

KEYWORDS: Ellen White, amalgamation, racism, slavery, abolition, a complication of the plot, how to deal with the flaws

# The Hardest

## QUESTION

BY TERRIE DOPP AAMODT

October 22, 2009, marked the opening of the working conference in Portland, Maine, that would begin to put together the manuscript of *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, which was published five years later by Oxford University Press. The choice of date was not what you are thinking, whatever that may be; rather, it marked the convergence of post-peak-color-season hotel rates in Maine and the away schedule of the University of Wisconsin-Madison football team. We did not explain all of this to our keynote speaker of the evening, Joan Hedrick, the Pulitzer-Prize-winning biographer of Harriet Beecher Stowe. She had learned the date's significance by the time she arrived in Portland, so it was with some trepidation that she entered our discussion of Ellen White studies. Before her conference invitation was given, Hedrick had never heard of Ellen White, a feature she shared with many other scholars of American literature, history, and religion. And yet that night, as she described the joys and challenges of writing a woman's life, everyone present could resonate with her task. She spoke of women's expected place in nineteenth-century America, the challenges of women assuming unconventional roles outside of their domestic

sphere, and tensions between innovative women and the power structures they encountered. When she concluded, we were still digesting the rich possibilities she had laid out for us when Ciro Sepulveda, a professor of history at Oakwood University, jumped up with the first question of the discussion session:

"It's clear from hearing your talk that you have profound admiration for your subject, but how do you deal with the flaws?"

The people in the room with ties to Adventism—well over half—were all ears.

How *do* you deal with the flaws? Before I describe Hedrick's response, I want to reflect on the question. What is the biographer *supposed* to do? In the 1930s, during the heyday of literary and intellectual modernism, the historian and cultural critic Lewis Mumford described the role of the modern biographer. Earlier generations had, he said, been satisfied to assemble available documents and "a well-modeled clay mask" into something "called a 'character.'" Any traits out of character would be discarded, and the biographer could proceed to create a bronze sculpture from the selected materials and, "in an excess of piety, would often gild the bronze head."

# “It’s clear from hearing your talk that you have profound admiration for your subject, but how do you deal with the flaws?”

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In Mumford’s day, modernist thinkers were telling biographers to skip the moral mask and go straight to the facts. But identifying the facts, even before the advent of postmodernism, was easier said than done. No, Mumford said, the biographer is not a sculptor but is more like an archaeologist, trying to make sense of the bits left to her, even if all she is given is a shoulder blade and part of a foot.<sup>1</sup>

Compared to some biographical tasks, though, the one facing this biographer includes a plethora of detached skeletal pieces with which to attempt reconstructing the person of Ellen White and telling her story whole. But *more* does not necessarily mean *easier*. Because I am foolish enough to stand in front of a roomful of people with acutely developed critical faculties and try to explain my task, I’ll just go straight to the hardest problem this biographer has encountered: what to make of Ellen White’s statements on amalgamation and how to determine their relationship to her various statements on racial issues. To identify this issue as the hardest problem is not to trivialize the others, such as the use of sources, inconsistencies, veracity, statements about science, or the chasm between empirical evidence and visionary phenomena. This topic of amalgamation and race is highly controversial, it attracts strong opinions from every angle, it lays open some deeply troubling and persistent issues within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and it touches on national, even worldwide, matters as fresh as this morning’s newspaper.<sup>2</sup>

There are many ways to deal with this problem, and they have all been tried: explain it away, gloss it over with rhetorical analysis, contextualize it to death, create a framework of coherence—a controlling narrative—into which selected details may be conveniently fitted, or ignore it completely and claim that the allotted number of pages in the volume under construction precludes even bringing up the issue. Conversely, one could expect a

subject to behave according to cultural expectations that did not yet exist and use deviations from that standard to discredit the subject, or one could identify this issue as the Gordian knot that, once undone, unravels every claim the subject made and every action she ever took. Mumford describes these latter activities as an attempt “to strip off the moral mask,” usually leading “not to a clear reading of the character, but to the building-up of a sort of negative moral mask, as artificial and arbitrary as the one that it replaced—or rather more so, because the original mask was a work of art produced by the subject himself and it bore his own veritable imprint.”<sup>3</sup> I am not sure that any of these strategies aid us in our attempt to understand this person whole. So let me lay out the box of skeletal remains on the topic and see what we have to work with.

