus led him to cast emotion as a function necessary for the survival of the individual and the species, rather than to assign it any moral or religious value.[32] Unlike the phrenologists who would succeed him, Gall did not strongly advocate for self-improvement or social reform, but hoped simply to understand how the brain functioned. Gall's organology therefore tended to be more deterministic, depicting character as inherent and only changeable to a small extent.[33] While Gall's organology was heavily influenced by Romanticism, his empiricism was uncharacteristic of the movement. Jason Hall describes phrenology as having a paradoxical character as "a Romantic psychology expressed in positivistic language and methodology."[34] Hall argues that this hybrid character of phrenology makes it difficult to understand how readily it was adopted by Romantic writers, given their emphasis on instinct rather than empirical investigation. Yet this may be explained, partly, by the way phrenology shifted as it moved on from the work of Gall and into the hands of others.

It was Gall's assistant and protégé Spurzheim who first reversed course to take phrenology back in a more metaphysical direction, a fact which would contribute to Gall and Spurzheim's unamicable split in the mid-1810s.[35] Their differences are reflected in the adoption of the name phrenology itself. Gall's preferred term organology was indicative of the emphasis on the study of the brain's organs—that is the physical manifestations of mental faculties—while phrenology derived from the Ancient Greek word *phrēn* which referred to the intangible mind. While Spurzheim did not coin the term he, unlike Gall, was more than happy to adopt

[31] Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 13-14.
[32] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 28.
[33] Kristine Swenson, "Phrenology as Neurodiversity: the Fowlers and Modern Brain Disorder," in *Progress and Pathology: Medicine and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Melissa Dickson, Emilie Taylor-Brown, and Sally Shuttleworth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 102.
[34] Hall, "Gall's Phrenology," 306.
[35] Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 14.

it.[36] Spurzheim's phrenology imposed a more explicit hierarchy on the faculties than Gall's, which had simply divided the faculties between those shared with animals and those unique to humans. It was Spurzheim who first introduced the threefold division between the propensities, sentiments, and intellect, which would become a key element in future phrenological works. Additionally, while Gall had listed explicitly negative traits as faculties, Spurzheim took the position that none of the faculties were inherently bad, only liable to be abused.[37] This was the version of phrenology first experienced by Combe, and it was this form of the science which he would adopt as his template for the improvement of humankind.[38]

Unlike Gall and Spurzheim, Combe was not trained in medicine but rather worked as a lawyer before turning to phrenology. His phrenology is the most philosophical in nature, and shares a specific affinity with the Scottish philosophical tradition.[39] With its elements of faculty psychology, Gall's organology already showed some overlap with Scottish philosophers. Finger and Eling, however, have concluded that the similarities found in Gall's organology were merely "superficial," as it does not appear Gall was particularly familiar with any Scottish work.[40] Its influence on Combe, however, is more readily apparent. Of the Scottish Common Sense philosophers, Combe thought himself to be most indebted to Thomas Brown.

While Brown had died in 1820, when phrenology was still in its nascent stages of development, his published lectures were praised by Combe and others in the phrenological community. In his examination of the feeling faculties in *Elements of Phrenology*, Combe cited Brown's work more than that of any other philosopher. Combe referred to Brown to give evidence for the existence of six of the faculties, while he referred to Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, Francis Bacon and Adam Smith only once each.[41] Despite Combe's belief in the inadequacy of metaphysical approaches to the mind in comparison to the material approach of

[36] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 427.
[37] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 423-24.
[38] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 448-49.
[39] Sokal, "Practical Phrenology," 22-24; David Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull: George Combe and the Mid-Victorian Mind* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008), 36-46, 79-80.
[40] Finger and Eling, *Franz Joseph Gall*, 113.
[41] Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, 45, 53, 61, 70, 75, 79-80.

phrenology, he reserved high praise for Brown.[42] Brown's lectures, in Combe's description, were "a monument of what the human mind was capable of accomplishing, in investigating its own constitution by an imperfect method." Indeed, Combe sought to adopt Brown posthumously as an early friend of phrenology, by arguing that he arrived at many "conclusions harmonizing with those obtained by phrenological observation."[43]

Combe was not alone in this assertion, which was justified to some extent by the support of Brown's biographer, David Welsh. Welsh—himself a member of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society—agreed with Combe that Brown's philosophy aligned with phrenology to a "remarkable degree."[44] Furthermore, Welsh claimed that Brown had investigated and been receptive to phrenology during the early stages of its development. Brown had told him, Welsh reported, that although he believed that Gall and Spurzheim "had proceeded farther than they were warranted by facts," he had found the science to have potential.[45] Nor was Combe the only phrenologist to praise Brown. His American contemporary Charles Caldwell, with whom Combe corresponded, noted Brown as an exception from his criticism of metaphysicians in general.[46] Praising Brown's lectures, Caldwell echoed Combe by writing that Brown "occupied the middle ground" between philosophy and phrenology, and endorsed Welsh's prediction that Brown would be most remembered for coming close to phrenological ideas, despite lacking its methodology.[47]

In actuality, Combe's phrenology took after Brown's philosophy more in style than in substance. Brown had abandoned the division of the mind into different faculties which had become common in Scottish philosophy, and which remained prominent in phrenology.[48]

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[42] Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, 43.
[43] Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, 75; Dixon, *Passions to Emotions*, 115; Sean Dyde, "George Combe and Common Sense," *British Journal for the History of Science* 48, no. 2 (June 2015): 251; Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, 40.
[44] David Welsh, *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Brown, M.D., Late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: W. & C. Tait, 1825), 519.
[45] Welsh, *Life and Writings of Thomas Brown*, 520.
[46] Charles Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: A. G. Meriwether, 1827), 211-12.
[47] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 211, 224; Welsh, *Life and Writings of Thomas Brown*, 519.
[48] Thomas Dixon, "The Psychology of the Emotions in Britain and America in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Religious and Antireligious Commitments," *Osiris* 16 (2001): 299-300.

However, Brown was an important transitional figure in the move away from the religious conception of "passions" and towards a secular understanding of "emotions."[49] Brown too drew his methodology from science, viewing his study of the mind as "mental chemistry" and "mental physics," although it was still a wholly reflective undertaking.[50] As Thomas Dixon has argued, Brown's philosophy represented a significant shift toward a more scientific understanding of emotion. This shift was reflected in the language used by those who discussed emotion before and after Brown, with earlier writers associating passions with religiously-loaded words like "grace" and "sin," while those coming after more likely to associate scientific terms such as "emotion," "observation," and "law."

Combe's word choice shows the influence of post-Brown emotional discourse, yet not exclusively. Throughout *The Constitution of Man*, Combe uses words related to both religious and non-religious conceptions of emotion. Combe is more likely to use the religiously associated "passion" or "affection," with the pair combined occurring twenty-five times, while "emotion" is used only on fifteen occasions.[51] Of the words singled out by Dixon, "law" and its derivatives is the most used, in 641 instances. However while Combe often uses "law" in a scientific sense—as in natural laws, for example—he also regularly uses it in a more religious sense, such as "the laws of the Creator." As might be imagined, "brain" and "observation" also see significant usage, with fifty-one and twenty-eight occurrences respectively. Yet there are also eighteen mentions of the word "spirit" (excluding those referring to alcoholic spirits), six of "conscience" and two occurrences each of "sin" and "of the soul". Taken together, these word choices reflect phrenology's purported uncovering of universal scientific laws through empirical observation, while at the same time retaining significant vestiges of religious and metaphysical understandings of the mind.

[49] Dixon, "Pyschology of the Emotions," 289.
[50] Dixon, "Pyschology of the Emotions," 302.
[51] These numbers are taken from the 1838 American edition, and include plurals and derivatives such as "passions" and "passionate," etc.

In summary, by the time of Combe's work, phrenology occupied a liminal space between older metaphysical theories of mind and an emerging scientific sensibility. While Gall had married his Romantic outlook with a hard empiricism, Combe and later phrenologists drew away from his more radical stance. Rather than further divorce the science from previous strands of thought, Combe synthesised phrenology with older philosophies. The couching of older ideas about human nature inside a new scientific language may, as de Giustino has suggested, have contributed to phrenology's popularity. Like Thomas Brown, Combe's understanding of emotion shifted towards the more scientific. Yet this transition was not complete. Combe retained significant elements of a more religious and philosophical understanding of what emotions were. This included the concept of emotion as a moral sense, which, as will be discussed below, had significant implications when combined with phrenology's most distinctive feature.

### *Happiness and the Emotional Brain*

While Combe's phrenology drew substantially from previous mental philosophies, where phrenology differed was in its localisation of these faculties within the physical structure of the brain itself. Fay Bound Alberti argues that since the introduction of reason as a "principle of mind" in antiquity, a dominant discourse arose which viewed the heart as the centre of emotion in juxtaposition to the brain as the domain of reason. Placing reason in the brain—the utmost portion of the human body, and therefore closest to God—established reason as a God-given gift which differentiated humans from other animals, and the sane from the insane.[52] By the nineteenth century, however, a craniocentric model had emerged which mapped the experience of emotion onto the physical brain.[53] Phrenological research helped lend credence to this craniocentric model.[54]

[52] Bound Alberti, *Mortal Coil*, 113.
[53] Bound Alberti, *Mortal Coil*, 126-27.
[54] Bound Alberti, *Mortal Coil*, 128-29.

In his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, given in Edinburgh in 1835-36, Combe used the localisation of the mind in the brain to argue for the legitimacy and usefulness of all the faculties, including those responsible for emotion. Asking his audience who it was who endowed the brain with its functions, Combe replied:

> It was God. When, therefore, we study the mental organs and their functions, we go directly to the fountain head of true knowledge, regarding the qualities of the human mind. Whatever we shall certainly ascertain as being written in them, is doctrine imprinted by the finger of God himself. If we are certain that these organs were instituted by the Creator, we may rest assured that they have all a legitimate sphere of action.[55]

Rather than characterising emotion as something to be subsumed by the intellect, Combe emphasised that all mental functions had their own, useful purposes. The ideal of mental perfection was not in one group of faculties dominating the others, but in the harmonious action of all. It was only with the faculties working together that an individual could achieve the phrenological ideal of happiness.

In the introduction to the American edition of *The Constitution of Man*, Combe's editor praised the book's object of making men "happier and better."[56] The aim of increasing happiness was one particularly tailored to the early nineteenth century, and had special resonance in America. The Declaration of Independence had made the pursuit of happiness one of the founding ideals of the American Republic. Yet competing and sometimes mutually exclusive definitions of happiness abounded. One of Thomas Jefferson's major influences, the philosopher John Locke had defined happiness as the pursuit of individual pleasure.[57] Yet Jefferson was also invested in the classical republican tradition, which viewed happiness as the result of civic virtue rather than a private aim.[58] Darrin McMahon argues that Jefferson, along with many others in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sought to find a way to

[55] George Combe, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Delivered before the Phrenological Association, at Edinburgh, in the Winter Session of 1835-1836*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1840), 15.
[56] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, v.
[57] Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 317.
[58] McMahon, *Happiness*, 324.

reconcile pursuing both private and public happiness.[59] Scottish Enlightenment thinkers were once again key to this attempt. Many Scottish philosophers, such as Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith, theorised that humans possessed a moral sense which rewarded virtuous behaviour with pleasurable feeling.[60] The gulf between seeking private and public happiness was thus closed, as one's moral sense could only be satiated by acts of public benevolence.[61] Combe's understanding of human happiness fits well within this tradition.

Combe envisioned happiness as the individual acting in harmony with natural law.[62] His object, he wrote, was "to discover as many of the contrivances of the Creator, for effecting beneficial purposes, as possible; and to point out in what manner, by accommodating our conduct to these contrivances, we may lessen our misery and increase our happiness."[63] Combe argued that there were three sets of universal laws to which humanity must adhere in order to be happy. The first were physical laws, such as gravity, which dictated the function of the external world. Infringing the physical laws would bring about injuries, such as a broken leg from falling off a cliff, or the collapse of a building. Organic laws were the laws by which organisms were able to survive, such as an animal's need to reproduce, and non-adherence to them resulted in illness and death. The last set of laws were the moral laws, set out by God to ensure humankind's proper conduct.[64] Key to Combe's understanding of human nature is the idea that the brain was designed to encourage the individual to adhere to these laws. The intellectual faculties led one to understand the physical laws of the universe, and know that if they were to jump off a cliff, they would fall. The propensities ensured that the organic laws were met, by giving people internal desires for basic needs. Lastly, the sentiments ensured that people would adhere to moral laws.

[59] McMahon, *Happiness*, 330-31.
[60] Dixon, *Passions to Emotions*, 64-66, 93-94.
[61] McMahon, *Happiness*, 325-26.
[62] Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, 81-83.
[63] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 12.
[64] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 1-16.

Combe wrote that just as the intellectual faculties helped prevent individuals falling off a cliff, the existence of moral sentiments ensured they did not "fall over the moral precipice."[65] The sentiments then, were depicted as an internal sense of morality, which guided the individual toward virtue when they were properly cultivated. Positive emotions, stirred up within each of the sentimental organs, were the reward for acting within their dictates. "Those who obey the moral law," Combe wrote, "enjoy the intense internal delights that spring from active moral faculties." On the other hand, negative feelings were a punishment for failing to adhere to moral laws. Combe warned that those "who disobey [the moral] law, are tormented with insatiable desires, which, from the nature of things, cannot be gratified; they are punished by the perpetual craving of whatever portion of the moral sentiment they possess, for higher enjoyments, which are never attained."[66] These punishing "insatiable desires" included such feelings as "discontent, hatred, and other mental annoyances" and were calculated, Combe claimed, "to induce the offender to return to obedience, that he may enjoy the rewards attached to it."[67] The sentimental faculties therefore functioned as a form of moral sense, ensuring that individual wellbeing was tied to proper actions towards others. Moreover, by establishing these sentimental faculties as physical entities, Combe's phrenology lent further credence to the existence of a moral sense by making it directly observable. In this sense, Combe wrote, "morality becomes a science," and understanding the sentimental organs revealed how man is truly meant to behave.[68]

The faculties listed amongst Combe's sentiments show clearly their configuration toward the public good. The first two sentiments can be seen as necessary counterbalances on each other: Self-Esteem, which propelled the individual to develop their regard for themselves; and Love of Approbation, which sought regard from others. The third, Cautiousness impelled the individual to maintain their own safety, but also inclined them to contemplate the consequences

[65] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 51.
[66] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 9.
[67] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 11.
[68] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 142.

of their actions. These initial three sentiments were shared with animals. The later sentiments, which were exclusively found in humans, were even more clearly inclined toward public virtue. These sentiments included Benevolence, which engendered a "desire for the happiness of others," while Veneration compelled the individual to "respect whatever is great and good" and Conscientiousness gave "the sentiment of justice, or respect for the rights of others."[69]

However the sentiments acting alone did not guarantee happiness. Happiness, Combe wrote, was "connected inseparably with the exercise of the three great classes of faculties, the moral sentiments and intellect directing and controlling sway, before it can be permanently attained."[70] The sentiments and the intellect held equal importance. A properly developed intellect was required in order to effectively act in accordance with the sentiments. Likewise, through a combination of the propensities and the sentiments, the former could be elevated, and the latter made more effective. The faculty of Destructiveness, for example, if unencumbered by sentiment could lead to unrepressed anger. But if tempered with Benevolence it turned into indignation, becoming a "check upon undue encroachment, and … an able assistant to justice."[71] This relationship was reciprocal—just as the sentiments elevated the propensities, the propensities added force to acting out the sentiment's dictates.

That the faculties should act in harmony was the most important tenet across the work of all phrenologists. One American practitioner of phrenology, Dr William Elder, envisioned this arrangement in a particularly apt metaphor. Giving the inaugural address at a society for mutual improvement in Pittsburgh, he described the mind as "an arch of power and beauty." Just as the stones of the arch each gave support to the whole structure, so too did the faculties of the mind each do important work in ensuring proper mental function. On the one side of this arch were the faculties of the intellect, while the other rose "from the lowest of the instincts, through a glorious gradation of emotions." In this configuration, it was the sentiments that were placed in

[69] George Combe, *Notes on the United States of North America During a Phrenological Visit in 1838-9-40*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1841), xxi.
[70] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 45.
[71] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 47.

the position of most importance. They were, Elder argued, "the keystone that fitly joins the moral to the intellectual segment of the mind" and thus kept the entire structure from collapsing.[72] Elder's depiction of the brain as an arch was not merely a fanciful metaphor, but reflected the location of the phrenological organs when the head was viewed in profile. The propensities were located to the rear, at the base of the skull, while the intellectual organs could be found at the front, behind the eyes and forehead. In between them, the sentiments were located at the crown of the head, seemingly closest to God. This placement underlined the close association between the sentiments, godliness, and virtue.

Phrenology of the variety practised by Combe and his followers therefore depicted emotion as an inbuilt moral sense. If followed, the individual was "rewarded with pleasing emotions in the mental faculties themselves," but if ignored they would experience "the deprivation of these emotions, [and] painful feelings within the mind."[73] Furthermore, it was, as Combe wrote, "as necessary to feel correctly as to reason deeply."[74] While the intellect and even the lower propensities were important, it was the emotion produced by the sentiments which ensured virtue. The importance of the moral emotions particularly would continue to be emphasised throughout the work of subsequent phrenologists. Charles Caldwell, Combe's American contemporary, echoed his views, writing that "to acquit himself in the sphere for which he is intended, man must be moral as well as intellectual. He must have virtuous feelings, as well as correct thoughts."[75] When Combe published his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* in the United States, it was reviewed positively in Fowler and Wells' *American Phrenological Journal*. The reviewer succinctly summarised the role Combe's phrenology depicted for emotion in the human brain: "Man is a law unto himself. And that law is inscribed on the

[72] William Elder, *Address Delivered to the Penn Institute, at the First Meeting after its Organization, February 28, 1839* (Pittsburgh: Alexander Jaynes, 1839), 14.
[73] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 142.
[74] Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, 124.
[75] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 218.

structure and constitution of his mind by the finger of his creator. In following the moral law, therefore, we but follow the emotions and injunctions of our nature."[76]

### *Emotion and American Democracy*

In 1838 Combe gained the chance to apply his theories to American society firsthand, when he undertook an extensive lecture tour of the north-eastern states. Combe was not the first international phrenologist to visit the American lecture circuit. Spurzheim had arrived in 1832 intending to undertake a lecture tour around the country, however these plans were cut short by his death in Boston only a few months after his arrival.[77] Although short, Spurzheim's visit made a significant impression, particularly in Boston where most of his time was spent. Upon his death, Spurzheim had left behind his phrenological collection consisting mostly of various casts of heads and skulls. A group of Spurzheim's supporters formed the Boston Phrenological Society to look after this collection and preserve Spurzheim's memory.[78] The Society soon began publishing its own phrenological journal, *The Annals of Phrenology*, which printed some American content amongst reprints of articles from international journals. Well-represented in *The Annals of Phrenology* was Combe himself, with a large portion of the reprinted articles originating in the *Edinburgh Phrenological Journal* of which he was the editor.