First, the amalgamation quotes. White used the term twice in troubling ways. The quotes appeared in July 1864, when *Spiritual Gifts*, Volume Three was published. In her preface, White lamented the scarce details on Old Testament spiritual heroes and promised an accurate expansion: “Since the great facts of faith . . . have been opened to me in vision,” she stated, “I have been more than ever convinced that ignorance . . . and the wily advantage taken of this ignorance by some who know better are the grand bulwarks of infidelity.”<sup>4</sup> And then she proceeded to pump oxygen into groups like American Atheists (one of whom wrote to me some time back on this very topic). In Chapter Six, “Crime Before the Flood,” she described vividly the extent of sin and perversion that incited God to destroy the earth with water. People luxuriated in material goods, denied the existence of God, and worshiped what they had made with their own hands. Stoked with a meat diet, which “increased their ferocity and violence,” they murdered their neighbors with impunity, appropriated their wives in polygamous

profusion, and stole their cattle. “But if there was one sin above another which called for the destruction of the race by the flood,” White continued, “it was the base crime of amalgamation of man and beast which defaced the image of God, and caused confusion everywhere.”<sup>5</sup>

What did she mean? What does a plain reading of the text reveal? The words say that man and beast became mixed together via serious criminal acts, creating mass consternation and distorting the image of God that had been built into Adam and Eve. If she had left it there, the words would have provided plenty of room for head-scratching and discussion. But she went further. After vividly recounting the Flood’s destruction, she described the rainbow, a sign of God’s “mercy and compassion” to “repentant man.” In the next breath, she returned to amalgamation. “Every species of animal which God had created were preserved in the ark,” she went on. “The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood.” But those sinful distortions returned after the Deluge, she asserted: “Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.” And that is all she said. No further explanation, no development, no additional use of the term as applied to human

beings in any of her other writings, although these quotes would be replicated in 1870 in *The Spirit of Prophecy, Volume One*.<sup>6</sup>

White did not indicate which races she was referring to, but the potential implications were the final straw for B. F. Snook and William H. Brinkerhoff, two disgruntled Adventist pastors from Iowa who already doubted the validity of Ellen White’s visions and cast a hearsay-fueled parting shot on their way out the door. Deploying their penchant for hyperbole, they declared this statement signified that White had taught that Negroes were not human. “But what are we to understand by certain races of men?” they asked, “She has . . . left us to fix the stigma of amalgamation where we may see fit. But

the interpretation has come to light. She told it to her husband, and he made it known to Eld. Ingraham, and he divulged the secret to the writer that Sister White had seen that God never made the Darkey.”<sup>7</sup> Shaky though this purported evidence may have been, Snook’s and Brinkerhoff’s pamphlet acquired a life of its own and still circulates on the Internet.

Within a few months, Uriah Smith, the first in a long line of mansplainers, sprang to Ellen White’s defense in the pages of the *Review*, digging the hole even deeper. To describe what for him constituted the still-visible effects of amalgamation, Smith, reflecting popular racist polygenesis theory, listed the “wild Bushmen of Africa, some tribes of the Hottentots, and perhaps the Digger Indians of our own country, &c.” as examples.<sup>8</sup> Over the years since then, explanations have multiplied: her grandson-in-law, D. E. Robinson, said in 1931 that the passage fulfilled