The reaction to Spurzheim's death showed that ideas of moral improvement emerging in phrenology had resonated strongly with American audiences. Spurzheim's funeral service featured a poem written by the Reverend John Pierpont, in which he highlighted the religious aspects of phrenology, emphasising it as the discovery of God's work:

> Nature's priest, how true and fervent
> Was thy worship at her shrine!
> Friend of man, of God the servant,

[76] Review of *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, by George Combe, *American Phrenological Journal* 3, no. 1 (October 1841): 23.
[77] Anthony A. Walsh, "The American Tour of Dr. Spurzheim," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 27, no. 2 (April 1972).
[78] Walsh, "Boston Medical Community," 266-268.

Advocate of truths divine.[79]

The eulogy for Spurzheim, given by Harvard professor Charles Follen, praised Spurzheim's work toward the "improvement and happiness of man."[80] The Americans who supported Spurzheim saw phrenology as more than a means of understanding the mind, but as a template for the betterment of humankind and society.

Despite his unhappy first impression of America, Combe was a keen observer of American society and, more specifically, the effect of its institutions on the minds of the people. His journal, published in two volumes in America with additional comments from his editor Andrew Boardman, took significant interest in how American attitudes reflected the country's democratic leanings. Combe wrote in the introduction that some of the occurrences he noted might appear "trifling." To this, he responded that

> American Democracy is a phenomenon which has scarcely had a parallel in the world. It is, therefore, full of interest in all its features. From the vast political and social power wielded even by the meanest of the people, from their being, not in name only but in fact, the sovereigns of the nation, their manners, habits, opinions, and social condition are far more interesting than those of the same classes in a European kingdom.[81]

This focus on what may have appeared to be banal anecdotes about the lower classes, Combe argued, was indeed vital to both understanding the operation of American society and ensuring its continuance. It was "to these very people," Combe wrote, that "the most profound and enlightened statesmen, the most learned lawyers, and the most accomplished divines, must address themselves; they must guide their understanding, and direct their passions, or allow their country to be ruined."[82] As his fear of the masses ruining the country indicated, Combe had a complicated relationship with American democracy.

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[79] Printed in Charles Follen, "Funeral Oration: Delivered Before the Citizens of Boston Assembled at the Old South Church, November 17, 1832, at the Funeral of Gaspar Spurzheim, M.D.," *The Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* 8, no. 38 (December 1833): 331.
[80] Follen, "Funeral Oration," 323.
[81] Combe, *Notes* 1, xi.
[82] Combe, *Notes* 1, xi.

Combe considered America's democratic system of government to be an improvement over the monarchies of Europe, including that of his British home, as it allowed for the freedom to exercise all of one's faculties.[83] In European countries, Combe argued in his American lectures, various pressures combined to limit the individual's free exercise of their mind. In Austria—which Combe described as "a military but still a civilized despotism"—only those who were employed by the emperor had the opportunity to employ their moral sentiments in public life.[84] Prussia, on the other hand, over-governed its citizens, allowing "the people to do nothing for themselves" and thus leaving their faculties deprived of exercise.[85] Great Britain and Ireland, Combe argued, had a significant amount of liberty, but the activity of the people's higher sentiments was restricted by the oppression of a hereditary aristocracy and the power of the Church of England.[86] This was not the case in America, Combe claimed. "In this country you are free from such shackles," he told his American audiences: in the United States, the "faculties are allowed to take their full swing … And this is the great distinction between your government and ours."[87] Without these restrictions it would theoretically be possible for all Americans to improve and perfect their own minds, but with this possibility came a danger. For, as Combe argued, "all the faculties have a sphere of virtuous activity, but they have also a wide sphere of abuse."[88]

This was a warning also given by American phrenologist Amos Dean, who would later become the inaugural president of the University of Iowa. In his article "A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity," Dean described a phrenological understanding of the causes of insanity. In particular, Dean argued that insanity was a disease of civilised countries, as it was there only that the mind was free enough to exercise the faculties to extremities. As such, the United States found itself in particular danger. The proportion of insane Americans,

[83] Tomlinson, *Head Masters*, 237-38.
[84] George Combe, *Lectures on Phrenology*, ed. Andrew Boardman (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1839), 354-56.
[85] Combe, *Lectures on Phrenology*, 356-57.
[86] Combe, *Lectures on Phrenology*, 357-59.
[87] Combe, *Lectures on Phrenology*, 359.
[88] Combe, *Lectures on Phrenology*, 360.

Dean claimed, was roughly one in eight hundred.[89] The reasons Dean gave for this were numerous, but included the "freedom of thought and action allowed by law" and "the ever acting and changing scene of our politics."[90] Dean argued that the problem therefore lay at the root of America's institutions themselves, and that the overexercise of the mind was "as utterly inseparable from our habits of thought, of feeling, and of action, as is the dead stillness of intellectual and moral death from the iron grasp of unqualified despotism."[91] Like Combe, Dean closely aligned the state of America's institutions with the mental capabilities of the people, and worried that the average person might not be trusted to properly cultivate their faculties to the necessary extent for virtuous action.

The concerns of Combe and Dean tapped into a broader tension in Jacksonian America as to the direction that had been taken in American politics. The rise of the Democratic Party under Andrew Jackson, driven by the expansion of suffrage to all white men, led to concerns about the role of the masses within the nation's politics. There were fears that the people would act with a mob mentality, driven by their own emotion rather than what was best for the country. Combe noticed this tension in his journal. He wrote that:

> The generation trained to obedience under monarchical institutions is extinct; a race now occupies the field which has been reared under the full influence of democracy. The people worship themselves, as the fountains equally of wisdom and power. They bend all institutions in subserviency to their views and feelings.[92]

This cultural shift was not merely limited to politics. Due to the influence of democracy and the expanding market, the early nineteenth century saw an increasing focus on the self.[93] Phrenology, with its faith in the perfectibility of the individual and society, seemed to present a scientific basis for the cultivation of people's minds in order to prevent democracy's potential descent into chaos.

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[89] Amos Dean, "Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity," *The American Phrenological Journal* 2, no. 1 (October 1839): 33.
[90] Dean, "Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity," 33.
[91] Dean, "Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity," 34.
[92] Combe, *Notes* 1, 105.
[93] Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 122-28.

Combe thought it necessary that the American masses be provided with moral education. Aided by the phrenological understanding of the mind, the public needed to exercise their sentiments so that the "reckless self-confident spirit which now animated many of them in the United States would be supplanted by disciplined understandings and regulated affections."[94] The cultivation of individual emotion, Combe argued, was the key to the collective wellbeing of the people. "The condition of each influences the happiness of the rest," he told his American audiences. "Among you especially, then, is the happiness and welfare of each linked to the happiness and welfare of all. To elevate the character of your whole population should therefore be your highest aim."[95] As Combe spoke, however, he assumed that his audience were part of an enlightened group who had already seen the value of phrenology. These elevated individuals would be key to Combe's plan to improve the American character.

While Combe saw the emotional cultivation of the self as the key to the cultivation of the public as a whole, he did not put the onus on the individual to reform themselves. Instead he asked his audience, as those who had already received his wisdom, to turn their attention outwards and seek to improve the "whole population." In the journal of his travels, Combe explained this reasoning further. There would, he wrote, always be three classes of people. At the top were those with large moral and intellectual organs, and proportionate propensities, who possessed "the highest qualities of sentiment and intellect."[96] The second had their sentiments, intellect, and propensities of equal size, and their character would therefore be highly dependent on circumstance. The third were those whose animal propensities predominated over the sentiments and intellect, and were virtually unable to care for themselves. It was on the first class, Combe wrote, that "a severe responsibility lies … for on them a bountiful Creator has bestowed his best gifts, and committed their weaker brethren to their care."[97]

[94] Combe, *Notes* 1, 105, 47.
[95] Combe, *Lectures on Phrenology*, 373.
[96] Combe, *Notes* 1, 128.
[97] Combe, *Notes* 1, 129.

However, Combe was concerned that in a democracy the lower two groups might hold power over the first. "In the United States," Combe observed, "the people have the power to tyrannise, if they please, over the wealthy, the educated, and the refined." While he believed that the American masses were of a "greatly superior condition" than those of other countries due to their better-balanced minds, he felt himself forced to conclude that "democracy, in its present condition of imperfect instruction, is a rough institute of government."[98] The lack of cultivation in the masses had flow on effects in the American legislature. Just as, Combe wrote, "a stream cannot rise higher than its fountain, so, in social life, if the public mind be blind and selfish, the representatives of that mind will never rise into the region of truth and justice."[99] Combe concluded that:

> The moral sentiments alone desire universal happiness, and intellect, extensively informed and highly cultivated, is necessary to discover the means of realising their desires. High moral, religious, and intellectual training, therefore, in the people at large, and nothing else, will produce pure and wise legislation.[100]

Yet despite Combe's trepidation as to the current state of American democracy, he believed that phrenology provided a schema for improving the population and avoiding its downfall. Consistently in his *Notes*, Combe stressed the importance of education not only of the intellect, but of the sentiments. To this end he proposed significant reform of the American school system, with his ideas put into action by reformers such as Horace Mann.[101]

Ultimately, Combe positioned phrenology as a friend to democracy. The optimism inherent in Combe's work is all the more clear when viewing his criticism of another key text of a European's travels through America. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, the first volume of which was published in 1835, and Combe's *Notes* share many similar points of view. Tocqueville famously warned of the "tyranny of the majority," just as Combe feared the power of the "ignorant and self-willed multitude."[102] Similarly, Tocqueville warned of the

[98] Combe, *Notes* 1, 215.
[99] Combe, *Notes* 1, 235.
[100] Combe, *Notes* 1, 236.
[101] Combe's influence on American school reform has been covered extensively in Tomlinson, *Head Masters*.
[102] Combe, *Notes* 1, 213.

unfortunate effects of the pursuit of wealth, also like Combe. Combe himself was familiar with at least the initial volume of *Democracy*, reading it first before travelling to America, and for a second time during his stay. Combe was effusive in his praise, calling Tocqueville's work "the most correct and profound that has been written by any foreigner on the United States."[103] He did, however, criticise one aspect. The only deficiency of *Democracy*, Combe wrote, "is a want of a philosophy of mind."[104]

The lack of a proper understanding of the mind, Combe perceived, had lent a somewhat gloomy outlook to Tocqueville's analysis. "In the United States," Combe wrote,

> a vast moral experiment is in progress. [Tocqueville] perceives its magnitude and importance, and the embarrassments with which it is beset; but he does not equally well appreciate the relation in which the phenomena stand to the human faculties, or divine their ultimate effect on American civilisation. The reader rises from the perusal of his work embarrassed by fears and doubts. It appears to me that phrenology enables us to dispel much darkness from the horizon, and to view the future progress of the United States in a much more favourable light than that in which it is regarded in his pages.[105]

Where Tocqueville's analysis had made the ultimate success of American democracy seem somewhat uncertain, Combe's phrenology offered a clearer path forward. He relied, however, on enlightened individuals such as Horace Mann to do the work of educating the masses, rather than trusting them to cultivate themselves. Later phrenologists, such as the Fowlers, would not follow this same course.

## *Conclusion*

Phrenology began as a scientific endeavour, but by the time Combe arrived in America it had been transformed into something very different. Moving beyond Gall's empiricism, Combe saw phrenology as the key to the betterment of the individual and of society, and in this endeavour emotions were to play an important role. Rather than placing emotion in opposition to reason,

[103] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 103.
[104] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 104.
[105] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 104.

Combe's phrenology taught that intellect and sentiment should work in harmony, with emotion providing a moral sense to ensure the individual followed a virtuous path. In America, where the nature of democracy meant the individual had more power in society, Combe felt that phrenology had a special relevance. Summarising the opinion gained from his American travels, he wrote that he "returned, not only with the impression converted into conviction, but further persuaded, that in the United States, probably earlier than in any other country, will Phrenology be applied to practical and important purposes."[106] By providing a framework for understanding the mind, Combe's phrenology provided hope that democracy could be made workable in America and abroad, so long as the sentiments of the public were properly trained.

Yet there was a darker undercurrent to this understanding of democracy, which surfaces occasionally in Combe's work. American society could thrive if the masses properly developed their sentiments, yet Combe did not necessarily believe all brains were made equal. An acknowledgement of this comes late in Combe's *Notes on the United States*, as Combe contemplates the state of American civilisation. Once again acknowledging that the future of the country relies on the mental cultivation of its people, Combe highlighted a key advantage already possessed by the American public:

> The Anglo-Saxon race, which chiefly has peopled the United States, has been richly endowed by nature with mental qualities. It possesses, in a high degree, all the faculties classed under the three grand divisions before mentioned.[107]

Whiteness, in Combe's work, was associated with a more advanced natural state of the mind—a belief which would have severe repercussions for the perceived suitability of non-white participation in American society. Just as the development of sentiments provided a justification for the participation of the white masses in democracy, so too could it provide a benchmark to be used to exclude others.

[106] Combe, *Notes*, 1, xvi.
[107] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 242.

## Chapter Two

The Rights They Are "Fitted to Enjoy": Emotion and Race in Phrenology

### *Introduction*

In 1846 the American abolitionist Frederick Douglass visited Edinburgh, where he was able to satisfy what he later described as a "very intense desire"—speaking with George Combe.[1] On 22 October, Douglass breakfasted with Combe at his home along with three other abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, publisher of the influential American anti-slavery newspaper *The Liberator*.[2] Douglass was enamoured with Combe's *Constitution of Man*. Reading it, he wrote, "had relieved my path of many shadows."[3] Douglass was no less impressed with Combe himself, remembering his meeting with Combe as a highlight of his time in Scotland. Combe, Douglass wrote,

> looked at all political and social questions through his peculiar mental science. His manner was remarkably quiet, and he spoke as not expecting opposition to his views. Phrenology explained everything to him, from the finite to the infinite, I look back to the morning spent with this singularly clear-headed man with much satisfaction.[4]

Despite the wide-ranging conversation, Douglass gave no indication that there was any discussion of race or slavery during his visit.

That Douglass, a prominent voice for African Americans, had so much respect for Combe, the foremost proponent of a science that is commonly regarded as perpetuating ideas of racial inferiority, might appear odd. Yet it demonstrates the significance of these ideas within the American social sphere, across all races. Phrenologists like Combe, as discussed in the previous chapter, established that properly balanced minds were necessary for the health of a

[1] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, from 1817 to 1882* (London: Christian Age Office, 1882), 208.
[2] For the relationship between phrenology and the abolitionist movement, see: Branson, 184-93; Hamilton, "Phrenology and Anti-Slavery," 173-87; Rusert, "Science of Freedom," 291-308.
[3] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 208.
[4] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 208.

democracy—and, most importantly, that they knew how to measure them. In making these measurements, phrenologists often claimed to find people of non-European descent coming up short. In a speech in 1854, Douglass criticised phrenologists for always depicting "the *highest* type of the European, and the *lowest* type of the negro."[5] If the proper brain were necessary for the health of a democracy, the stakes of these claims were high. As Douglass continued, "the importance of this criticism may not be apparent to all:—but to the *black* man it is very apparent. He sees the injustice, and writhes under its sting."[6] Douglass' criticism was not directed at phrenology itself, but rather the biases of its practitioners. He thought there was a possibility that phrenology might prove the equality of all people, instead of denying it.

While Douglass' more inclusive vision of phrenology never came to be the dominant form of the science, his engagement with it shows the important part which conceptions of the mind played in arguing for people of colour's inclusion in, or exclusion from, American society. This chapter will examine the beliefs white phrenologists held regarding the emotions of other racial groups. In particular, it will compare Combe's body of work to that of the Kentuckian physician, professor, and slaveholder Charles Caldwell, in which can be found the most ardent expression of belief in racial inferiority amongst phrenologists. Although most phrenologists expressed some belief in a hierarchy of human beings, Caldwell did so most explicitly, as a result of his early adoption of polygenism—the belief that different races comprised entirely separate species of human.[7] As Giovanni Tarantino writes, "racism essentially seeks to rationalize and systematize the irrational, trying to justify prejudice, fear, hatred and discrimination by analysing what are presented as empirical facts in a purportedly rational fashion."[8] For Caldwell, phrenology supported his view of the world, which saw American society as purely the domain of white people of European descent. By assigning different

[5] "The Negro Is a Man," *The Liberator*, July 28 1854, 119; Hamilton, "Phrenology and Anti-Slavery," 176-77; Rusert, "Science of Freedom," 303-04.
[6] "The Negro Is a Man," 119.
[7] John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 45.
[8] Giovanni Tarantino, "Feeling White: Beneath and Beyond," in *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe: 1100-1700*, ed. Andrew Lynch and Susan Broomhall (London: Routledge, 2020), 303.

mental characteristics to racial groups according to arbitrary differences in skull shapes, phrenologists like Caldwell legitimised these beliefs by casting these differences as biological facts. As phrenology claimed the areas of the brain responsible for emotion could be quantified, these biological "facts" extended to include tendencies toward certain emotions.

This chapter first returns to the work of George Combe to establish the prevailing beliefs about emotional racial difference amongst phrenologists. Combe, it argues, saw emotions as a fundamental part of the development of societies. In order to sustain a democracy, which Combe saw as the ideal socio-political structure, a society had to consist of individuals with properly developed sentiments which could prevail over their lower emotions. While Combe also saw intelligence as an important factor, as he deemed it necessary for people to effectively work together, it was the sentiments which would ensure the longevity of a society by encouraging people to act beyond their immediate personal interests. Combe's depiction of the emotions of Native Americans and Africans therefore reflected and reinforced his understanding of their position in the process of social advancement, and their suitability for participation in American society. For Native Americans, this meant emphasising their anger and lack of attachment to place to justify their dispossession. For Africans, however, Combe focused on their potential for sentimental feeling when properly educated, and instead blamed slavery for supressing the moral emotions of white and African Americans alike.

This chapter then considers the work of Charles Caldwell. As a slave-owner, Caldwell offers a significant contrast to Combe. Though he wrote less on Native Americans, Caldwell was keenly interested in the minds of people of African descent. While they shared many beliefs, Caldwell's support of white superiority was much more ardent. Caldwell drew a distinction between personal and political freedoms and, despite his own exploitation of enslaved people, believed enslaved Africans should be entitled to personal freedoms. However, he thought that the strength of their propensities barred them from being able to exercise political rights. This harsher indictment, the chapter argues, was a result of Caldwell's

polygenism, and presaged more rigidly biological understandings of emotional difference to come under the emergent scientific racism of the mid-nineteenth century.