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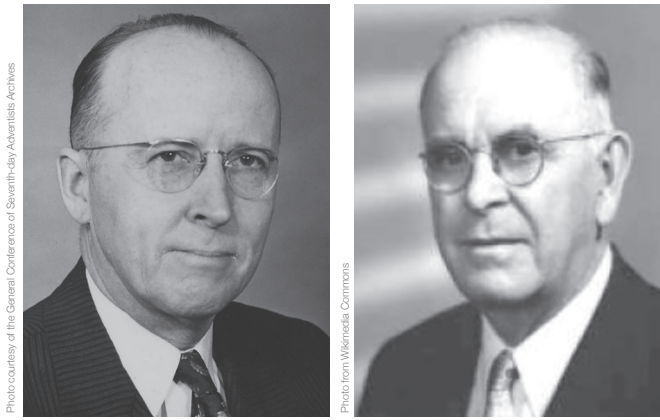
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her prefatory intent to counter skepticism about creation and that her statements helped refute the recently published ideas of Charles Darwin. “Mrs. White’s statement, if accepted, will solve the problems connected with the close physical resemblance between man and some of the apes,” Robinson claimed, oblivious of his racist overtones. He saw greater structural differences between apes and the tailed monkeys “than

between [apes] and man. Anyone who observes the chimpanzee, the gorilla, or the orang, would not find it difficult to believe that they had some common ancestry with the human race. . . . As far as the evidence goes, it is far more reasonable to believe that the apes are descended from man, than to regard them as his ancestors.”<sup>9</sup>

In his own attempt to redeem the quote, George McCready Price stated that what she meant to say was “amalgamation of man and of beast” (in other words, of man with man and of beast with beast), although he did not explain how such activities constituted a “base crime.” F. D. Nichol adopted Price’s grammar and created a rationale for it in 1951, maintaining that a plain reading of the passage would require accepting an “assumption”



Frank Marsh (left) and Harold W. Clark (right)

that “has marshaled against it the whole weight of scientific belief today.” Although he focused primarily on defending creationism, he did offer that “Certainly there is nothing in the savage races of some remote heathen lands that even suggests a cross between man and animals. And if the most degraded race of men does not suggest such a cross, much less do any species of animals suggest it.”<sup>10</sup>

Adventist scientists Frank Marsh and Harold W. Clark carried on a spirited dialogue in the 1940s, with Marsh adhering closely to Price’s grammatical analysis and Clark dangling the possibility that White may have meant what she appears to have said. In 1947, Clark carried out the most systematic analysis I have seen among the early defenders before he drew his conclusions. Along the way he hopefully picked up on the comment of one unnamed scientist who suggested that perhaps apes were descendants, rather than ancestors, of man. He concludes that “while there is . . . no positive evidence that man and animals have crossed in modern times, there are certain facts which indicate very strongly that such may have taken place at some time in the past.”<sup>11</sup> Like Ellen White, Clark was careful not to mention any specific races in his

analysis. Through all of these explanations, the scholars involved focused on issues of science and anthropology, usually staying away from racial arguments.

Before I draw my own conclusions about these statements, I will turn to the related skeletal pieces in my box: the references White made to race and slavery in the context of contemporary events. Her musings on amalgamation occurred in the middle of fiery discussions on slavery in the context of the Civil War. During the 1850s, as the nation argued about the Fugitive Slave Act and the spread of slavery into the territories, Adventists piled on, adopting an antislavery point of view, and eventually taking up the rhetoric of the most extreme opponents of government policy, the abolitionists.<sup>12</sup> Adventists tended to be apolitical, but the slavery issue dovetailed neatly with their prophetic interpretation of Revelation 13. In 1857, Uriah Smith equated the lamb-like aspects of one of the beasts described in the chapter with the principles of equality in the Declaration of Independence, but the draconic side of this “hypocritical nation” proceeded to “hold in abject servitude over 3,200,000 of human beings, rob them of those rights with which they acknowledge that all men are endowed by their Creator, and write out a base denial of all their fair professions in characters of blood.”<sup>13</sup>

“The moral influence of the nation has passed away,” thundered J. H. Waggoner in 1858, as Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas warily circled each other during the US Senate election campaign in Illinois, and the Adventist writer saw all organized religion as complicit. “The churches hold themselves bound to obey the laws of the land, unjust and wicked as they may be,” he continued, and “thus, instead of being ‘the light of the world,’ . . . their light is become darkness.”<sup>14</sup> Some Adventists insisted there was no point in fighting slavery,

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as it was too enmeshed to remove before the end of time, but Uriah Smith, the Whites, and others harshly criticized the federal government and prodded their fellow church members to take action.

After Abraham Lincoln was elected to the presidency on November 6, 1860, the incumbent James Buchanan, a northern doughface Democrat in the thrall of southern white supremacists, dithered until Lincoln's inauguration the following March, while slave states prepared to secede. On November 20, the *Review* reprinted an article by Harriet Beecher Stowe, an antislavery supporter of colonization who had earned the admiration of abolitionists in 1852 by publishing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Uriah Smith's headnote to her article connected the United States with the majestic, terrifying description of the last days of Babylon in Revelation 18, noting part of the wealth of that decadent kingdom was invested in the "bodies and souls of men." Stowe's article, originally published in the *Independent*, was as critical of organized religion as Waggoner had been in the pages of the *Review*. Both writers knew that although all the mainline Protestant denominations in the US split over the slavery issue before the war began, none of them called for the immediate abolition of the peculiar institution. "When a great moral question is made a test-question before the public mind, or a great evil is threatening to spread in a community," Stowe declared, and when "any body of men professing eminently to be the representative men of Christianity, decline publicly and clearly to express any opinion about it, this want of assertion is immediately received by the powers of evil as the strongest affirmation."<sup>15</sup> Adventist leaders were on board with the antislavery and abolitionist opinion that the impending civil conflict had cosmic dimensions, and unlike their formally organized counterparts, their official journal included abolitionist viewpoints.

They saw it as a matter of the survival of Christianity. Another Adventist, John Fee, spoke out in the *Review* a few days after the Confederate States of America organized its government in February 1861. Fee quoted a statement the Presbyterian theologian and abolitionist Albert Barnes had made several years earlier: "The Christian church, if right, would break the bonds of the slave in a year." Voltaire had won over public opinion in France because he stood up for the poor and oppressed while the French church remained silent, Barnes noted; the same thing

could happen in the United States. Fee took Barnes's cue: "Four millions of native-born Americans of 'one blood' with ourselves," he fumed, are "despoiled in the sacred rights of husband and wife, parents and child; yet most of the professed ministers of Him who came to . . . preach deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty them that are bruised, dispose of the claims of these millions by a 'single paragraph' in their sermons. . . . [and for] the colored man in the free States, there are but few churches where he is treated as a brother. Most treat him as Pharisees did Gentiles in the time of Christ."<sup>16</sup>

Ellen White jumped into this strident context in late August 1861. By this time, the Confederates had captured Fort Sumter; Lincoln had called up 75,000 troops for 90 days, and inexperienced soldiers on both sides had stumbled toward a flawed Confederate victory at the First Battle of Manassas. White reflected both the ardent discussions on the pages of the *Review* during the previous few years and the attitudes of the larger antislavery and abolitionist communities, which chafed at Lincoln's refusal to violate his Constitutional oath in order to free the slaves. Radical Republicans in Congress and their allies in the press, echoed by Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, excoriated Lincoln for his timidity in returning to their owners the slaves freed by abolitionist generals in the early weeks of the war.

White, like some Northern clergymen, asserted that this timidity was precisely why the Union lost at Manassas. "God is punishing this nation for the high crime of slavery," she railed. "All heaven beholds with indignation, human beings, the workmanship of God, reduced to the lowest depths of degradation, and placed on a level with the brute creation by their fellow-men."<sup>17</sup> Angels were recording this "grievous sin," she continued. God's anger "burns against this nation, and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned, and have themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise." She marveled at how professed Christians could weep over the agonies of early Christian martyrs while inflicting suffering on their own slaves. "It will be more tolerable for the heathen and for papists in the day of the execution of God's judgment than for such men," she warned. Several months before Julia Ward Howe penned the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," White expressed similar sentiments: "God's anger will not cease until he has caused the land



Manassas National Battlefield Park, the site of two Confederate victories during the American Civil War. Henry House Hill is now part of Manassas National Battlefield Park.

of light to drink the dregs of the cup of his fury.” She described how, while attending a church conference in Roosevelt, New York, on August 3 (about two weeks after the Battle of Manassas) she experienced a vision in which she was shown “the sin of slavery.” It had been expressed in the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, a statute “calculated to crush out of man every noble, general feeling of sympathy . . . [and executed in] direct opposition to the teaching of Christ.”