### *George Combe and Race*

In 1823, an exploratory expedition travelling through the Great Lakes region encountered the gravesite of former Miami chief, Little Turtle. Little Turtle was, in the words of the trip's documenter William H. Keating, "one of the most celebrated Indian chiefs ever known to white men," who had developed a great "attachment" to the United States. It was because of this strength of character that the scientists in the group began discussing an attempt to steal Little Turtle's skull. "It would, in their opinion," wrote Keating, "have been interesting to observe, whether the examination of this head would have afforded any support to the new, and as yet uncertain, science of Phrenology."[9] In this particular instance, they were dissuaded from desecrating Little Turtle's grave by the accompanying members of the Indian Department, who warned them that they were liable to be caught and that this would "doubtless irritate" the Miami.[10] In 1823, as Keating's remarks suggest, phrenology had already gained some recognition in the United States, although it was only in its early stages of dissemination.[11] It was not until the following year that Caldwell's *Elements of Phrenology*—the first phrenological text by an American—would publish its first edition. Yet even at this early stage, phrenology's potential to inform understandings of race were readily apparent to the American scientists on the expedition. Others would not be dissuaded from stealing skulls to examine, many of which would find their way into the collection of American ethnographer Samuel George Morton, where they would eventually be phrenologically analysed by Combe himself.

[9] William H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of the St. Peter's River, Lake Minnepeek, Lake of the Woods, &c. &c.*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: H. C. Carey & I. Lea, 1824), 87.
[10] Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition*, 1, 88.
[11] Phrenology also began to take hold outside of scientific circles as early as 1823, see: Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 30.

The work of phrenologists like Combe, as shown in the previous chapter, promised the attainability of happiness for both the individual and society as a whole. As the editor of the American edition of *The Constitution of Man* explained, the purpose of Combe's work was to "show how the human race may be as happy as the constitution of man actually fits it to be."[12] This happiness depended on the balance of the faculties—the harmonious functioning of the propensities, sentiments and intellect in conjunction with one another. Yet as much as Combe was concerned with elucidating the proper function of the mind, he also concerned himself with documenting cases of supposed deviance from this desired norm. In this regard, a key area of interest to Combe was how the function of the brain varied between people of different races. In his work, Combe portrayed the balanced mind as being uniquely prevalent for "Caucasians"—a racial grouping with somewhat tenuous boundaries that was nevertheless understood to consist predominately of white Europeans and their descendants. African and Native American people, the two racial groups that drew the most attention from phrenologists writing in and about America, were both seen to deviate from this norm in significant ways. The perfect balance required for happiness—both for the individual and society—was thought to be only easily attainable by whites.

In *The Constitution of Man*, Combe described the differences in brains as emerging from inheritance. Children, he argued, were born with a brain similar to that of their parents, and thus personality traits were passed on from generation to generation. Although individuals had the capacity to change and cultivate their own minds, the characteristics they inherited placed limitations on the extent to which their faculties could improve. "This law," he wrote

> becomes absolutely undeniable in nations. When we place the collection of Hindoo, Charib, Negro, New Holland, North American, and European skulls … in juxtaposition, we perceive a national form and combination of organs. … Here, then, each Hindoo, Chinese, New Hollander, Negro, and Charib, obviously inherits from his parents a certain general type of head; and so does each European.[13]

[12] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, iv.
[13] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 101-02.

Since Combe believed brains to be shaped by the societies they existed within, he argued that these different groups passed the characteristics of their society from generation to generation. Therefore the brain of an individual reflected not only their own personality, but the character of the society they were raised in—and more importantly, the extent to which it had developed. Like many in the nineteenth century, Combe believed that societies progressed linearly until they reached a "civilised" state. Yet given his peculiar phrenological perspective, his work is uniquely placed to offer an understanding of the role emotions were seen to play in that process.

Combe believed that emotions were essential to the formation of societies. In his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, given in Edinburgh in 1832, Combe spent several sessions decoding social life through the lens of phrenology. For Combe, an individual's primary obligations were to the community. Combe argued that while the individual had a responsibility to themselves to remain healthy and gain knowledge, the nature of the phrenological faculties showed that their "proper sphere of life and action" was in the society of others.[14] Combe argued that the basic building block of any society was the domestic unit, the existence of which was maintained by the three propensities he called the domestic affections: Amativeness, Philoprogenitiveness, and Adhesiveness. These domestic affections gave humankind its social nature, as together they were responsible for feelings of affection between different people and thus for the bonds which held society together. The first, Amativeness, was the organ of sexual desire and therefore produced what Combe described as "a feeling obviously necessary to the continuation of the species."[15] The second, Philoprogenitiveness, was responsible for producing affection towards one's offspring—again, a necessity for the "preservation and continuance of the species."[16] The third, Adhesiveness, generated feelings of attachment towards others, and thus "friendship and society result from it."[17] Together, as Combe wrote, these three faculties

[14] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 112.
[15] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 46.
[16] George Combe, *A System of Phrenology* (New York: William H. Colyer, 1842), 115.
[17] Combe, *Constitution of Man*, 25.

gave people "a desire for a companion of a different sex, for children, and for the society of human beings."[18]

Yet these feelings alone only formed the basis of societies. For societies to progress, Combe believed, higher feelings and the intellect were required. Once a society had been established, Combe listed a number of factors which dictated its development on the scale of civilisation. Prominent among these was the development of the people's brains, which Combe believed determined their level of independence and liberty.[19] "The history of the world," he went on to write, "shews that some nations live habitually under subjection to foreign powers; that other nations are independent, but not free; while … very few indeed, enjoy at once the blessings of independence and liberty."[20] There were three factors which Combe believed gave the people the capacity to govern with both independence and liberty: the size of their brain, their intelligence, and their moral and intellectual development.

Phrenologists, Combe argued, were "well acquainted" with the idea that the size of one's brain correlated with their amount of "mental power."[21] It was this lack of mental power, Combe argued, that precluded a society composed of people with small brains from having independence. Combe wrote that history showed that "wherever a people possessing small brains have been invaded by a people possessing large brains, they have fallen prostrate before them."[22] As an example of this, Combe pointed to the "Peruvians, Mexicans and Hindoos" who had been "deprived of their independence" by allegedly larger-brained Europeans. On the other hand, the "Charibs, Auracanians, [and] Caffres," who had larger brains, had managed to resist Europeans despite being, in Combe's words, barbarians.[23] Combe drew his evidence for the relative sizes of these brains from the skull collection of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society,

[18] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 113.
[19] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 355.
[20] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 359.
[21] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 360.
[22] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 360.
[23] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 360.

with further support from the collection of Samuel George Morton, as he noted in a footnote to the published edition of these lectures.

Combe's second factor was the level of intelligence a society had reached. Defending their independence from other nations required, in Combe's understanding, enough intelligence to be able to band together in the common interest. "However energetic the individuals of a nation may be," Combe wrote, "if they should be so deficient in intelligence as to be incapable of joining in a general plan of defence, they must necessarily fall."[24] Once again, Combe turned to the "Charibs"—the then common term for indigenous peoples of Central America and the Caribbean—to provide an illustration of his claims. He believed that while they had powerful enough brains to repel invaders, their development was mostly in their Combativeness and Destructiveness and did not extend to their reflecting organs. While this endowed them with the ferocity to defend themselves, it also rendered them "incapable of co-operating in a general system of defence."[25] This coming together also required some development of the sentiments, particularly Self-Esteem, Firmness, and Love of Approbation. However, Combe believed that the sentiments overall did not have to be well developed to maintain independence, as the "connection between national independence and individual interest is so palpable … that a very small portion of moral sentiment suffices to render men capable of this devotion."[26] These moral sentiments were instead most important for achieving what Combe saw to be the ideal society: one both independent and free.

Liberty, Combe argued, was the state of being free within a society—to be able to act without undue restriction from a government or sovereign. The ideal society would both be free from the control of other nations, but would also allow the individual within it freedom to act as they would. Combe believed that this state required "far higher moral and intellectual gifts than mere independence demands."[27] In order to establish and maintain this independence, the

[24] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 361.
[25] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 362.
[26] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 362.
[27] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 363.

individuals of a nation were required to be "in general moderate, virtuous, and just"—qualities found within the sentiments.[28] Combe attributed the success of the United States in this to the qualities handed down by the English settlers who had first established colonies in America. The first colonists had been "industrious individuals" who had fled England under "religious or political persecution." Over time they had developed further, so that by the time of the American Revolution "they were a moral and an intelligent people;—they instituted the American republic, the freest government on earth."[29] Not all people were properly constituted to enjoy the same success.

Even other European nations failed to live up to the standards Combe believed were necessary for liberty. Combe contrasted the success of the British North American colonies with the failures of Spanish America, which he claimed had been "peopled at first by ruffians … who waded through oceans of blood to dominion over the natives, and who practised cruelty … not industry, as their means of acquiring wealth."[30] Without the proper development of the sentiments, Combe argued, they had failed in their attempts to set up republics in imitation of the United States:

> The cruel, base, self-seeking, dishonest, vain, and ambitious propensities, which had distinguished them as Spanish colonists, did not instantly leave them when they proclaimed themselves to be free citizens of independent republics.[31]

As a consequence of this, Combe depicted the Spanish Americas as having been embroiled in decades long conflict since their attempts at revolution—"the penalty," he wrote, "which Providence ordains them to pay … for the immoral dispositions which they have inherited."[32] Liberty could only be maintained when the people of a national group had progressed to the appropriate point.

[28] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 363.
[29] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 364.
[30] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 364.
[31] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 365.
[32] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 365.

Although Combe did not explicitly address race in his discussion of the progression of societies, his beliefs are important when it comes to understanding his evaluations of the brains of non-white people. Combe believed democracy to be the apotheosis of social progression. Governments, he wrote, "become more democratic in proportion as the people become more intelligent and moral."[33] Combe's beliefs accord with what Nicole Eustace has called the "theory of civilised sentiments," the origins of which she traces back to the work of Scottish philosopher Adam Smith.[34] Smith argued that "the emotional elevation common to civilized nations allowed the people of those nations to live exemplary lives of virtue, while the emotional inadequacies of 'savage' nations rendered such people morally inferior."[35] According to Eustace, these beliefs had the "wide-ranging geo-political utility" of justifying forced labour and the stealing of land for empires.[36] Under Combe's logic the United States could, as a democratic empire, be justified in these actions. While Combe did not seek to justify such things in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, this logic can be seen at work when he did address the minds of other races.

Two of Combe's works address racial difference explicitly: *A System of Phrenology* (1835), and his essay contribution to Samuel George Morton's *Crania Americana* (1839). *A System of Phrenology* was another of Combe's explanations of the history, principles and application of phrenology. It included a comprehensive review of what Combe called "the cerebral development of nations," totalling twenty-three pages.[37] Combe's contribution to *Crania Americana* appears to have been a companion piece to this—much of the language is copied from the former work, to which Combe directs the reader should they seek further information.[38] What distinguishes this essay is instead where it appears. Samuel George Morton

[33] Combe, *Moral Philosophy*, 400.
[34] Nicole Eustace, "The Theory of Civilized Sentiments: Emotion and the Creation of the United States," in *The World of the Revolutionary American Republic: Land, Labor, and the Conflict for a Continent*, ed. Andrew Shankman (New York: Routledge, 2014), 268-70.
[35] Eustace, "Civilized Sentiments," 268.
[36] Eustace, "Civilized Sentiments," 269.
[37] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 420-23.
[38] George Combe, "Phrenological Remarks on the Relation of the Natural Talents and Dispositions of Nations, and the Developments of their Brains," in *Crania Americana; or, a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various*

was a member of the Academy of National Sciences in Philadelphia and his *Crania Americana* was a foundational text for what is now known as the American school of ethnography.

This strain of ethnography promoted the idea of inherent racial inferiority.[39] While many studies focus on later adherents to this school, such as Josiah Nott, Bruce Dain argues that it was Morton who first established "race [as] a fixed entity and racial inferiority as a fact."[40] In *Crania Americana*, Morton took measurements of the Native American skulls in an attempt to draw conclusions about their mental capacities. Morton himself focussed on craniometry—the measurement of overall skull volume as opposed to the identification of particular organs that was phrenology—but Combe's contribution added further evidence to the claims Morton was making about Native American character. In his later works Morton would abandon phrenology entirely, yet Combe's addition formed a foundational part in this establishing work of American ethnology.[41] Both *A System of Phrenology* and the *Crania Americana* essay depict Europeans, or Caucasians, as being uniquely suited to civilisation. "The inhabitants of Europe," Combe wrote in both, "have manifested, in all ages, a strong tendency to moral and intellectual improvement."[42] All others had failed to meet this standard.

In *A System of Phrenology*, Combe acknowledges that he had only the two casts of Native American skulls in his collection, and that it was therefore "impossible to draw any safe inference" about their character.[43] Nevertheless, he still attempted to make broad claims about Native American minds, claiming that the "exact coincidence" between the two skulls "would lead us to suppose that they represent the national shape."[44] Combe concluded:

> The combination of Destructiveness, Secretiveness, Cautiousness, and Firmness corresponds remarkably with their timid, cunning, persevering ferocity; while their

*Aboriginal Nations of North and South America*, ed. Samuel George Morton (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839), 269-91.
[39] Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 197-98.
[40] Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 198.
[41] Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 200; Poskett, *Materials of the Mind*, 78-112.
[42] Combe, "Phrenological Remarks," 421; Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 271.
[43] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 429.
[44] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 430.

> deficiency in the moral organs, and in Concentrativeness and Adhesiveness, would account for the looseness of their social and patriotic relations.[45]

The greater number of specimens provided by *Crania Americana* allowed Combe to reinforce these claims in more detail, taking into account differences between tribes. Skulls of the Iroquois, Combe argued, presented strong faculties of Self-Esteem, Firmness, Combativeness and Destructiveness with deficient moral and intellectual faculties. Such a make-up allowed them to maintain their independence, while "not being able to sustain themselves as independent communities."[46] Combe believed the most highly developed Native American societies within the United States to be the Cherokee, who had on average larger brains, "including the animal, moral, and intellectual regions."[47] Despite the higher than average development of Cherokee brains, however, Combe emphasised his belief that white brains remained superior. To do so, Combe provided the skull of an unidentified Swiss person (Figure 2), which he argued "may here be assumed as a specimen of a powerful race, to serve as a standard by which to compare the skulls of the other tribes represented in this work."[48]

The degree of cultivation of the higher emotions, the sentiments, therefore corresponded with wider ideas about who was seen to be the more "civilised" Native American groups. While the Cherokee were believed to have stronger sentiments, in Combe's mind they were outliers from the general Native American character. In both descriptions, Combe emphasised Native Americans' tendencies toward large organs of Destructiveness—the faculty responsible for anger. This belief in the anger of Native Americans reinforced their supposed "savageness" in opposition to the refined sentiments of white Americans, establishing an essential incompatibility with American society.[49] Of particular note is Combe's insistence that Native Americans were deficient in Concentrativeness. One of the functions of this faculty was to

[45] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 430.
[46] Combe, "Phrenological Remarks," 282.
[47] Combe, "Phrenological Remarks," 283.
[48] Combe, "Phrenological Remarks," 277.
[49] Carpenter, *Seeing Red*, 18-20; Strang, *Frontiers*, 308-314.

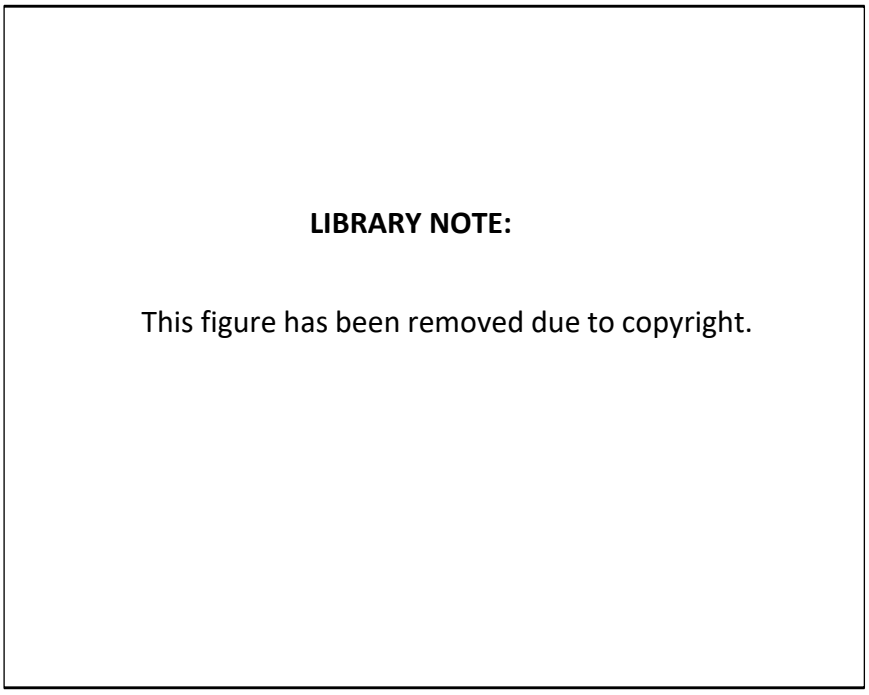


**Figure 2:** Plate LXXI from Samuel George Morton's *Crania Americana* (1839), depicting the skull of an unidentified Swiss person with markings indicating how different phrenological organs could be measured.

create feelings of attachment to place, or what Combe called Inhabitiveness.[50] In the early nineteenth century, as Susan Matt has found, rising individualism and geographical mobility had placed a new emphasis on the emotion of nostalgia, or homesickness.[51] Combe's belief reflected the perception that Native Americans were deficient in developing this attachment to land, which allowed for the easier justification of their dispossession.[52] Taken together, the

[50] Combe, "Phrenological Remarks," 283; Combe, *Notes* 1, xx. Other phrenologists would later list Inhabitiveness as an organ separate to Concentrativeness, yet Combe consistently depicted it as a function of the latter.
[51] Matt, *Homesickness*, 36-39.
[52] Matt, *Homesickness*, 39-41.

emotions which Combe thought were experienced by Native Americans—the incompatible anger and lack of attachment—supported the logic of colonisation by framing their culture as fundamentally incompatible and unattached to their land.

Combe's view of Africans was very different. The skulls of African people, he wrote, showed they were higher "in the scale of development of the moral and intellectual organs."[53] Citing the writings of Timothy Flint, Combe claimed that this proved Africans were "in the highest degree susceptible of all the passions, … especially so of the mild and gentle affections."[54] Unlike in Native Americans, Combe recorded that Concentrativeness was "largely developed," as were the organs of Philoprogenitiveness, Veneration, Hope and Wonder.[55] The key deficiencies noted by Combe were in Conscientiousness, Cautiousness, Ideality and Reflection.[56] The strength of their faculties of Hope, Veneration and Wonder—the latter two of which produced emotions of respect and awe—made them "prone to credulity, and to regard, with profound admiration and respect, any object which is represented as possessing supernatural power."[57] Although unmentioned in this passage, Combe also believed that Veneration could extend to those in authority, not merely to God. Too strong an organ of Veneration, he once wrote, could lead to "abject subserviency to persons in authority"—a claim which has clear implications for their state of slavery.[58] Nevertheless, the well-developed sentiments Combe observed in African skulls indicated their superior suitability for life in the United States, in marked opposition to those of Native Americans.