Then she described her vision of “the late disastrous battle at Manassas, Va.” She recounted the Northern charge against Henry House Hill, which was succeeding despite high casualties until “an angel descended and waved his hand backward . . . and a precipitate retreat

commenced. . . . Then it was explained, that God had this nation in his own hand, and would suffer no victories to be gained faster than he ordained, and no more losses to the Northern men than in his wisdom he saw fit, to punish the North for their sin.”<sup>18</sup> Here she expressed the common belief on both sides that even if their cause was fundamentally right, God would chasten them for their sins before he would allow them to proceed to victory. In fact, supporters of both sides used similar language after this first major battle.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the early years of the war, the pages of the *Review* were filled with refutations of biblical arguments supporting slavery, as well as fervid debates on the draft, pacifism, and the theory of just war. After the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, however, the subject of slavery faded, along with the expectation that time would end with slavery intact. The church pivoted toward spreading its mission to Europe and elsewhere, typically bypassing debates about Reconstruction, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and anti-black violence. Although many one-time abolitionists became Radical Republicans and sought to enforce racial equality in the South, Adventists took a pass. There were virtually no Adventists in the South during or just after the war, and the region fell off the denominational radar. Like some other antislavery activists, once the peculiar institution was ended by the Thirteenth Amendment, they assumed their work was done.

It was nearly twenty-five years before Ellen White revisited the subject in detail. In 1889, the General Conference drew up resolutions on the “color line” in South Africa, and she drafted a manuscript on Jim Crow racism. A year later, as she worshiped with white congregants and former slaves in St. Louis, Missouri, she knelt with them in prayer. Just then, she recounted, “these words were presented to me as if written with a pen of

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fire: ‘All ye are brethren,’” (Matthew 23:8). She wanted the congregation to know that “the God of the white man is the God of the black man, and the Lord declares that His love for the least of His children exceeds that of a mother for her beloved child.” She drew on her own experience as a mother and the maternal imagery of scripture to describe God’s love for His black children as that of a mother for her child, particularly one who has been mistreated: “As soon as a mother sees reason for others to regard her child with aversion or contempt, does she not increase her tenderness, as if to shield him from the world’s rude touch? ‘Can a mother forget her sucking child? Yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee’” (Isaiah 49:15). God loves His children equally, she said, “except that He has a special, tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater burden than others.”<sup>20</sup>

The General Conference session in 1891 turned its attention to the work beginning in the South, a region that had been whipsawed politically: Radical Republicans had installed their people in Southern statehouses and forced whites there to accept political, legal, and social equality with their former slaves, often at the point of the bayonet. The active phase of Reconstruction had ended in 1877, and by the 1890s, Jim Crow legislation installed by white supremacist southern Democrats had swept over the former Confederacy. White people who consorted with blacks in any way, including evangelists or educators, did so at the very real peril of their lives.

At the 1891 General Conference, R. M. Kilgore, superintendent of the church’s District Two in the United States—later the Southern Union—reported on this brand-

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new field within Adventism. The denomination had made “no provision . . . for the development of workers to labor especially among the colored people,” Kilgore reported.<sup>21</sup> He described the needs and asked the church to recruit black teachers to work with black students in the South,

acknowledging the realities of Jim Crow racial separation.