The difference between the two was made clear by Combe in his response to a speech by Senator Henry Clay, in which Clay argued that if abolition were to succeed it would trigger a

[53] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 433.
[54] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 433; Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years, Passed in Occassional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi, from Pittsburg and the Missouri to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Florida to the Spanish Frontier* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826), 139. Combe's comparison between the emotions of Native Americans and Africans closely matched that of Flint, see: Dwyer, "Mastering Emotions," 45-46.
[55] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 433-34.
[56] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 433.
[57] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 434.
[58] Combe, *Notes* 1, xxi.

race war. “Before I had an opportunity of studying the Negro character and Negro brain,” Combe admitted, “I entertained the same opinion … that a war of extermination would be the consequence of immediate freedom.”[59] Having had the opportunity to study them, however, Combe’s opinion had changed. Here, he relied on a contrast between African Americans and Native Americans, drawn from his work on *Crania Americana*. The brains of Native Americans, he claimed, indicated a “natural character that is proud, cautious, cunning, cruel, obstinate, vindictive, and little capable of reflection or combination”—thus, justifying their dispossession.[60] On the other hand, Combe claimed Africans had more developed moral and reflective organs, and were “therefore, naturally more submissive, docile, intelligent, patient, trustworthy, and susceptible of kindly emotions, and less cruel, cunning, and vindictive, than the other race.”[61] African Americans, Combe therefore argued, displayed feelings which made them “a safe companion to the White,” despite their supposed inferiority.[62]

Throughout his writings, Combe makes clear that he saw the state of African brains as improvable, albeit only through mixing with whites. In *A System of Phrenology* he noted that, while none had reached the level of Europeans, different African groups had attained varying levels of civilisation.[63] Combe’s belief in Africans’ capacity for improvement is on display multiple times throughout his American journals. On a visit to an orphanage for African American children in New York, he found a formerly enslaved child who he believed to be less mentally well-developed than the children who had been born free. Slavery, Combe speculated, was the cause of this supposed deficiency.[64] At one point, Combe argued that slavery “deprives the individual of self-will and self-reliance.”[65] Where enslaved African people were cared for, they appeared capable of developing even further when in proximity to European society. In support of this, Combe related a conversation he had with a man from Bermuda, where there

[59] Combe, *Notes* 1, 259.
[60] Combe, *Notes* 1, 259.
[61] Combe, *Notes* 1, 260.
[62] Branson, “Science of Race,” 182-83; Combe, *Notes* 1, 260; Stack, *Queen Victoria’s Skull*, 223.
[63] Combe, *System of Phrenology*, 433.
[64] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 27.
[65] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 35.

were enslaved people who had been "educated" and "well treated." This, Combe concluded, showed "the capability of the Negro race of improvement by cultivation."[66] Yet Combe was concerned of the effects of the brutal treatment of enslaved people in the United States on both African American minds, and the minds of white people in proximity to it.

Despite his belief in the inferiority of non-whites, Combe believed that it was slavery itself which was the biggest threat to America's institutions. The moral sentiments, Combe argued, "revolt[ed] against cruelty and injustice in every form," including slavery.[67] Combe feared that the practice of slavery stifled these sentiments, which he experienced firsthand during his time in Washington DC. Daily proximity with slavery had, Combe observed, "blunt[ed] men's moral perceptions," even amongst "persons of education and good standing in society," which he viewed as abnormal.[68] He reflected that even though he did not consider himself to possess "any uncommon degree of sensibility," he could not look at enslaved people "without involuntarily first placing myself in their stead" and imagining their life of "toil and misery."[69] Elsewhere in the published journals of his American travels, Combe spelled out what he saw the danger to be:

> If [the Americans] nourish in the bosom of their country a system at open enmity with benevolence and justice, and if they harden their higher feelings in such a way as to become blind to its cruelty and injustice, it is morally impossible that minds thus perverted in their perceptions, can esteem and practise justice in all the other relations of life; and as soon as justice is generally abandoned as the polar star of the Union, its strength is gone. It may continue to adhere together while no strong conflicting interests arise among its members to tear it asunder; but whenever such appear—when the sentiment of justice is prostate in the minds of the people, the end is not far distant.[70]

Combe saw slavery's suppression of the moral emotions as an existential threat to the Union and decried that in all defences of slavery "the fundamental error seems to be committed, of assuming that Negroes are not men, but merely goods and chattels."[71] Despite his belief in their

[66] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 161.
[67] Combe, *Notes* 1, 159.
[68] Combe, *Notes* 1, 265.
[69] Combe, *Notes* 1, 265.
[70] Combe, *Notes* 1, 160.
[71] Combe, *Notes* 1, 259.

inferiority, Combe's support for the abolition of slavery was in fact settled by his view of their minds.

In Combe's phrenology, we therefore see how his perception of non-white emotions reflected the position they held in relation to American society. Combe saw emotion as fundamental to the progression of society, to the extent that it was foundational to what he perceived as the highest form of society—a democracy. He saw both Native Americans and Africans as failing to completely meet the emotional standards required for this, but in different and contrasting ways. This difference reflected the trend noted by Ezra Tawil in the first half of the nineteenth century, whereby Native Americans were often imagined as existing outside the margins of society, while African Americans existed within it.[72] For Native Americans, he claimed that a supposed tendency to anger and lack of connection to place rendered them on the whole incapable of participation in the society of the United States. Yet he saw Africans, particularly those in America, as displaying great sentimental potential and a promising capacity for cultivation. Instead, it was slavery itself which represented the true threat to the sentiments necessary for the success of the United States. Such a belief lent credence to his abolitionism by countering the argument that their incompatibility would ultimately lead to a race war if freed. This argument, Combe wrote, was "the argument of the white man, of the master, in whose eyes his own losses or sufferings are ponderous as gold, and those of three millions of Negroes light as a feather."[73]

### *Charles Caldwell and Slavery*

During his American travels, Combe took the time to visit his phrenological colleague Charles Caldwell, then working as a medical lecturer in Kentucky. Combe was full of praise for Caldwell, calling him an "early, persevering, intrepid, and successful advocate of Phrenology,"

[72] Tawil, *Racial Sentiment*, 59-60.
[73] Combe, *Notes* 1, 259.

and "one of the most powerful and eloquent medical writers in the United States."[74] To Combe's disappointment, Caldwell had taken ill and could only manage to talk for a short time, which left Combe to explore Kentucky. Combe's respect for Caldwell did not extend to his state of residence, which he felt only proved his opinion of slavery as a blight on American society. "Nothing can exceed the fertility and beauty of Kentucky," Combe wrote, "yet slavery prevents it from fully flourishing."[75] Combe noted the dilapidated appearance of many of the buildings, which he attributed to the subduing effect of slavery both on the enslaved and the local white population. Combe referred to a former slave owner who believed that slavery "was corrupting the minds of his children," and depicted the enslaved people themselves as "immoral and miserable."[76] Yet Caldwell, the man Combe was in Kentucky to meet, was himself a slave-owner. While the two shared many opinions based in their common interest in phrenology, this proximity and reliance on slavery would colour Caldwell's perspective, causing some key differences of beliefs between the two men.

Born in North Carolina around 1772, Charles Caldwell was a physician who had trained under Benjamin Rush at the University of Pennsylvania, from which he graduated in 1796.[77] After many years practicing medicine, editing and writing for a literary magazine, teaching, and gaining a reputation for combativeness in Philadelphia, he was invited to join the faculty at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky in 1819.[78] It was in 1821, on a trip to Europe to purchase books and supplies for the university, that Caldwell met Franz Josef Gall and Johann Spurzheim and became a convert to phrenology.[79] Upon his return he began lecturing on the subject, and it was these lectures which formed the basis for Caldwell's 1824 publication *Elements of Phrenology*—the first phrenological book published by an American.[80] *Elements*

[74] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 293. On the relationship between Combe and Caldwell, see: Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, 220-21.
[75] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 293.
[76] Combe, *Notes*, 2, 295.
[77] Emmet Field Horine, *Biographical Sketch and Guide to the Writings of Charles Caldwell, M.D., 1772-1853: with Sections on Phrenology and Hypnotism* (Brooks: High Acres Press, 1960), 2-6.
[78] Horine, *Biographical Sketch*, 6-9.
[79] Horine, *Biographical Sketch*, 10-11.
[80] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 1st ed., iii-viii; Horine, *Biographical sketch*, 11.

*of Phrenology* would be republished in a much expanded second edition in 1827.[81] Caldwell's egotistical and argumentative personality, readily apparent in his writings, contributed to difficulties in his professional life which led him to leave Transylvania University to join the Louisville Medical Institute in 1837, from which he was acrimoniously dismissed in 1849.[82] Caldwell remained living in Louisville until his death in 1853.

Historians such as James Poskett have linked Caldwell's views on race to his status as a slave-owner.[83] However, there has been little research as to the exact nature and extent of his ownership of enslaved people. Poskett relies on Caldwell's admission in his biography that during his childhood in North Carolina, his father owned "but few slaves."[84] Caldwell also acknowledged his slave ownership while living in Kentucky in the second edition of *Elements of Phrenology*, in which he claimed to have educated one enslaved man in medicine and manumitted others.[85] Yet these claims have not been interrogated, and Caldwell's exact relationship with the enslaved people in his care is unknown beyond his own claim to being a benevolent slave-owner. Indeed, even some basic biographical facts about Caldwell are murky, with the essay accompanying Emmet Field Horine's 1960 annotated bibliography of Caldwell's work remaining his most in-depth biography.[86] An examination of available public records raises questions concerning previously reported biographical facts about Caldwell, and complicates his own claims to benevolence.

The clearest record of Caldwell's slave ownership comes from the 1850 Census and its corresponding Slave Schedule. The 1850 Census shows Caldwell living in Louisville with his second wife Mary, her two children from a previous marriage, and her sister Harriet Warner,

[81] Unless otherwise noted, all references to Caldwell's *Elements of Phrenology* are taken from this second, expanded edition.
[82] Horine, *Biographical Sketch*, 11-14.
[83] Poskett, "Global Politics of Reform," 416-20; Poskett, *Materials of the Mind*, 119-21.
[84] Charles Caldwell, *Autobiography of Charles Caldwell, M.D. with Preface, Notes, and Appendix, by Harriot W. Warner* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1855), 62; Poskett, "Global Politics of Reform," 417.
[85] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 259-60.
[86] Horine, *Biographical Sketch*, 1-17.

who would go on to edit Caldwell's autobiography.[87] In the Slave Schedule, Caldwell claims ownership of eight enslaved people: four men aged seventy, nineteen, two and six months, and four women aged thirty-seven, twenty, seventeen and three.[88] The composition and age range, particularly the presence of young children, would seem to indicate this consisted of at least one family group. Upon his death in 1853, Caldwell's slaveholdings were slightly diminished but broadly similar. An article in the *Louisville Daily Courier* reported that Caldwell's will left the "adult slaves, three in number, … for the use of his wife and her sister," while the "children and future issues, are to belong to his wife."[89]

The extent of Caldwell's slave ownership earlier during his time in Kentucky is more difficult to ascertain, in large part due to confusion surrounding his date of birth. Horine reported Caldwell's birthdate as 14 May 1772—a date he most likely took from Caldwell's autobiography.[90] The date in Caldwell's autobiography, however, is accompanied by an editor's note which states that Caldwell's manuscript had left his date of birth blank. The included birthdate, Warner writes, came from "an old Bible" in which his age was recorded.[91] The fact that Caldwell chose to omit the date in his manuscript raises questions as to whether he knew exactly when he was born. Although the 1772 date does align with the 1850 Census, in which he gave his age as seventy-eight, at least one other source contradicts this. In 1821, Caldwell is listed on an incoming passenger manifest returning from his trip to Europe, where his age is given as forty-five—indicating a birth year of approximately 1775.[92] This uncertainty around Caldwell's date of birth has important repercussions for verifying his identity in censuses prior

[87] "United States Census, 1850," database with images, *FamilySearch*, Charles Caldwell, Louisville, Jefferson, Kentucky, United States: NARA microfilm publication (Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M65C-4TP.
[88] "United States Census (Slave Schedule), 1850," database with images, *FamilySearch*, Charles Caldwell in entry for MM9.1.1/MVZ3-MTC, 1850, https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:HR7K-45N2.
[89] "Will of the Late Dr. Caldwell," *The Louisville Daily Courier*, August 8 1853, 3.
[90] Caldwell, *Autobiography*, 62; Horine, *Biographical sketch*, 1.
[91] Caldwell, *Autobiography*, 62.
[92] "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Passenger Lists, 1800-1882," database with images, *FamilySearch*, Charles Caldwell, 1821, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K8C9-3FJ.

to 1850, which only gave the name of the head of each household and a broad age band for each member therein.

Of the censuses taken during his time in Kentucky, there does not appear to be anyone who is a match for Caldwell listed in either 1820 or 1840. The 1830 Census, however, lists only one Charles Caldwell residing in Lexington, where he was living at that time.[93] In this case Caldwell's age is given as falling between sixty and sixty-nine—indicating a birth year in the 1761-1770 range, inconsistent with both the 1850 Census and the 1821 passenger manifest. Given Caldwell's clear uncertainty about his date of birth, however, it is still possible that this is him. Assuming he fell on the lower end of the sixty to sixty-nine age bracket, a birth year closer to 1770 is near to the others Caldwell gave throughout his life. It is notable that the 1772 date appears to be one which Caldwell settled upon later in his life, and could therefore represent a middle estimate between the two other dates. This possibility seems to have been acknowledged by Caldwell's contemporaries: in his obituary for Caldwell read before the American Philosophical Society, Benjamin Coates gave his date of birth as "about the year 1772."[94]

If this is the correct Caldwell in the 1830 Census, it points to potential new information about his relationship with enslaved people. In 1830, Caldwell is shown as having only two other members in his household: an enslaved woman between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-six, and a boy under the age of ten listed as a "free colored person." While the exact nature of this relationship can only be speculated from census documents, the relative ages of the woman and child may indicate they are mother and son. In turn, the difference in free status between the pair might point to Caldwell being the boy's father, as the manumission of children

[93] "United States Census, 1830," database with images, *FamilySearch*, Charles Caldwell, Lexington, Fayette, Kentucky, United States: NARA microfilm publication M19, (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 35, FHL microfilm 7,814, https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XHPG-9J3.
[94] Benjamin Hornor Coates, *Biographical Notice of Charles Caldwell, M. D.: Read Before the American Philosophical Society, January 19, 1855* (Philadelphia: T. K. and P. G. Collins, 1855), 4.

resulting from an owner-slave relationship—although rare—was not unheard of.[95] Sexual contact between enslaved women and their owners was, as described by Brenda Stevenson, "a common occurrence by any measure, both widespread and obvious."[96] Although the practice was so widespread as to defy the easy characterisation of those involved, both Stevenson and Annette Gordon-Reed point to some common factors in these relationships: the men who took enslaved women as concubines were often single or widowed, and the women themselves often worked in domestic roles and were aged in their mid-to-late teens when sexual advances began.[97]

Caldwell's personal circumstances at the time of the 1830 Census align with these factors. Caldwell was married twice: in 1799 to Eliza Leaming, and in 1842 to Mary Barton. The exact circumstances of the end of Caldwell's first marriage are unclear, but it appears to have occurred during or shortly after December of 1820. On the 9th of that month, Caldwell sent a letter to his brother-in-law, J. F. Leaming, in which he indicated that a separation was imminent.[98] Having moved to Lexington the previous year, Caldwell, Eliza, and their son Thomas were lodging with the Clifford family.[99] However, Eliza—as described by Caldwell in his letter—had become jealous of the attention the Cliffords paid to him and Thomas, and was thus "playing off one of her fits of devilry" towards them. Caldwell was clearly unhappy in the marriage, and wrote that he was determined to "tame [Eliza] or part from her. … Self-immolation for twenty years is sufficient, and will not be renewed." Of particular note is the fact that Caldwell appeared to be lodging with the Cliffords in Lexington as he wished to not "ever again become a house-keeper" with Eliza. If Caldwell was true to his word and separated from Eliza around December 1820, he would have found himself both single and in the position to move into his

[95] Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), 108. Gordon-Reed notes that the actions of slave owners towards their enslaved children existed on a "continuum" between the few who manumitted their child and the mother, and the majority who did nothing.
[96] Brenda E. Stevenson, "What's Love Got to Do With It? Concubinage and Enslaved Women and Girls in the Antebellum South," *Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 101.
[97] Gordon-Reed, *Hemingses of Monticello*, 106-10; Stevenson, "Concubinage," 106-10.
[98] Charles Caldwell to J. F. Leaming, December 9, 1820, Special Collections Call Number C C, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky, United States.
[99] Caldwell's status as a lodger in 1820 offers an explanation as to why his name does not appear on the 1820 Census.

own house. In such circumstances, he may have bought or hired a young enslaved woman to act as a domestic servant. Had he fathered a son with this woman, they would have been aged under ten by the time of the 1830 Census.

The scope of this thesis and current restrictions on research travel preclude any further substantiation of this possibility. Yet it is nevertheless important to consider that Caldwell's beliefs did not originate purely intellectually, but were shaped by his day-to-day experience and exploitation of his enslaved workers. Examining Caldwell's views on race in this context helps demonstrate his role in what Christopher Willoughby calls "the long process of embedding racial thinking into medical knowledge and education."[100] Caldwell's medical and scientific bona fides helped legitimise his views, developed through his own implication in slavery. Although Caldwell's writings, discussed below, align more with earlier less "scientific" arguments about race, his personal contributions helped develop the harder scientific racism of the later antebellum period.[101] In his capacity as a professor, Caldwell spread his beliefs to students including Samuel Cartwright, who would become a leading advocate for scientific racism.[102]

### *Caldwell, Emotion and Race*

Like Combe, Caldwell believed in phrenology's utility for improving the overall happiness of humankind. In an 1833 speech before the Lexington Medical Society, later published as a pamphlet, Caldwell described the key aim of a public intellectual such as himself as being to "improve in some way the condition of man, and thus enlarge the general stock of human happiness."[103] Phrenology was an important part of this work, Caldwell claimed. The happiness of the community as a whole was dependent on the happiness of the individuals within it, and

[100] Christopher D. E. Willoughby, "Running Away from Drapetomania: Samuel A. Cartwright, Medicine, and Race in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 3 (August 2018): 583.
[101] Willoughby, "Running Away," 604.
[102] On Caldwell's relationship to Cartwright, see Willoughby, "Running Away," 580-81, 589-90, 604.
[103] Charles Caldwell, *Thoughts on the True Mode of Improving the Condition of Man* (Lexington: H. Savary & Co., 1833), 3.

phrenology therefore provided an important blueprint for this individual improvement.[104] In this sense, happiness became not only something to be personally desired, but an obligation to the community. Caldwell's phrasing here is telling. The balance of the mental organs was necessary, he stated, not only "for the comfort and happiness, as well as for the efficiency of man," but also for "his usefulness as a member of society."[105] This sentiment is repeated throughout Caldwell's speech. An individual, he argues, should seek to be "as happy in himself, and as useful to others, as the laws of his being admit."[106] The audience to whom Caldwell was speaking, the Lexington Medical Society, would have been uniformly white and male. For them, perhaps, Caldwell saw the path to mental balance as wide open—yet not all shared the same capacity for development.