While this was going on, White polished her 1889 manuscript on race, and it circulated for years, until her son Edson published it in *The Southern Work* in 1898. Meanwhile, when *Patriarchs and Prophets* went to press in 1890, the references to amalgamation were gone—and the descriptions of meat-eating before the Flood were toned down significantly. When *Desire*

*of Ages* appeared in 1898, she used the conclusion of



Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

R. M. Kilgore



Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

James Edson White, c.1870

Her premillennial pessimism led her to believe that the problem would continue (which it has done, longer than White thought the world would last), and her apocalyptic urgency put the gospel before racial remediation. A tragic result of this strategy was the church's willingness to apply this pragmatic, time-specific advice as if it were a long-term principle.

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the Good Samaritan story to make a point about race. Christ's command to the inquisitive lawyer, "Go, and do thou likewise," said White, forever answered the question, "Who is my neighbor?" and, she continued, "Christ has shown that our neighbor does not mean merely one of the church or faith to which we belong. It has no reference to race, color, or class distinction. Our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God."<sup>22</sup>

That statement would make an elegant denouement to the series of events described here, but it is not the end of the story either. In addition to preaching ideals, White gave practical advice. As she watched Edson and his associates risk their lives to minister to blacks in Mississippi, she became aware of the intransigent racial prejudice and hatred in the former Confederacy and of the helplessness or unwillingness of governments to check it. Thus, she advised that black congregations function separately from whites "not to exclude them from worshipping with white people, because they are black, but in order that the progress of the truth may be advanced. Let them understand that this plan is to be followed until the Lord shows us a better way." She advised against interracial marriage in consideration of its effects on the children produced by these unions. Through all of this she continued to emphasize equality to both white and black congregations: "Let us as Christians who accept the principle that all men, white and black, are free and equal, adhere to this principle, and not be cowards in the face of the world."<sup>23</sup> Her pragmatism in this regard placed her closer to the accommodationist language of Booker T. Washington in the Atlanta Compromise than the furious idealism of W. E. B. DuBois, his intellectual rival in the African-American community. Her premillennial pessimism led her to believe that the problem would

continue (which it has done, longer than White thought the world would last), and her apocalyptic urgency put the gospel before racial remediation. A tragic result of this strategy was the church's willingness to apply this pragmatic, time-specific advice as if it were a long-term principle. That tendency crippled the church's ability to respond to the racial turmoil of the mid-twentieth century and into the civil rights era.

So, the pieces have been taken out of the box. How to assemble them? I'll return to *Ciro Sepulveda's* question of *Joan Hedrick*: How do you deal with the flaws? Here is what she said that evening in 2009 regarding her subject's problems:

I view them as great complications of the plot, as good material for biographers. . . . The flaws . . . bring a person into sharp focus. Nobody is human without having flaws. To see the flaws as well as the virtues, and how they intersect—we can all see in ourselves that our strengths also have a downside. Seeing the human is seeing the human being whole. I don't see it as a problem but I see it as a possibility. I see it as great literary material and sometimes as great didactic material. I see the greatest problem of *Harriet Beecher Stowe* . . . that in her own relationships with black women she was not the egalitarian that I would have hoped she was. That has to be said about most abolitionists in the 19th century. They wanted to abolish slavery, but that did not mean they wanted to be social equals with black people. They just wanted to have that legal institution gone, but they did not want to have lunch with them. The North segregated the lunch counters and the trolley cars and so forth. I was very aware



at various points that Stowe was seeing black people through her middle class white eyes and wasn't really seeing the people that were right in front of her, in spite of writing that wonderful story of a life.<sup>24</sup>

That is all well and good, you may say, but Ellen White was not just a famous novelist; she was a self-proclaimed messenger of the Lord who was accepted by her coreligionists as a prophet. Stowe may have seen Uncle Tom's death in vision, as she claimed to do, and she may have spoken prophetically to the nation in her fiction and journalism, but shouldn't a divinely inspired prophet be held to a higher standard? What do *we* do with the flaws?