It was Caucasians alone, claimed Caldwell in the expanded 1827 edition of *Elements of Phrenology*, who could achieve the necessary balance to be a happy and functional member of society. While their propensities still tended to be larger than the other organs, the development of the "frontal and superior regions"—the sentiments and intellectual faculties—tended to be "much fuller" than in other races. To Caldwell, this meant that the difference between the faculties was "much less considerable" and therefore easily rectified through education. In particular, Caldwell praised the development of Caucasians' sentiments. It was in Caucasians, Caldwell wrote, "that the moral sentiments, especially Conscientiousness, Benevolence, Hope, Veneration, and a well regulated Self-Esteem, endowed with superior vigour and activity, rise to the highest degree of perfection."[107] All this combined, Caldwell believed, to create a Caucasian mind which resembled

> a well-constructed vessel at sea, under the guidance of a skilful helmsman, with a full press of canvas, spread to a strong and favouring breeze. Under such circumstances, her appearance is majestic, her force irresistible, her movement

[104] Caldwell, *Thoughts*, 8-9.
[105] Caldwell, *Thoughts*, 14.
[106] Caldwell, *Thoughts*, 8, 36.
[107] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 244.

> through the water swift and graceful, and she reaches, in security, her destined haven.[108]

Caldwell finished this paragraph with a warning, however: "Alter, in any measure, this confederacy of agents, and you deteriorate her movement, or endanger her safety." It was for this reason, Caldwell believed, that "[it] is in the Caucasian race alone, that we find real human greatness."[109]

In criticising the character of non-whites, Caldwell echoed the belief that race was a difference much deeper than mere skin colour. This belief is clearest in his *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* (1830), in which Caldwell mounts an early argument in support of the theory of polygenesis.[110] *Original Unity* was based on Caldwell's earlier review of British ethnologist James Cowles Prichard's *Researches into the Physical History of Man* (1813), in which Prichard argued that racial difference could emerge from physical variations passed on from parent to child by pointing to the existence of albinism as proof complexion could change between generations. Caldwell criticised this claim on numerous grounds, but most importantly made clear that he believed the differences between races went far beyond external physical attributes. The difference of people with albinism, he wrote, "is superficial; a matter of mere colour, and nothing more. Complexion excepted, an African albino is a real African, and a Caucasian albino a real Caucasian."[111] Racial difference, for Caldwell, was as much—if not more—of an internal attribute as an external one. The "general diversity" of race, Caldwell believed, was "composed, like other aggregates, of many subordinate ones. It is corporeal and mental. The former consists of differences in colour, texture, and figure; the latter, in the intellect and moral feeling." As a phrenologist, for Caldwell the corporeal and mental were not entirely separate. Caldwell noted that he could observe the mental qualities through the corporeal, as the physical differences between races consisted in part of "the form of the

[108] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 245.
[109] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 245.
[110] Tawil, *Racial Sentiment*, 47-48.
[111] Charles Caldwell, *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* (New York: E. Bliss, 1830), 67.

brain, that organ being known to give shape to the skull."[112] The grounding of *Original Unity* in the science was not lost on its reviewers, one of which praised it as "strictly phrenological" as "every one would eagerly desire that it should be."[113]

Given his close relationship with enslaved people, Caldwell's desire to uncover what he perceived as inner differences between the races was not purely an academic exercise. In discussing his slave ownership in *Elements*, he critiqued British writer John Mason Good's work in support of monogenesis, *The Book of Nature*. In it, Good had written that arguments regarding the difference in intellectual capabilities between races were "the feeblest and most superficial" in support of polygenesis. These beliefs, Good wrote,

> suit the narrow purposes of a slave merchant—of a trafficker in human nerves and muscles—of a wretch, who in equal defiance of the feelings and laws of the day, has the impudence to offer for sale … a living Hottentot woman.[114]

In response to this, Caldwell launched a series of invective at Good's "blustering tirade," "embittered denunciation" and "miserable rhodomontade."[115] Caldwell took particular issue with the characterisation of supporters of these theories as human traffickers. He instead disputed that he trafficked slaves, claiming that he had "never purchased a slave with a view of selling him again."[116] As a result Caldwell claimed he had been accused by his neighbours of "doing an injury to our slaves by two [*sic*] much indulgence."[117]

Elsewhere, Caldwell expressed a somewhat disapproving stance towards the institution of slavery despite his own involvement and settled belief in the inferiority of people of African descent. In *Original Unity*, Caldwell disavowed the notion that belief in racial inferiority could be used to justify slavery. He denied that his theories would "produce, in the superior, either

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[112] Caldwell, *Original Unity*, 76.
[113] Review of *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race*, by Charles Caldwell, *The North American Medical and Surgical Journal* 12, no. 2 (October 1831): 366.
[114] John Mason Good, *The Book of Nature* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1831), 209.
[115] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 259.
[116] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 260.
[117] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 260.

injustice or cruelty toward the inferior, or induce him to inflict on him any injury or wrong."[118]

Caldwell then went on to give a mealy-mouthed and convoluted criticism of slavery:

> It is not true, then, that the theory contended for favours injustice, oppression, and wrong, inflicted by the higher races of men on the lower. It gives no countenance, as it has been accused of doing, to cruelty or tyranny practised on the Africans, or the aborigines of our country. Each race is entitled alike to all the rights it is fitted to enjoy. But each race is neither qualified, nor can it ever become so, to enjoy and turn to proper account precisely the same rights, especially in the same degree, and has not therefore the same claim to all of them. The Caucasians are not justified in either enslaving the Africans or destroying the Indians, merely because their superiority in intellect and war enables them to do so.[119]

It is possible to read this passage as a straightforward denunciation of slavery: Caucasians are not justified in enslaving other races due simply to their supposed superiority.[120] Yet the conditions applied to this proposition encourage a more ambivalent interpretation. It is certainly not an argument for equal rights. Instead, Caldwell argues that different races are entitled to different rights: the rights they are "fitted to enjoy."

Caldwell would expand upon the meaning of this in 1835's *Phrenology Vindicated*, one of his many diatribes against critics of phrenology. In this instance, Caldwell wrote in response to an 1834 review of Spurzheim's *Phrenology, or the Doctrine of the Mental Phenomena* in the *Christian Examiner and General Review*.[121] The anonymous author of this review had referenced James Cowles Prichard's work on race to support, in opposition to most phrenologists, the claim that the African intellect was equal to that of the European.[122] Caldwell refuted this by repeating the arguments he had made in *Original Unity* that African brains were poorly balanced and had "far more of the animal and less of the man than the Caucasian, and [are] therefore less fit for an elevated and comprehensive sphere of action."[123] Once again, Caldwell offered a qualified denunciation of slavery, writing that it should be abolished "as

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[118] Caldwell, *Original Unity*, vi.
[119] Caldwell, *Original Unity*, vii.
[120] Tawil, for example, takes Caldwell at his word: Tawil, *Racial Sentiment*, 57.
[121] "Pretensions of Phrenology Examined," review of *Phrenology, or the Doctrine of the Mental Phenomena* by Johann Spurzheim, *Christian Examiner and General Review* 17, no. 2 (November 1834): 249-69.
[122] "Pretensions of Phrenology," 266.
[123] Charles Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated, in a Series of Remarks, Physiological, Moral and Critical, on Article VII of the November Number, 1834, of the "Christian Examiner," headed "Pretensions of Phrenology Examined"* (Lexington: J. Clarke & Co., 1835), 76.

soon … as it can be done with safety."[124] Caldwell went on to make explicit the exact rights different races were suited for, drawing a clear distinction between what he called personal and political freedom.

In essence, Caldwell's personal and political freedoms mirror the qualities of independence and liberty described by Combe, albeit on the scale of the individual. Personal freedom was independence and therefore, in the case of African Americans, freedom from slavery.[125] Political freedom, on the other hand, reflected Combe's conception of liberty, being the capacity "to frame and administer a system of wise and salutary laws, for the government of himself and others in a large community" and to "be a peaceful, industrious, and orderly citizen."[126] While Caldwell believed that Africans were entitled to personal freedom, he denied they were capable of holding political freedom. The problem, Caldwell believed, was in the over-development of the more selfish propensities. "The cerebral development of the negro is in fault," he wrote, "The animal compartment of his brain is too preponderant for the purposes of true political freedom."[127] Unlike Combe, Caldwell relied less on actual analysis of skulls in this argument, pointing instead to contemporary incidences which he believed had proven their incapacity for political freedom. *Phrenology Vindicated* is replete with references to the supposed failures of Africans to suitably adapt to civilisation. Caldwell pointed to Haiti, arguing that since the overthrow of French colonial rule it had displayed deteriorating "moral, social, and personal conditions."[128] In Canada, he argued, a group of manumitted slaves had settled and become "idle, poor, vicious, and miserable," while nearby communities of immigrants from Scotland and Ireland had prospered.[129] Likewise, he predicted the colony of Liberia would devolve to "barbarism" due to the lack of a Caucasian influence.[130] Such examples, he alleged, caused him to call into doubt even his previous expression of belief in Africans' capacities for

[124] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 80.
[125] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 80.
[126] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 80-81.
[127] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 81.
[128] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 79-80, 82.
[129] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 82-83.
[130] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 79.

personal freedom. Upon examining the "strength and permanency of their social feelings," Caldwell claimed to fear they could not enjoy the same level of freedom available to Caucasians.[131]

Caldwell's argument in *Phrenology Vindicated* is in fact inconsistent with some of his earlier writing on race, in which he had espoused a position similar to Combe. In the 1827 edition of *Elements of Phrenology*, Caldwell compared Africans to Native Americans and, like Combe, concluded that Africans were more suited to civilisation. Africans, Caldwell claimed, had more developed Amativeness, Philoprogenitiveness and Adhesiveness—which produced feelings of social attachment—as well as "superior development of some of the moral organs" which provide "a further fitness for civilization."[132] On the other hand, Native Americans displayed greater Combativeness, Destructiveness, and Secretiveness, once again emphasising their supposed anger.[133] These claims appear to run counter to those offered in *Phrenology Vindicated*, that the animal portion of the brain was "too preponderant" in Africans. An explanation for this discrepancy can be found in Caldwell's shifting relationship to the theory of polygenesis. Caldwell's *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race*, in which he mounted an argument for polygenism, was published in 1830 but based on a review he had written earlier, in 1814, before he was familiar with phrenology. Yet in *Elements of Phrenology*, written between the two, Caldwell was equivocal about his belief in polygenesis. At one point in *Elements*, he claimed that although he saw the races as unequal, he did not wish to "call in question the original unity of the human race."[134] It is unclear why this is. The phrenological community was largely centred in Northern cities and perhaps, as James Poskett has suggested, Caldwell sought to downplay his racial theories in pursuit of this audience.[135] However, it would seem by 1830 that he was confident enough in his belief to republish his previous review in the form of a book.

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[131] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 81-82.
[132] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 243.
[133] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 243.
[134] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 265.
[135] Poskett, *Materials of the Mind*, 119-20.

By *Phrenology Vindicated*, in 1835, Caldwell's polygenism is evident throughout. The mental and emotional differences between Africans and Caucasians are depicted as an insurmountable divide rather than something that might, as he had previously written in *Elements*, be "mutable by the influence of education and example."[136] In the previous "three or four centuries," Caldwell claimed, the people of Africa had shown no signs of improvement, while European groups who had been in a similar state were now "the most enlightened of the human family." Caldwell finds the reason for this in the "constitutional differences" between the two races.[137] Even when "mingled in the same society," Caldwell depicts Caucasians as being superior to Africans due to "native inferiority"—a term he later repeats.[138] This shift in Caldwell's language reflects the hardening of these emotional boundaries as polygenesis grew to become a more accepted theory in American scientific circles. As Erin Dwyer has noted, although polygenesists allowed social construction some influence in the development of racial traits, the inherent starting difference and slowness of social processes essentially made these differences insurmountable.[139] While Combe's phrenology had left open the possibility of change, within a relatively short period, Caldwell's presaged the emergence of scientific racism, which would leave no room for African Americans in white society.

Caldwell himself understood that he was departing from his fellow phrenologists in his belief in insurmountable racial difference. These views, he wrote, were not "fully entertained by the Phrenological School." He continued:

> Though Phrenology satisfactorily accounts for the mental inferiority of the African race that exists *at present*, … by showing a deficiency in their moral and intellectual organs, and a predominance of their animal ones, the professors of that science … do not … maintain, that that inferiority will necessarily be permanent. As far as we are informed, they have no where contended, that education will not remove it. Should the sentiment we have advanced, therefore, prove erroneous, the responsibility of it rests on ourselves; and we cheerfully assume it.[140]

[136] Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology*, 243.
[137] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 77.
[138] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 78, 80.
[139] Dwyer, "Mastering Emotions," 57.
[140] Caldwell, *Phrenology Vindicated*, 83.

Although Caldwell and Combe would always correspond, the former's opinions on race did not sit well with the latter. Amongst Combe's papers, James Poskett has found an 1839 letter from Caldwell, in which he gave his opinion on race. In the margins, Combe noted: "I think more of Africans than he. They are inferior to whites, but this is not the question."[141] While both men thought of African people as emotionally inferior, Caldwell's belief in the immutability of that difference reflected their disparate outlooks, and presented an unbridgeable divide between their perceptions of race, and of emotion.

## *Conclusion*

In the work of both Combe and Caldwell, emotion emerges as a key location of conceptions of racial difference. Although intellect was also considered important, it was the sentiments that endowed individuals and societies with the ability to maintain liberty by setting aside personal interest when necessary. In phrenology we therefore find further proof of Ezra Tawil's contention that a theory of "racial sentiment" emerged in the nineteenth century, which positioned feeling as a defining point of racial differentiation.[142] Using phrenology, Combe and Caldwell sectioned off different races from American society, based on their capacity for the higher emotions of the sentiments. While initially fairly similar in their estimation of racial emotions, Caldwell would go on to differ significantly in his perception of African people. Most striking, however, was their disagreement over whether this difference could be overcome. For Combe, education and cultivation, although slow, could eventually raise African Americans to the level of Europeans. For Caldwell, however, this was an impossibility. The rigidity with which Caldwell perceived racial categories, informed by his belief in polygenesis, forever discounted the ability of Africans to feel the requisite emotions for social and political equality. In this sense, it is understandable why Frederick Douglass seems to have gravitated toward

[141] Poskett, *Materials of the Mind*, 120-21.
[142] Tawil, *Racial Sentiment*, 2-3.

Combe's perception of the world. For Combe, the emotional boundary between those who could and could not participate equally in society was ultimately permeable, while Caldwell depicted it as forever closed to those who were not white.

## Chapter Three

"Looking to their Own Heads": Emotion and Gender in Phrenology

### *Introduction*

Just as phrenology depicted significant differences between the mental developments of different races, so too did it emphasise gender differences. Yet the gender differences espoused by phrenologists were very different to those said to exist across racial lines, particularly in terms of emotion. While phrenologists pointed to emotional difference in non-whites that helped justify their limited participation in American society—whether they believed these were inherent and unchangeable or not—women were seen to have highly developed emotional capabilities with the development of women's sentiments often depicted as exceeding that of men. Furthermore, no phrenologist made the argument that men and women represented entirely different species, as Caldwell had done with his support of polygenesis. As the differences between white men and women's brains were seen to be more subtle, phrenologists' approaches to gender differed significantly from their approach to race.

The popularity of phrenology in the United States coincided with shifting perceptions of women and their role within the Republic. In 1966, Barbara Welter famously defined the "Cult of True Womanhood" as it appeared in nineteenth-century American literature, which ascribed women four virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity—and restricted them mainly to the home.[1] Over the ensuing decades, historians have continued to engage with Welter's argument, expanding upon and challenging her initial thesis. Increasingly, scholars have pointed to how women were able to negotiate an intermediary space between the public and private, where they could influence politics without explicitly challenging the precepts of true womanhood.[2] As the middle of the nineteenth century approached, a growing women's

[1] Welter, "True Womanhood," 151-52.
[2] Sarah M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 92.

rights movement emerged. Jan Lewis argues that after the American Revolution patriarchal values were undermined and affection made a virtue, allowing "women, who were supposedly naturally affectionate, a political role."[3] An examination of phrenology's depiction of women supports Lewis' claim. While the domestic view of women's nature did not change, the greater importance given to emotion supported women's further engagement in politics.

This chapter examines the approach of phrenologists to these gender differences, in the context of the changing ideals of femininity and the burgeoning women's rights movement of the first half of the nineteenth century. It argues that the phrenological view of the brain put forward an understanding of femininity that was able to undergird both belief in domesticity and support for women's suffrage. In phrenology, emotion was seen to emanate from the brain rather than the heart, linking it more closely with intellect and giving near-equal value to the two. This made it more difficult to enforce a binary opposition between the domestic and public sphere, predicated on the opposition of reason and emotion. It was the disruption of this distinction that gave phrenology its appeal across a wide spectrum of nineteenth-century feminist thought. While the division of these two spheres remained in place, it no longer entirely justified the exclusion of women from formal political processes. Phrenology could therefore appeal, as Carla Bittel notes, both to "difference feminism" which focused on what made women distinctive from men, as well as those who focused on men and women's inherent similarities.[4]

This chapter first explores Sarah Josepha Hale's engagement with phrenology in the pages of her magazines, particularly *The Ladies' Magazine* (1828-1836). Hale, one of the most prominent female writers and editors of the era, recognised early on the implications of locating emotion in the brain for women. Although often regarded as conservative, Hale's work on phrenology offered an early archetype for how its supporters would approach the question of

[3] Jan Lewis, "Mother's Love: The Construction of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Mothers and Motherhood: Readings in American History*, ed. Rima D. Apple and Janet Golden (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 52.
[4] Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself," 119.

gender. The chapter then examines the role of gender in the practical phrenology of the *American Phrenological Journal* (*APJ*) and the work of its publishers Fowler and Wells. The individuals involved with Fowler and Wells offer a compelling example of phrenology's simultaneous support of varying points of view on gender: while the *APJ* offered a more conventional view of true womanhood, members of the Fowler family actively supported and campaigned for woman's rights. Lastly, it turns to those individuals who used phrenology to explicitly argue for women's rights. Rather than reject the conception that women were more emotional, they focused on connections between emotion and human rights. Ultimately, the role of emotion within phrenology enabled it to act in support of both conservative gender roles and the promotion of women's suffrage.

## *Sarah Hale and the Ascendancy of Emotion*

One of the earliest women to support phrenology in the United States was the writer and magazine editor Sarah Josepha Hale. Hale, born Sarah Josepha Buell in 1788, was one of the most influential female writers of the nineteenth century. Widowed in 1822, Hale justified her literary pursuits by the need to provide for her five children—the eldest of whom was seven years old and the youngest under one at the time of her husband's death. In 1828, Hale began the publication of *The Ladies' Magazine* in Boston, which she edited until 1836. At that point *The Ladies' Magazine* was bought by Louis Godey, owner of its biggest competitor *Godey's Lady's Book*. Godey closed *The Ladies' Magazine* masthead and made Hale the new editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a position which she retained until 1877, two years before her death in 1879. By 1860, *Godey's Lady's Book* boasted 150,000 subscribers, making it the most highly circulated of any American magazine at the time.[5] Among her many accomplishments, Hale raised funds to build the Bunker Hill Monument in Boston, successfully campaigned to have

[5] Laura McCall, "'The Reign of Brute Force Is Now Over': A Content Analysis of *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1830-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 221.

Thanksgiving recognised as a national holiday, and wrote the poem which formed the basis for the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

*The Ladies' Magazine*, as described by Hale, was the only magazine "devoted strictly to the object of inculcating, with all womanly duties and accomplishments, the tone of sentiment and feeling corresponding with the high dignity of an *American lady*."[6] The purpose of the magazine was, as Hale set out in its opening issue, to improve American society through the education of women. No other efforts, Hale argued, would "have an influence more important on the character and happiness of our society."[7] This claim was enmeshed in nineteenth-century understandings of gender and the role of women in society. Hale was careful to explain that she did not wish for women to "usurp the station" of men.[8] Instead she viewed women as responsible for the domestic realm, particularly as mothers to future generations of Americans. It was properly educated mothers, Hale argued, who would ensure that the "sons of the republic will become polished pillars in the temple of our national glory, and the daughters bright gems to adorn it."[9] Hale made clear that this was a national project, promising that work "descriptive of American scenery, character, and manners, will be most welcome."[10] In phrenology, Hale saw a science which would empower women to both understand themselves, and give them the tools to raise children to be fit and proper citizens.

Hale had first been impressed by phrenology when she attended Spurzheim's lectures before his death in Boston, and used the editorship of her magazines to promote the science. After some earlier scattered mentions in *The Ladies' Magazine*, the first article specifically on the topic was a short piece in the October 1832 issue, titled "What Good Will Phrenology Do the Ladies?" In this article, the unnamed author—probably Hale herself—recounted being

[6] Sarah Josepha Hale, "The Ladies' Magazine," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 5, no. 12 (December 1832): 576.
[7] "Introduction," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 1, no. 1 (January 1828): 1.
[8] "Introduction," 2.
[9] "Introduction," 2.
[10] "Introduction," 4.

approached by a young woman, who was concerned that attending Spurzheim's lectures would overstep the bounds of feminine proprietary. In response, the author wrote:

> We told the lady in question, that Dr. Spurzheim was proving the *heart* lay in the *head*, therefore, as the heart was always considered a lady's province, we thought that our sex had now, good authority for looking to their own heads at least: perhaps it would not be well to judge those of the gentlemen—except they were very fine.[11]

In *The Ladies' Magazine*, phrenology was used to justify the subtle expansion of the "female sphere." Phrenology linked emotion and cognition as two closely intertwined and co-dependent processes rather than the separate workings of the heart and brain. An important divider between women's domain of the "heart," and men's of the "head," had been disrupted. Knowledge of the whole brain could therefore fall within woman's sphere.

Hale's belief that phrenology presented an opportunity for women in society to increase their status was bolstered by a conversation she had with Spurzheim after one of his lectures. In this conversation, which Hale recounted in her obituary for Spurzheim in the December 1832 issue of *The Ladies' Magazine*, Hale was impressed by Spurzheim's consideration of women. Hale recounted Spurzheim telling her that phrenology would do more for elevating women than anything other than Christianity, as it gave women "a participation in the labors of mind."[12] In particular, Hale was moved by Spurzheim's reminiscences of his own mother and the role she had played in his early life. Spurzheim told Hale that

> If, … I possess any excellence of character, I owe it all to my early training. In the first place, my mother gave me a good physical education,—then she cultivated my moral feeling, and she taught me to *think*.—I owe everything to my mother![13]

Spurzheim's attribution of his talents to his mother made a great impression on Hale, but also made clear for her the responsibility that phrenology placed on women to direct the

[11] "What Good Will Phrenology Do the Ladies?" *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 5, no. 10 (October 1832): 474.
[12] Sarah Josepha Hale, "Dr. Spurzheim," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 5, no. 12 (December 1832): 572.
[13] Hale, "Dr. Spurzheim," 572.

development of future generations. Phrenology, Hale summarised, was both a "triumph for woman" as well as a heavy responsibility "impose[d] on our sex."[14]

Hale responded to this responsibility by imploring her readers to take an interest in the science. In a November article, published shortly before Spurzheim's death, Hale promoted his lectures and shared the hope that they would be well attended by both men and women. A lack of attendance at his upcoming lectures, Hale bemoaned, would indicate that "the spirit of the Literary Emporium is departed," and that *The Ladies' Magazine* should "confine [its] work to the fashions, and the frivolous gossip which prevails in the usual periodicals prepared for our weak sex."[15] Hale continued her promotion of phrenology throughout the 1833 volume of *The Ladies' Magazine*, beginning with an introduction to the phrenological organs accompanied by an illustrative plate in the January issue. The explanation of the organs, taken from Spurzheim, emphasised gendered differences. Of the propensities and sentiments, Philoprogenitiveness and Adhesiveness—two out of three of the domestic propensities—were said to be larger in women than men, as were Cautiousness, Love of Approbation, and Reverence. Men, on the other hand, displayed larger Amativeness, Combativeness, Self-Esteem and Firmness.[16]

As Hale's conversation with Spurzheim and emphasis on women's domestic propensities indicate, despite women's admission into the mental sphere she still viewed their role as primarily domestic. Just as Hale sought to reassure male readers that their role would not be usurped in the introduction to *The Ladies' Magazine*, she also took pains to clarify that phrenology's boost to women would not come at the expense of men. While she explained that Spurzheim saw society deriving great benefit from "judiciously cultivated and rightly directed" female intellect, their primary responsibility was to be "an intellectual and moral help-meet for man."[17] So too did "What Good Will Phrenology Do the Ladies?" shift focus to women's roles as mothers and nurses for the next generation. Knowledge of the mind did not mean women

[14] Hale, "Dr. Spurzheim," 572.
[15] "A Chapter to be Read," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 5, no. 11 (November 1832): 115-16.
[16] "Hints About Phrenology [no. 1]," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6, no. 1 (January 1833): 24.
[17] "A Chapter," 115-16.

should take more active roles in other areas of society, it argued, but rather enabled them to perform their domestic role more effectively while placing even greater emphasis on its importance. As Hale pointedly wrote, "unless the men take charge of the nurseries, and run the risk of all the 'mewling and puking' &c., we do not see any way of obviating the necessity of female participation in the science."[18]

The articles which followed continued to focus on women's use of these organs in the raising of children, for the betterment of society. "A Chapter on Cats," from the February 1833 issue of *The Ladies' Magazine*, offered both an example of how women could shape the minds of their children, along with the phrenological theory behind it. In "Cats," Hale instructed mothers to encourage their children to show kindness to animals in order to "cultivate constantly the benevolent affections."[19] Using explicitly phrenological language, she explained that some children had "the organ of *Destructiveness* large, and that these may show a propensity to injure or destroy animals." These children, Hale wrote, should be encouraged to observe and care for animals as to "direct their feelings" so that their sentiments would develop enough to overpower their Destructiveness.[20] Drawing upon the works of Spurzheim, Hale emphasised that the feeling faculties were exercised through experience rather than rote learning. For example, merely reading descriptions of charity would not develop Benevolence, but rather the individual should "experience suffering himself, and contemplate misery in others."[21] Women's natural affinity for sentiment gave them a great aptitude for this kind of practical teaching, alongside more traditional forms of education.

This approach to childrearing did not emerge from phrenology, but was instead given legitimacy by phrenology's apparent scientific backing. Advice to teach children kindness towards animals, for example, was common in the nineteenth century.[22] This advice appeared

[18] "What Good Will Phrenology Do the Ladies?" 474.
[19] Sarah Josepha Hale, "A Chapter On Cats," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6, no. 2 (February 1833): 61.
[20] Hale, "Cats," 58.
[21] "Hints About Phrenology [no. 3]," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6, no. 3 (March 1833): 136.
[22] Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 55.

in writings by Hale which predated her interest in phrenology, such as "Mary's Lamb," which was published two years before Spurzheim's lectures in her collection *Poems for Children* (1830). "Mary's Lamb," which was later set to music as the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb," ended with a moral lesson:

> "What makes the lamb love Mary so?"
> The eager children cry—
> "O, Mary loves the lamb, you know,"
> The Teacher did reply;—
> "And you each gentle animal
> In confidence may bind,
> And make them follow at your call,
> If you are always *kind*."[23]

In her introduction to *Poems for Children*, Hale explained that the purpose of these poems was to induce children "to love truth and goodness" and therefore "teach their hearts to love their God and their country."[24] This purpose is echoed in an anecdote Hale recounts in "A Chapter on Cats" about a group of children whose mother teaches them to better respect their family cat, Mouser, after they tease her for being unable to catch mice. After Mouser then proves them wrong by hunting two mice, the mother "improved that opportunity to impress on the hearts (*heads* phrenologically speaking) of her children, the importance of being *just* as well as *kind*, to animals."[25] Hale's attitude towards childrearing had not changed, but was now grounded in the language of phrenology.

Beyond merely moulding the minds of the children in their care, Hale also encouraged women to pay close attention to the phrenological developments of potential partners. Included in the 1833 volume of *The Ladies' Magazine* was a series of plates illustrating different personality types, in order to help women identify certain traits. Hale warned against marrying men whose propensities were developed out of proportion. In describing one of the plates which showed a man with bulging organs of Destructiveness, Combativeness, Firmness and

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[23] Sarah Josepha Hale, *Poems for Our Children: Designed for Families, Sabbath Schools, and Infant Schools* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1830), 6-7. This final stanza is usually excised from the nursery rhyme version of the poem.
[24] Hale, *Poems for Our Children*, 3.
[25] Hale, "Cats," 61.

Acquisitiveness, Hale warned: "Never, my dear lady, marry a man with such a shaped head—he will be cruel-hearted, and miserly if not worse."[26] Like other supporters of phrenology, Hale believed that mental attributes, much like physical ones, could be passed down from generation to generation. Such belief encouraged eugenics amongst phrenologists. The numerous examples of mental attributes being inherited, Hale argued, offered a "great additional motive to be careful in the choice of a partner in marriage."[27] Hale believed that through the selective choice of sexual partners "not only the condition of single families, but of whole nations, might be improved beyond imagination, in figure, stature, complexion, health, talents, and moral feeling."[28] Women were therefore responsible twofold for the emotional development of the next generation, both in their personal responsibility for developing their own children and by shaping the fate of the nation through their selection of partner.

Though still frequently mentioned, phrenology was less often the focus of articles after Hale took up editorship of *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1837. Phrenology often appeared, as it had also done in *The Ladies' Magazine*, in the fiction published in *Godey's*. Nevertheless *Godey's* still endorsed Combe's lectures upon his trip to the United States, noting that in Boston Combe had received "the respect and warm feelings which the pupil and friend of the good and great Spurzheim could not fail to inspire," and reiterating that his lectures were of particular importance to women.[29] Hale did not seek to change the duties associated with women's life in America, but instead to raise their importance. By bringing together emotion and intellect in the brain, phrenology imposed less of a hierarchical distinction between them. Yet in doing so, Hale had begun to blur the distinction upon which the supposed separation of spheres rested. Hale's work set a template that would be followed by social reformers with an interest in phrenology and the role of women in society. Strong similarities can especially be seen in the work of the practical phrenologists Fowler and Wells.

[26] "Hints About Phrenology [no. 7]," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6, no. 9 (September 1833): 426.
[27] "Hints About Phrenology [no. 4]," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6, no. 4 (April 1833): 174.
[28] "Hints [no. 4]," 175.
[29] "Editor's Table," *Godey's Lady's Book* 18, no. 2 (February 1839): 95.

### *Fowler and Wells and the Domestic Ideal*

The late-1830s saw the emergence of a different form of phrenology in America, the more self-improvement-focused practical phrenology. The earliest adopters of phrenology in the United States were members of the social and scientific elite.[30] As Courtney E. Thompson notes, most had also held professional careers alongside their phrenological pursuits—Caldwell and Spurzheim were physicians, while Combe was a lawyer.[31] Practical phrenologists, however, devoted themselves to phrenology as a profession and sought a broader audience, priding themselves on the accessibility of their doctrine the masses. In the United States, this shift toward practical phrenology was driven by the brothers Orson and Lorenzo Fowler, along with a number of their family and associates including their business partner Samuel Wells, their sister and Wells' wife Charlotte Fowler Wells, and Lorenzo's wife Lydia Folger Fowler. The brothers published their first phrenological textbook, *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated and Applied*, in 1837. Their publishing house, Fowler and Wells, published numerous phrenological texts along with other works of popular science and self-improvement.

Fowler and Wells' flagship publication was the *American Phrenological Journal* (*APJ*), a monthly periodical focused on phrenology, which began publication in 1839. The first volume was edited by J. A. Warne and published by Orson and Lorenzo, although they hid their connection at first by hiring A. Waldie as publisher. Warne retired as editor after the first volume and was replaced by Nathan Allen, but the journal struggled financially. The declining financial situation of the journal led Lorenzo to withdraw his support after the publication of the third volume in 1841. Orson was left without enough money to continue paying Allen as editor and—at the encouragement of Charlotte—instead took up the editorship himself. Under Orson's editorship the *APJ* found more success, and by the end of 1842 was in a much more

[30] McCandless, "Mesmerism and Phrenology," 205; Walsh, "Boston Medical Community," 268-70.
[31] Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 83-84.

financially viable position.[32] In 1849, Lorenzo once again joined with his brother and became co-editor of the journal. After its tumultuous early years, the *APJ* gained enough stability to continue to be published into the early twentieth century.

Just as Combe had, Fowler and Wells' publications articulated the need to properly develop the minds of the people to ensure long-term stability in American society. A writer in the third volume of the *APJ*, reviewing Combe's *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, agreed about the necessity of education:

> To our existence as a nation, destined to continue the home of freedom and all its enjoyments … Without it in due degree, and of the requisite character, our government will become a despotism of the most hopeless description, or it will be rent asunder by civil dissensions, and be made the prey of licentiousness, anarchy, and misrule.[33]

Where they differed from Combe and other earlier phrenologists like Caldwell was in their movement away from their more scientific style. Practical phrenologists such as the Fowlers combined phrenology with the burgeoning American obsession with improvement, producing work that sought to be accessible, useful, and easily applied to day-to-day life. In the early nineteenth century, the desire to improve had become a common element of American life. As Daniel Walker Howe writes, improvement in this context had both collective and individual meanings, as well as physical and moral.[34] Americans sought to improve themselves and their communities, as well as the world around them.

Fowler and Wells' publications were well suited to this environment. In the introduction to *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated and Applied*, they described it as an attempt to present "the subject in a far more *practical* form than it has heretofore been given."[35] The Fowlers' phrenological classification also arranged the organs into smaller, more descriptive groups which emphasised the function of each organ in relation to the self and others. The propensities

[32] Orson Squire Fowler, "The Past and Future Course of the Journal," *American Phrenological Journal* 4, no. 10 (October 1842): 314-18.
[33] Review of Combe's Lectures on Moral Philosophy, 50.
[34] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 244.
[35] Fowler and Fowler, *Phrenology Proved*, iv.


**Figure 3:** A chart which accompanied Orson Fowler's *Education and Self Improvement*, similar to that which would have accompanied *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated and Applied*. Readers could mark the size of each organ in the columns, and the numbers directed them to the pages where the size of that organ was discussed.

were split into two groups—the domestic and selfish propensities—and the sentiments into three—selfish, moral and religious, and semi-intellectual.[36] The book was designed not merely

[36] Fowler and Fowler, *Phrenology Proved*, 45-51.

as an intellectual treatise on the nature of the brain, but as a tool for the individual to identify and improve their own deficiencies. *Phrenology Proved, Illustrated and Applied* included a chart on which the reader could mark their own phrenological development, with page references which would "refer [the reader to] a most beautiful and accurate analysis of his *own mind*."[37] A chart of this type became common across many the Fowlers' publications. Another appeared at the beginning of Orson Fowler's *Education and Self-Improvement, Founded on Physiology and Phrenology*, published in 1843 (Figure 3). The Fowlers also sought to cut back on the specialised language used by earlier phrenologists. Orson Fowler, in his book *Fowler on Matrimony* offered a mild rebuke to his predecessors by claiming that phrenology had "suffered somewhat from the attempt of its founders to put it on a *scientific* footing."[38] In that text, Orson used simple terminology in place of phrenological terms, such as "friendship" in place of Adhesiveness, and "parental love" instead of Philoprogenitiveness. However, he retained the more scientific terms in other works.[39]

In their numerous texts, the Fowlers explicitly tied their work to the early nineteenth century's culture of self-improvement. The drive to improve, Orson argued in the preface to *Education and Self-Improvement*, had been a leading American characteristic since the Revolution.[40] He bemoaned, however, that this drive had mostly been directed to physical improvements such as agriculture, machinery, and other "conveniences of life" rather than to the mind. Orson sought to ensure broader social improvement by giving the individual the tools to improve their self. The aim of his work, he wrote, was to

> guide the footsteps of the young into the paths of virtue, happiness, and learning; and to open up to all the true path to self-improvement, virtue, and happiness by expounding the laws of their physical and mental being … objects the most important and exalted that can possibly engage the attention of mortals.[41]

[37] Fowler and Fowler, *Phrenology Proved*, vi.
[38] Orson Squire Fowler, *Fowler on Matrimony: or, Phrenology and Physiology Applied to the Selection of Congenial Companions for Life; Including Directions to the Married for Living Together Affectionately and Happily* (New York: O. S. & L. N. Fowler, 1842), 9.
[39] Fowler, *Fowler on Matrimony*, 9.
[40] Orson Squire Fowler, *Education and Self-Improvement Founded on Physiology and Phrenology*, 2nd ed., vol. I (New York: O.S. & L.N. Fowler, 1844), 3.
[41] Fowler, *Education and Self-Improvement*, I, 3.