As you can probably tell, I see the amalgamation statements as a flaw, as a complication of the plot. If Ellen White is indeed a flawed prophet, she has a good deal of company. The story of a prophet is a human story as well as a divine one.<sup>25</sup> Reading White's amalgamation statements and reading widely in her explicit comments about slavery and race from the Civil War era until the end of her life, I can also say that the amalgamation quotes, whatever may have been their intent, were not normative. The principles she expressed in her theology of race are remarkable, particularly in light of that fact that by the 1890s almost every white person had given up on the fight for racial equality. Years earlier, the Radical Republican Charles Sumner and the fiery abolitionist Horace Greeley made their peace with the white supremacist South. Some Republicans who had forced the black vote on the South for a few years were unwilling to grant it in their home states in the North. When Henry Cabot Lodge Sr.'s civil rights bill failed to pass the Senate in 1890—it was literally bargained away to gain support for silver currency—the federal government gave up on enforcing the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments until 1957. No president would publicly condemn the practice of lynching, and anti-lynching legislation remained a dream. The Republican Party abandoned its black constituents and pursued its vision of prosperity, accepting the white South's narrative that the Civil War was not fought about slavery and Reconstruction had been nothing but a corrupt power grab.

Bucking mainstream American politics, Ellen White

insisted that there was no color line in heaven and blacks and whites were spiritually equal on earth. Was Ellen White a racist? Yes, she was, in the sense that racism is part of the fallen human condition and affects us all. Was she a through-going, out-and-out Anglo-Saxon-favoring racist like Ralph Waldo Emerson (also an abolitionist), Louis Agassiz, and a host of other nineteenth-century American intellectuals? Certainly not. Did she go against the American grain in the 1890s by insisting blacks and whites were equal in the sight of God? Absolutely.

I do not know why White made her statements about amalgamation in *Spiritual Gifts*. As a biographer who believes she had something to say to the world, I wish she had not said them. It is possible that she grew to regret them also. I find no value in trying to explain them away. She made them, and that fact should be noted in the context of the other things she said about slavery and race over the years. What is more disquieting to me is the way subsequent supporters of White have sought to redeem those statements. My take on this and other controversial issues involving Ellen White is to let her say what she said, try to understand the context from which her statements arose, and try to see the person whole. Ellen White was a remarkable woman with a powerful spiritual message for her own world and for subsequent generations. She deserves to speak for herself.

## Endnotes

1. Lewis Mumford, "The Task of the Modern Biographer," *The English Journal* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1934), 1–3. Accessed August 8, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/804887>

2. This article is a transcript of a lecture delivered to the annual conference of the Association of Adventist Forums in September 2018. In it I described how I worked through the biographical problem of White's amalgamation statements, in the context of racial attitudes of the time and her subsequent statements on race, as well as statements from her defenders, primarily in the 1930s and 1940s. After doing so, and after delivering the lecture, I examined recent scholarship and commentary that form the historiographical record on this topic, and I describe several of those sources here. The Ellen G. White Estate provides an excerpt from Francis D. Nichol's book, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* on the topic of amalgamation: <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-amalg.html/>. It also includes a brief summary of a similar position at <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-faq-unus.html/#unusual-section-c1>. *Spectrum* has published two articles on the topic: Gordon Shigley, "Amalgamation of Man and Beast," *Spectrum* 12, no. 4 (1982) 10–19; and Ronald Osborn, "True Blood: Race, Science, and Early Adventist Amalgamation Theory Revisited," *Spectrum* 38, no. 4 (2010), 1–29, 62. Ronald L. Numbers, in *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), discusses the controversial passages primarily as they were defended by Adventist creationists. Shigley discusses in detail the 1947 Adventist summit that featured presentations by Adventist scientists Frank Marsh and Harold W. Clark; I have cited in this lecture transcript preliminary versions of

their discussions, which went on for several years.