The application of phrenology to this task, Orson claimed, would "do more to promote the happiness, virtue, talents and well-being of man, than has been done by all the other improvements … of this and past ages put together."[42] Orson made similar claims upon his assumption of the editorship of the *APJ* in 1842. The only remedy, he claimed, to the "physical evils, pains, and sufferings, as well as moral maladies and vices, which now so afflict mankind" was in the dissemination of phrenology.[43] Orson sought to publish articles that were "short, plain, to the point, and that [readers] can understand at a glance" in order to adapt phrenology to "this leading characteristic of our age and nation."[44] The compatibility of this approach to phrenology with the nineteenth-century craze for self-improvement was a key factor in the Fowlers' success.[45]

This emphasis on practical topics included a focus on the phrenological developments of women, and their consequent role in public life. One of the earliest articles to point in this direction came in the fifth issue of the 1842 volume, entitled "On the Training of the Infant Mind. An Appeal to Woman."[46] The article printed correspondence on that topic from a subscriber to the journal, who Orson described in a brief introduction as "one of the oldest and most zealous Phrenologists in America"—a description which would seem might indicate Charles Caldwell, although he does not list the article amongst his works in his autobiography.[47] The article, which was to become the first of many focused on women and motherhood, criticised formal American education as focusing too much on the intellect and not enough on feelings.[48] Like Orson Fowler in the introduction to *Education and Self-Improvement*, the article's author argued that not enough focus had been placed on mental development. They warned that children had been "left wholly to the uncontrolled power of their own natural feelings, propensities, and passions," and called upon the mothers of the country to fill the

[42] Fowler, *Education and Self-Improvement*, I, 4.
[43] Orson Squire Fowler, "My Proposed Course," *American Phrenological Journal* 4, no. 1 (January 1842): 6.
[44] Fowler, "My Proposed Course," 5.
[45] Swenson, "Phrenology as Neurodiversity," 104-05.
[46] Orson Squire Fowler, "On the Training of the Infant Mind. An Appeal to Woman," *American Phrenological Journal* 4, no. 5 (May 1842): 131-36.
[47] Fowler, "Training of the Infant Mind," 131; Caldwell, *Autobiography*, 429-37.
[48] Fowler, "Training of the Infant Mind," 133.

void.[49] Here, however, the onus was placed directly on mothers. Like Hale, the author posited that the "future happiness of our race" depended on women's ability to mould their children's emotions.[50] In his introduction to the article, Orson promised that the "duty of *parents*, and especially of *mothers*" would be "still more fully urged hereafter."[51]

By the mid-1840s the *APJ*'s articles about women formed a central pillar of its content, as was reflected in its marketing. A prospectus for the 1847 volume of the journal highlighted five topics to which the journal was particularly devoted: phrenology, physiology, vital magnetism (also known as mesmerism), women, and self-improvement. Women, it stated, were

> as perfect by nature, and as perfectly adapted to promote human happiness, as even a God could render her, yet nearly everything appertaining to her education and habits is working her ruin;—to arrest which, and … and elevate our race, by unfolding her Phrenology and Physiology, … will constitute a leading object of the Journal.[52]

As is evident from the prospectus, the *APJ* clearly felt that women were undervalued in American society. The journal's exploration of women's role, however, would mainly emphasise their aptitude for the domestic sphere.

The coverage of women in the *APJ* was centred around the continuing article series "Woman—Her Character, Influence, Sphere, and Consequent Public Duties," which was a regular feature in issues from 1845 onwards. In the *APJ*, women were largely defined by their ability to experience moral emotion, in phrenological terms the development of their sentiments. The female head was described as "higher and longer than that of the male, but less developed at the sides, or in the animal and selfish range."[53] Such developments were seen to indicate women's occupation of a purer moral sphere that rose above the worldly pursuits of public life. The *APJ* continued:

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[49] Fowler, "Training of the Infant Mind," 133.
[50] Fowler, "Training of the Infant Mind," 136.
[51] Fowler, "Training of the Infant Mind," 132.
[52] "Prospectus of Volume IX for 1847, of the American Phrenological Journal," *American Phrenological Journal* 8, no. 12 (December 1846): 392.
[53] 'Woman—Her Character, Influence, Sphere, and Consequent Duties and Education. No. II,' *American Phrenological Journal* 7, no. 11 (November 1845): 369.

> Hence, force is not her nature, but kindness and goodness. She is not constituted to buffet the billows of adversity, to face enemies, and jostle and elbow her way through life. She is composed, rather, of the sweet and the good—is by nature more pure, and holy, and elevated than man. … Her nature places her far above the turmoils and strifes of the earth, and constitutes her the embodyment of amiableness and loveliness.[54]

This, the *APJ* made clear, did not mean that women were "tame and inefficient." Ultimately, it argued, it was moral forces which were most effectual at shaping the world—making women's "persuasion … more efficacious than man's force."[55] While women were mostly relegated to the domestic sphere, their actions within that sphere were seen to have a large impact on society as a whole.

The *APJ* posited that the character of a nation was, in large part, a reflection of the character of the women within it.[56] In the first instalment of the *APJ*'s regular series on women, the author described women as

> the fountainhead of those streams that go forth to bless and to perfect mankind; or else to embitter and deteriorate our race. As are the *women* of any nation, so is that nation, so that age. As is the mother, so are the sons—the latter being perpetual certificates of the character, the talents, the virtues, the vices, the all, of the former.[57]

Just as Hale believed, it was primarily in the role of mother that women were seen to wield such influence over the future of their nation. While women may have been excluded from the formal political processes of law-making, the piece reasoned, their voice was heard by having "stamp[ed] her own image" upon the sons in whom formal political power was invested. "Second hand," the author concluded, "but effectually, does woman guide and govern the world."[58] Attempts at reform to improve the happiness of humankind were therefore to focus on women, as the root of both society's ills and its potential progress.

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[54] "Duties and Education. No. II," 369.
[55] "Duties and Education. No. II," 370.
[56] Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself," 109.
[57] 'Woman—Her Character, Influence, Sphere, and Consequent Duties and Education. No. I,' *American Phrenological Journal* 7, no. 1 (January 1845): 10.
[58] "Duties and Education. No. I," 10.

This obligation was seen to fall particularly heavily on mothers in the United States. As established in Chapter One, the future success of the United States as a republican and democratic nation was believed to be highly dependent on the proper cultivation of the sentiments. Like Combe, the *APJ* saw America's success as an issue of global importance. The American experiment, one article claimed, was one that had never before been attempted, and its failure would result in a "relapse into the fatal folds of monarchy for many centuries to come."[59] The lack of a proper focus on developing the higher faculties of its citizens had led to "ignorance and lawless rowdyism" and "selfish and designing men lead[ing] the masses astray."[60] The *APJ* presented mothers as key to avoiding the United States' ruin, claiming that mothers especially were "by the impress you are daily and hourly stamping upon your offspring, … constantly and practically moulding our national character."[61] Nevertheless, this belief in the importance of motherhood still prioritised the role of men by emphasising that it was through their sons that women could "guide and govern this ark of our republic."[62] The *APJ* continued to emphasise women's domestic role, which was justified by the proof phrenology gave of women's generally superior emotional developments.

Like Hale, the authors writing in the *APJ* thought it was women's emotional capacity that suited them for domesticity, in particular their ability to love. If women were to be the ones to correctly mould the future generation of republicans, it was love that was their means of doing so. Phrenologists consistently returned to the supposed prominence of Philoprogenitiveness in female brains to explain how and why women should go about shaping the minds of those in their care. The difference in the size of Philoprogenitiveness, the organ responsible for love of children, between men and women was apparently large enough to allow phrenologists to distinguish between male and female skulls at a cursory glance.[63] As Philoprogenitiveness,

[59] 'Woman: Her Character, Sphere, Talents, Influence, and Consequent Duties, Education and Improvement.—Number VI,' *American Phrenological Journal* 9 (1847): 52.
[60] "Education and Improvement.—Number VI," 52.
[61] "Education and Improvement.—Number VI," 52.
[62] "Education and Improvement.—Number VI," 52.
[63] "Duties and Education. No. I," 10.

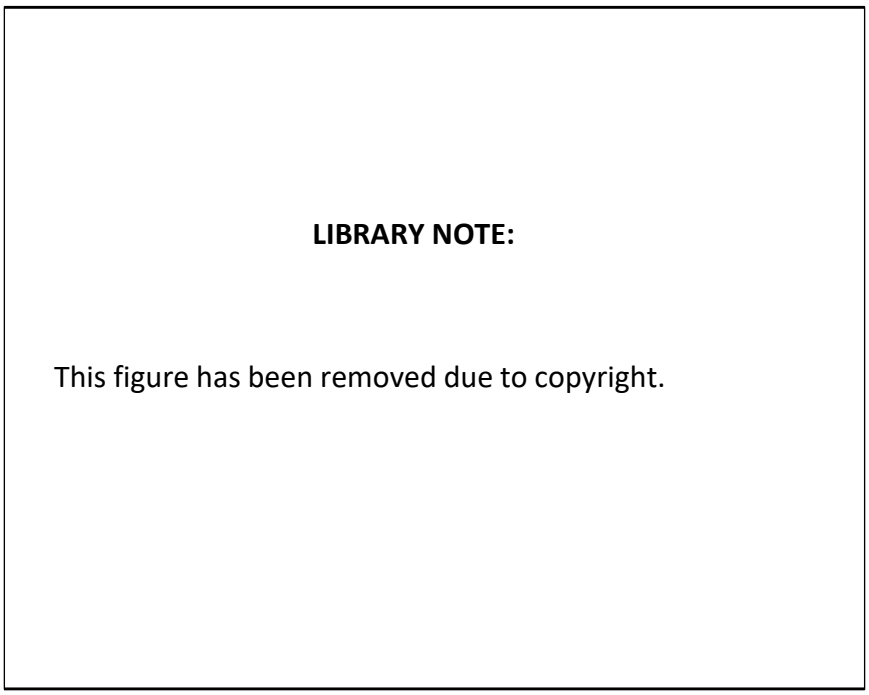


**Figure 4:** Two examples of depictions of the ideal female head in the *APJ*. The left shows the tall and slender head shape thought to indicate the dominance of the sentiments over the propensities. The figure in profile on the right displays the prominent bulge of Philoprogenitiveness and Adhesiveness at the back of the head.

along with the other social organs thought to be stronger in women, was located at the rear of the skull, idealised phrenological illustrations of women often depicted the back of women's heads as rather bulbous (Figure 4).[64] Phrenologists believed in a "mental law" that the display of love triggered a response in the minds of its object, which made them more easily influenced. "Few men are swayed by intellect," the *APJ* argued, "most are tossed hither and yon by their feelings."[65] This phenomenon, it claimed, gave women "unbounded control" over the minds of their children, enabling them to shape their character more effectively than fathers.

[64] "Woman, Her Character, Sphere, Influence, and Consequent Duties, and Education. No. III[a]," *American Phrenological Journal* 8, no. 10 (October 1846): 302; "Woman, Her Character, Sphere, Influence, and Consequent Duties, and Education. No. III[b]," *American Phrenological Journal* 8, no. 11 (November 1846): 353. Two consecutive entries in the "Woman" series in volume 8 of the *APJ* are labelled as the third, references to following entries use the number given in the title of the article.
[65] "Education and Improvement.—Number VI," 50.

The emphasis on women's natural ability to love also placed restrictions on the emotions that it was appropriate for women to express. If love were the source of women's influence, anger was deemed to be antithetical to the expectations of femininity. Destructiveness and Combativeness, the two propensities most associated with the expression of anger, were both located at the lower sides of the brain, and their prominence would spoil the idealised tall and slender form expected of the female head. The *APJ* warned women against "attempts to effect by anger what she was made to effect by love."[66] Where the expression of love promoted women's positive influence on their children, the *APJ* warned of anger's potential to stunt the development of the sentiments. Whereas motherly love would allow a child's emotions to flourish, nagging or scolding would serve only to smother "those exquisite susceptibilities which ought never to be hardened, but only to increase."[67]

As a result, the *APJ* stressed the view that anger was an unnatural trait for women, devoting an entire article of its "Woman" series to this topic. The scolding of children was "unnatural" and "anti-feminine," while directing anger at men made women "a virtual monstrosity."[68] Expressions of anger by women was used to justify their ill-treatment. "If and as far as you children dislike you," the article claimed, "it is your fault."[69] It went even further to claim that when women "complain that they are neglected or abused" it was "but a practical confession that they so conduct themselves as not to deserve love."[70] As Combativeness and Destructiveness were as much a part of women's brains as men's, there were some exceptions to the general rule. These faculties, the *APJ* wrote, were to be directed at moral wrongs rather than at other people, or to defend their children.[71] The article also did allow that women had a right to feel "indignation" in the event that they were abused by a man "in any thing appertaining to her sexual capacity."[72] Indignation, as noted by Michael Woods, was regarded as a

[66] "Duties and Education. No. II," 370.
[67] "Duties and Education. No. II," 370.
[68] 'Woman: Her Character, Sphere, Talents, Influence, and Consequent Duties, Education, and Improvement.—Number VII,' *American Phrenological Journal* 9 (1847): 214-16.
[69] "Education, and Improvement.—Number VII," 215.
[70] "Education, and Improvement.—Number VII," 218.
[71] "Education, and Improvement.—Number VII," 214-15.
[72] "Education, and Improvement.—Number VII," 216.

particularly righteous form of anger in nineteenth-century America.[73] Even in these cases, however, women's responses were severely restricted. Their indignation was to be expressed "not with anger, but with perfect indifference."[74] Women who did express anger were often set apart from the rest of society, such as in the *APJ*'s study of a "thief, and probable murderess" who displayed an "ungovernable and violent … anger."[75] The emphasis placed on women's ability to love, and its importance within the domestic sphere, effectively restricted the appropriate range of women's emotional expression.

The *APJ* continuously returned to the separation of male and female spheres, even while advocating for a view of mental abilities which saw women as equal—or superior, in terms of emotional ability—to men. One instalment of the journal's "Woman" series, attributed to an unidentified female author, followed a familiar pattern of arguing that women were inseparable from "the enduring monument of our country's freedom."[76] Nevertheless, the writer still focused most of her attention on women's role as wives and mothers to men. Women's place, she argued, was to be "neither timidly in the rear, nor boldly prominent—but at the side of man, encouraging him to new investigations, higher attainments, and deeper researches after truth."[77] It was as a mother, the author argued, that women found their "highest sphere of moral action."[78] The fact that the *APJ* regularly reinforced a strict domestic and public binary is surprising given the broader activities of those involved with Fowler and Wells.

The *APJ*'s conservative approach to women sits uncomfortably with other activities undertaken by the publishing house of Fowler and Wells and members of the Fowler family. Women in the Fowler family often took on significant roles as authors and presenters of phrenological lectures.[79] Lydia Folger Fowler, the wife of Lorenzo, was the second woman in

[73] Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict*, 12.
[74] "Education, and Improvement.—Number VII," 216.
[75] "Phrenological Examination of a Thief, and Probable Murderess," *American Phrenological Journal* 4, no. 10 (October 1842): 204.
[76] "Woman: Her Character, Sphere, Talents, Influence, and Consequent Duties, Education, and Improvement. By A Woman," *American Phrenological Journal* 10 (1848): 27.
[77] "Education, and Improvement. By A Woman," 25.
[78] "Education, and Improvement. By A Woman," 26.
[79] Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself," 112.

the United States to earn a medical degree, and was active in the women's rights movement.[80] Fowler and Wells also published an American edition of Scottish suffragette Marion Kirkland Reid's *A Plea for Women*, first published in Edinburgh in 1843.[81] The Fowler and Wells edition was retitled to *Woman, Her Education and Influence* to perhaps better link it to the articles on women in the *APJ*. Unlike the original, it also credited Marion Kirkland Reid by her husband's name as "Mrs. Hugo Reid," emphasising her role as a wife. The *APJ* promoted its support for female phrenologists, although again emphasised their domestic role as wives. In promoting the phrenological lectures of a Mr. and Mrs. Sanford, the *APJ* denied that Mrs. Sanford's role as a lecturer displayed any "inherent impropriety," while praising her as a "true help-mate for [her] husband."[82] While by 1850 the *APJ* would offer notices of women's rights conventions, as discussed below, the task of explicitly linking phrenological science to support for women's rights was left to others.

### *Phrenological, Emotion and Women's Rights*

As discussed in Chapter One, phrenologists saw emotion—or more specifically the moral sentiments—as an integral factor in the balanced mind, and thus in the continued success of America's system of government. Emotion had been elevated into the brain alongside the intellect, and therefore given more equal consideration alongside it. Consequently, the separation between the domestic and public spheres, structured as they were around the dichotomy of emotion and intellect, came to be much less distinct. With emotion holding a prominent position in society, the supposedly emotional nature of women offered less of an obstacle to women's equality, with emotion and intellect being seen as different, but equal. Some supporters of phrenology made this connection much more directly than the *APJ* did. One

[80] Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself," 112, 121; Frederick C. Waite, "Dr. Lydia Folder Fowler: The Second Woman to Recieve the Degree of Doctor of Medicine in the United States," *Annals of Medical History* 4, no. 3 (May 1932): 294-97.
[81] Marion Kirkland Reid, *Woman, Her Education and Influence* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1848).
[82] "E. H. Sanford and Wife," *American Phrenological Journal* 11, no. 2 (1849): 70.

such individual was Elisha Hurlbut, a lawyer and judge from New York who was perhaps most explicit amongst phrenologists in tying phrenology to the championing of human rights. Hurlbut's relationship with the Fowlers appears to have been somewhat fraught. While Hurlbut appreciated the work the Fowlers had done to propagate phrenology, he was dismissive of their commercialisation of the science as well as their alterations to the phrenological system of Gall, Spurzheim and Combe.[83] However, notices of Hurlbut's work appeared in the *APJ*, and the Fowler family appeared to have a great deal of respect for him. After Hurlbut's death in 1889 Charlotte Fowler Wells, Orson and Lorenzo's sister, wrote an effusive biography of him in the *APJ*, in which she claimed that Hurlbut was "much attached to Prof. L. N. Fowler as a representative of Phrenology."[84]

In May 1841, Hurlbut published an article titled "The Rights of Woman" in *The New World*, a weekly newspaper based in New York.[85] The article gained an endorsement by the *APJ*, which praised it as being "based entirely on physical organization, (Physiology and Phrenology) and … presented with great clearness and ability."[86] Hurlbut returned in full force to the blurred distinction between emotion and cognition which had been noted by Hale, while remaining mostly absent from the *APJ*. As Hurlbut put it in "The Rights of Woman":

> [W]oman is to be regarded not only as the companion and equal of man, but as the same intellectual being as himself, possessed of the same sentiments and affections—the same emotions and wants, and consequently of the same natural rights.[87]

Hurlbut explicitly tied the equal rights of women to their similar emotional capacity to men, and argued that all human rights "emanate[d] from the natural wants and emotions of mankind."[88] Although Hurlbut allowed that mental powers could "vary infinitely" between individuals, what was important, he argued, was that these powers were "common to man and

[83] Jeffrey Dunnington, "A Study of the Journal of Elisha P. Hurlbut, American Social Reformer, 1858-1887" (Master's thesis Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014), 103-05.
[84] Dunnington, "Journal of Elisha P. Hurlbut," 105; Charlotte Fowler Wells, "Sketches of Phrenological Biography: Elisha Powell Hurlbut," *Phrenological Journal and Science of Health* 96, no. 1 (July 1893): 31.
[85] Elisha P. Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," *The New World*, May 8 1841, 289-92.
[86] "Rights of Women," *American Phrenological Journal* 3, no. 9 (June 1841): 432.
[87] Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," 289.
[88] Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," 289.

woman, who have therefore one common nature."[89] Like the *APJ*, he was quick to emphasise that he did not wish for women to be given more power than men, explaining that women's "ambition may well be satisfied, without aspiring to be his superior."[90] Unlike the *APJ*, however, Hurlbut's call for women's equality came with a specific demand for change.

The point of "The Rights of Woman" was to advocate for the changing of marital law to ensure that women retained equal rights to their partners. Hurlbut wrote that because both men and women possessed the organ of Amativeness, which was responsible for feelings of sexual desire, marriage was a natural right which was necessary for the happiness of both sexes.[91] "Why then should woman," Hurlbut argued,

> by yielding to a like general demand of her nature, and entering the married state, be required to surrender any of her natural rights? Let it be borne in mind that the state of marriage is not more demanded by woman's nature than by man's. It is as necessary to his happiness as to her own.[92]

Hurlbut therefore considered it unjust that women should be required to forfeit any of their legal rights when entering a marriage. Since he viewed rights as emanating naturally from the emotions of the brain, the restriction of women's rights in marriage was a violation because women's "happiness still depends upon the free exercise of her natural powers."[93] Hurlbut's commitment to following phrenology's claims about the brain to their logical conclusion caused him to clearly advocate for the equal legal treatment of women.

Hurlbut would go on to consider human rights in relation to phrenology more expansively in his book *Essays on Human Rights and their Political Guarantees* (1845). In the first chapter of this volume, Hurlbut made clear that his beliefs about human rights were based on the phrenological model of the mind. Laws, Hurlbut argued, were only just in that they stemmed from the true nature of humankind. Phrenologists, he believed, had through "more than forty

[89] Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," 289.
[90] Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," 289.
[91] Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," 289.
[92] Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," 289.
[93] Hurlbut, "The Rights of Woman," 291.

years of patient labor and investigation … demonstrated, by physiological facts, the true natural faculties and dispositions of the human mind."[94] Hurlbut emphasised that, despite differences between the mental dispositions of individuals and groups, phrenology proved humanity was more similar than not.[95] The application of phrenology to human rights, Hurlbut believed, gave him an advantage over previous theorists on the subject. As an example, Hurlbut cited Jeremy Bentham's denial that property was a natural right.[96] In this respect Bentham was, as Hurlbut put it, "a giant groping in the darkness."[97] That the doctrines of phrenology included amongst the feelings an instinctive need to acquire property—the organ of Acquisitiveness—demonstrated the opposite.[98] While the propensities pointed towards certain rights, the sentiments ensured that those rights were applied justly, and the intellect provided the means of doing so.[99]

The forming of government, Hurlbut argued, was a function of the moral part of the brain. Like other phrenological theorists with an interest in the formation of nations, Hurlbut believed it was moral feeling which kept the ideal nation together. Hurlbut wrote that for a social state to successfully exist, there must be an "aggregated … sum of moral feeling, which … will control the actions of individuals."[100] The only problem with this was that, as phrenology showed, there existed a minority of people who were not endowed with the requisite development of their moral faculties. Individuals with "high intellectual gifts, strong moral emotions, and moderate animal desires" could be trusted to act appropriately without any need for laws. However, the existence of those with poor moral development meant that government was required to impose upon "each individual in society such moral restraint as is felt by a man having the best moral and intellectual endowment."[101] The role of government then, as Hurlbut

[94] Elisha P. Hurlbut, *Essays on Human Rights and their Political Guaranties* (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1845), 11.
[95] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 11-12.
[96] Jeremy Bentham and Etienne Dumont, *Theory of Legislation*, trans. R. Hildreth, 7th ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1891), 111-13; Hurlbut, *Essays*, 13-14.
[97] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 14.
[98] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 173.
[99] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 76-77.
[100] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 27.
[101] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 28-29.

saw it, was largely to regulate the emotions of its citizens. While expressed in more legalistic terms, this belief was fundamentally similar to those expressed by Combe, Caldwell, Hale and the *APJ*, who saw the proper cultivation of the sentiments as key to ensuring social harmony.

However, Hurlbut went further than these others in *Essays on Human Rights* by explicitly advocating for women's suffrage. In a chapter considering the elective franchise, Hurlbut argued that the franchise was inherent to "those who have the intelligence and moral impulse to prescribe and observe the rule of right," and that individuals should only be barred if their intellectual and moral natures were "defective."[102] Phrenology, Hurlbut argued, had established that "woman is endowed with precisely the same faculties as man," although "she enjoys some of these in a higher and some in a less degree than her sturdy brother."[103] However, the fact that phrenologists thought women's mental capabilities varied in degree was immaterial, Hurlbut believed. What was important was that women were endowed with the same faculties, and therefore the same rights.[104] Moreover, if governing was mostly a function of the emotional faculties then the generally higher development of these in women could be seen as an advantage, not a disadvantage.

Hurlbut was not the only individual to use phrenology to explicitly and directly champion the expansion of women's suffrage. At least some in the burgeoning women's rights movement of the late 1840s were familiar with phrenology, with the science playing a role at the 1850 Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. The 1850 Worcester Convention was the first in an annual series of national women's rights conventions, following the success of Seneca Falls in 1848, which set out to "consider the great question of Women's Rights, Duties, and Relations."[105] The call for the convention was signed by both Lydia and Lorenzo Fowler, with Orson Fowler invited to attend.[106] It garnered a notice in the *APJ*, which described

[102] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 109-12.
[103] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 113.
[104] Hurlbut, *Essays*, 116-17.
[105] *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, held at Worcester, October 23d & 24h, 1850*, (Boston: Prentiss & Sawyer, 1851), 3.
[106] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881), 820-21.

the "true position and sphere of woman" as "the most important problem of the age."[107] It criticised, however, the sense that the conference was for women only, arguing that both sexes should work together.[108] Orson Fowler reiterated both this criticism and general support for the purpose of the convention in a letter excusing his absence due to obligations elsewhere. Orson stressed the "fundamental truth" that men and women were made to function together as husband and wife.[109] Because of this, he argued

> all conventions of deliberation of woman without man are just as defective as the unmarried woman at fifty; just as all deliberations of men, either political, religious, mechanical, agricultural, or whatever they may be, are exactly like a bachelor at seventy.[110]

Nevertheless, Orson acknowledged that in order for society to improve, "politics and government require the participation of woman in some form."[111] Speeches at the convention would elaborate on this point.

At the Convention, the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison presented an essay written by Henry Hamlin Van Amringe, a reformer from Wisconsin, at the urging of their mutual acquaintance and fellow abolitionist Gerrit Smith. Van Amringe's essay, "Woman's Rights in Church and State," was later published in the proceedings of the Convention, albeit with only the portion on women's role in the state included due to space constraints.[112] While Van Amringe accepted that men and women occupied different spheres, he questioned whether the difference in spheres should endow men and women with unequal rights. By analysing women's roles across multiple countries, Van Amringe reasoned that the more developed a society, the more equal the rights given to the different sexes. While in a "savage state" women were subjected to "unremitting drudgery," Van Amringe argued, as nations advanced in "intelligence, arts, science, and Christian character" the rights of men and women gained closer

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[107] "The Worcester Female Convention," *American Phrenological Journal* 12, no. 9 (September 1850): 291.
[108] "Worcester Female Convention," 291-92.
[109] *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, 60-61.
[110] *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, 61.
[111] *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention*, 62.
[112] Henry Hamlin Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights in Church and State," in *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October 23d & 24h, 1850* (Boston: Prentis & Sawyer, 1851), 36n.

equality.[113] A perfect society would therefore be one which gave equal rights to women, including enfranchisement. The world, Van Amringe concluded, was "waiting for the establishment of the entire FREE EQUAL RIGHTS of Woman in Church and State, before it can proceed to its highest destiny."[114]

In making this argument, Van Amringe echoed Hurlbut's denial that intellect was the most important prerequisite for participation in governance. "Intellectual talent," he argued, "is but one element in the qualifications for government."[115] Van Amringe posed the following scenario to his audience:

> Place any plan of action, having regard to the government of the masses, before two persons, one having medium intellect, with large humanity and piety, and the other having large intellect, with small Benevolence, sense of justice and reverence … and large destructive and selfish powers; can you be in doubt concerning … the policy which they would adopt?[116]

The person with a well-developed intellect—but little else—would seek only to pursue their own interests, Van Amringe answered, while those with highly-developed moral sentiments would seek to enlarge "the happiness of the nation and of the world."[117] Van Amringe went beyond Hurlbut by not just promoting emotion as of equal value to intellect when it came to governance, but in claiming it was superior. It was the higher, moral emotions, Van Amringe argued, which were most needed in the halls of government.

In arguing this, Van Amringe did not reject the belief that women were inherently more emotional than men. Instead, he relied on phrenology to prove the necessity of emotion in decision-making, and therefore the need for women to be involved in politics. Van Amringe made direct reference to the phrenological mind in his essay, drawing an analogy between it and the composition of a legislature:

> It is evident that each phrenological organ should have its representation in the council chamber of freedom; each want should be heard; every affection should be

[113] Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights," 36-37.
[114] Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights," 44.
[115] Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights," 37.
[116] Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights," 37.
[117] Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights," 37.

> consulted. If man's phrenological constitution is different from that of woman, then man cannot legislate for woman. If their constitutions are the same, but unlike in combinations, then the unlike combinations of the phrenological organization of the sexes should be represented, no less than the unlike combinations of men themselves.[118]

The argument by Fay Bound Alberti, previously referred to in Chapter One, that the perception of mind and body and understanding of political structures are closely linked, is clearly expressed in Van Amringe's conception of legislative government.[119] Just as the ideal phrenological mind should seek balance between all its faculties—emotional and intellectual—so too should legislatures seek to balance the views expressed therein through the inclusion of both men and women. A legislature could not function perfectly, Van Amringe believed, "unaided by the *help* created by the Deity, in the phrenological constitution of woman."[120] Perfect government required balance, just as the perfect mind did, therefore the supposedly emotional nature of women was just as necessary to its success.

## *Conclusion*

In the first volume of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage's *History of Woman Suffrage*, the authors gave credit to phrenology as a notable step in the development of the women's suffrage movement. The "revelations of science," they wrote, had "crowned with new dignity, man and woman."[121] They argued that George Combe and Johann Spurzheim's discovery that the "feelings, sentiments, and affections of the soul mould and shape the skull, gave new importance to women's thought as mother of the race."[122] Fowler and Wells, despite the conservative role for women espoused in the *APJ*, continued to play a part in the movement for women's suffrage. The first and second volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage* were published by Fowler and Wells, of which Charlotte Fowler Wells was by then

[118] Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights," 40.
[119] Bound Alberti, *Mortal Coil*, 113, 24.
[120] Van Amringe, "Woman's Rights," 45.
[121] Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1, 51.
[122] Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1, 51.

general manager after Samuel Wells' death in 1875.[123] The first volume was dedicated to several women who had held an important place within the movement—included among them was Lydia Fowler.

The phrenological framework of emotion was able to support both a domestic ideal for women alongside their increased political participation. With sentiment seen as a vital force within public life, women could simultaneously be viewed as more emotional than men as well as fit for participation in formal political processes such as the elective franchise. Although not herself a supporter of women's suffrage, this view of women's emotional capacity can be seen as early as Sarah Josepha Hale's writings of the late 1830s. By the 1840s phrenology, now centred on the publishing house of Fowler and Wells, became increasingly entwined with the women's rights movement. Fowler and Wells' main publication, the *APJ*, continued to espouse a restrictive view of women, perhaps in an attempt to maintain broad appeal as the centrepiece of their growing phrenological empire. However, this view was not inconsistent with a position supporting women's suffrage, which was made more explicit by supporters of phrenology like Elisha Hurlbut and Henry Hamlin Van Amringe. Ultimately, phrenology celebrated differences between men and women while offering a challenge to those who would deny women's enfranchisement—a significant difference to phrenological views of race.

[123] Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1, 45.

## Conclusion

The work of phrenologists supported the view that emotional faculties were an equal and important part of the human brain. Emotion was thought to be a moral sense which enabled individuals to reconcile the pursuit of both personal and public happiness. Since the apparent democratic nature of the United States gave placed more power in individual hands, the cultivation of emotion was seen as fundamental to the health of American society. Where properly-cultivated sentiments were allegedly lacking, they were used to justify the exclusion of social groups from full participation. Non-whites in America were regularly depicted as lacking the necessary sentiments, whether by having improperly cultivated them, or because of an overpowering abundance of animal instincts. Important distinctions emerged between those phrenologists who emphasised social factors in moulding personality or those who believed them to be biologically inherent. Yet the phrenological view of emotion could also be used to argue for the expansion of social boundaries to include groups who had previously been excluded. With emotion seen to play such a powerful part in the success of the country, belief in women's natural aptitude for sentiment no longer formed a barrier to their political participation. The phrenological model of emotion therefore provided a justification for women's suffrage, without contradicting a belief in women's domestic nature.

Investigating phrenological texts provides deeper insight into the ideas about emotion which were circulating around nineteenth-century America, and indeed the Anglophone world at large. Thomas Dixon has described the nineteenth century as period of the secularisation of emotion, with the term "emotion" itself coming to dominate over religiously infused terms such as "passions," "affections" and "sentiments."[1] Dixon is careful, however, to warn against viewing this as a strictly linear process. Instead, he argues that "Christian (theological) and thinly theistic (metaphysical) ways of thinking about human mental life have persisted

[1] Dixon, *Passions to Emotions*, 233.

alongside the secular and scientific."[2] Phrenology is a testament to the complexity of this transition, combining as it did older ideas about emotion with the seemingly empirical methodology and language that would come to characterise the approaches of the latter nineteenth century. That phrenologists were able to combine these two approaches suggests that these older ideas continued to hold some currency, even as more canonical scientific texts began to move away from them.

The focus on emotion in phrenological texts points to numerous new avenues of investigation, beyond those considered in this thesis. One limitation on this research has been its focus on practitioners of phrenology and the texts they produced. Further study would be required to demonstrate the extent to which phrenological ideas about emotion entered into common understanding. As Carla Bittel notes, the many members of the public who engaged with phrenology did not do so unquestioningly.[3] Particularly in its practical form, Bittel argues, phrenology was "a dynamic encounter between practitioners and consumers, in which consumers took an active role and phrenology's authority could be challenged."[4] How everyday consumers of phrenology may have responded to and applied its depiction of emotion in their daily life would require investigation which is beyond the scope of this research. Additionally, this thesis has focused on how phrenologists applied these theories to race and gender, as two of the major divisions that dominated discussion in this period of American history. Phrenological texts, however, did not discuss these factors exclusively. The role of emotion in many other social divisions only touched upon briefly here—between religion, class, regions and nations, for example—might be further elaborated using these sources.

While phrenology continued to be practised post-1850, the ascension of practical phrenology over its more scientific form lessened its influence in academic circles.[5] By the early twentieth century, it had mostly fallen out of favour, although vestiges remained in the

[2] Dixon, *Passions to Emotions*, 233-34.
[3] Carla Bittel, "Testing the Truth of Phrenology: Knowledge Experiments in Antebellum American Cultures of Science and Health," *Medical History* 63, no. 3 (July 2019): 353.
[4] Bittel, "Testing the Truth," 355.
[5] Riegel, "Introduction of Phrenology," 77-78.

race science and eugenics of that period. In the twenty-first century, phrenology is popularly remembered mostly as a kitsch fascination, providing an opportunity for quirky home décor in the form of phrenological busts modelled after those produced by Fowler and Wells. This view of phrenology often rubs uncomfortably against its use as a tool of racism. In 2017, a restaurant in New York which had been named *Fowler & Wells*—a reference to its location at the site previously occupied by Fowler and Wells' American Phrenological Cabinet—changed its name after public outcry brought these connections to light.[6] Recently, phrenology reared its head in a more unusual way during the Capitol Insurrection of 6 January 2021. One participant, as reported by Ronan Farrow, claimed to believe in phrenology and stated that he had only agreed to be interviewed after studying images of Farrow's head.[7]

While those who subscribe to phrenology as a theory are rare today, the participation of an avowed phrenologist at this event is a reminder that the broader motivations behind it remain with us. Courtney Thompson and philosopher Quill Kukla have both separately identified what they call a "phrenological impulse" which remains to this day. For Thompson, the phrenological impulse is the "desire to apply phrenological theories, language, and practices to find practical solutions to social problems."[8] Despite the dismissal of phrenology as an active science, Thompson argues, many of its tenets and assumptions remain deeply ingrained.[9] For Kukla, the phrenological impulse is something that goes even deeper—it is the temptation to design systems that allow us to read character off of the external body.[10] At the core of both these definitions is a desire to make the invisible visible and comprehensible, whether that is an individual's character, or the causes of social ills. To return to Walt Whitman's "Poem of Many

[6] Kim Severson, "Tom Colicchio Changes His Restaurant's Racially Tinged Name," *The New York Times*, August 22 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/dining/temple-court-fowler-and-wells-tom-colicchio.html.
[7] Ronan Farrow, "A Former Marine Stormed the Capitol as Part of a Far-Right Militia," *New Yorker*, January 14, 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-former-marine-stormed-the-capitol-as-part-of-a-far-right-militia.
[8] Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 5-6.
[9] Thompson, *Organ of Murder*, 162-63.
[10] Rebecca Kukla, "The Phrenological Impulse and the Morphology of Character," in *Embodiment and Agency*, ed. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univeristy Press, 2009), 77-78.

in One," it is the desire to read not only the "objects"—the things themselves—but their "substratums" as well.

Given the potential for disconnect between the feeling of an emotion and its expression, it is understandable that emotion would attract the attention of this impulse. Nineteenth-century phrenologists sought to impart an order on something which was, for the most part, invisible. Phrenologists were confident that emotion was something that could be explained as a part of a coherent system which gave order to the world. In doing so they projected onto it their own beliefs about society and the way it should be structured. Emotion, then, became a tool to delineate and sometimes to challenge who was able to participate. It is this fact which makes phrenological texts such rich sources for understanding emotion in this period. They allow us to uncover both the emotional standards of nineteenth-century Americans, as well as the way they were used to negotiate the boundaries of who did and did not belong.

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