3. Mumford, "Modern Biographer," 7.
4. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Power Press, 1864), v–vi.
5. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, 64.
6. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, 75; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1870), 68, 78. This multi-volume series was renamed *The Great Controversy* in 1871.
7. B. F. Snook and William H. Brinkerhoff, "The Visions of E. G. White Not of God" (Cedar Rapids: Cedar Valley Times Book and Job Printers, 1866). Accessed August 15, 2018. <http://www.nonegw.org/snook/visionsc.htm>
8. Uriah Smith, "The Visions—Objections Answered," *Review and Herald*, July 31, 1866: 65. We have no record of Ellen White's thoughts on Smith's remarks, although she and James endorsed the booklet he eventually published defending her visions, which included this commentary. The historian Ibram X. Kendi describes the segregationist theory of polygenesis and racial hierarchy, which incorporated the notion that hypersexualized West African women cohabited with apes and produced offspring. Kendi traces how the concept was developed and promoted by John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1689), Carl Linnaeus, and Voltaire, among others; see *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 50–51, 84–86. In 1853, Josiah C. Nott and George Gliddon produced *Types of Mankind* to honor their mentor, Samuel Morton, author of *Crania Americana*, and to present American polygenesis science theory to the world (Kendi, 198–199). Gordon Shigley, cited above (13–14), notes that Uriah Smith's views harmonized with Morton's. Polygenesis was typically used to promote segregationist support for slavery; the amalgamation references by Smith and White do not harmonize with their typically abolitionist views.
9. D. E. Robinson, "Amalgamation vs. Evolution," unpublished paper [1931], Heritage Room, Pacific Union College.
10. George McCready Price, "The Amalgamation Question Again," unpublished paper, [ca. 1940], Heritage Room, Pacific Union College; F. D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1951), 306, 315.
11. Harold W. Clark, "Amalgamation: A Study of Perplexing Statements by Mrs. E. G. White," (A rerun of a paper issued March 1, 1942), unpublished paper [1948], Heritage Room, Pacific Union College, 8–9; Frank L. Marsh, "A Discussion of Harold W. Clark's Paper 'Amalgamation,'" unpublished paper (1948), Heritage Room, Pacific Union College.
12. I use "antislavery" to describe individuals who objected to slavery but wished to see it gradually eliminated and often supported relocation of freed slaves via colonization. "Abolition" refers to individuals who believed the immorality of slavery demanded its immediate extinction. Examples of both attitudes appear in the pages of the *Review* just before and during the Civil War.
13. Uriah Smith, "The Two-Horned Beast—Rev. XIII," *Review and Herald*, Mar. 19, 1857: 156.
14. J. H. Waggoner, "National Degeneracy," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 12, 1858: 101.
15. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Church and the Slave Trade," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 20, 1860: 2–3.
16. John G. Fee, "The Church, Slavery, and Caste," *Review and Herald*, February 19, 1861: 107. Kendi (p. 85) notes that Voltaire, like many Enlightenment intellectuals, supported polygenesis while opposing slavery.
17. Ellen White held slave owners responsible for the souls of their slaves; for those who "kept in ignorance" their slaves, "all the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master." Slaves prevented from achieving spiritual accountability, she said, could not be taken to

heaven, given that they knew "nothing of God, or the Bible, [and feared] nothing but his master's lash, and [did not hold] so elevated a position as his master's brute beasts." According to her theology, God "does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He lets him be as though he had not been," while the master had to suffer the seven last plagues and then be raised at the second resurrection "and suffer the second, most awful death" for both his own sins and those of his slaves, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1858), 193. This teaching has raised eyebrows and charges of racism, although it should also be noted that White described a similar destiny for others who, through no fault of their own, had not had the opportunity to learn of God, salvation, and heaven, while she also described slaves in heaven who had been given the opportunity to claim salvation.

18. Ellen White, "Slavery and the War," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 27, 1861: 100–101.
19. The Rev. Horace Bushnell, a Northern abolitionist clergyman, noted a week after the battle that God had allowed the North to experience adversity early in the war, *Reverses Needed: A Discourse Delivered on the Saturday after the Battle of Bull Run* (Hartford: L. E. Hunt, 1861); Stephen Elliott, the Episcopal Bishop of Georgia, preached that if the Confederate soldiers dying at Manassas had been able to see spiritual things, "I feel sure that they would have seen horses and chariots of fire riding upon the storm of battle." *God's Presence with Our Army at Manassas!* (Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1861), 20. See also Terrie Aamodt, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause: Apocalyptic Imagery and the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 50–60.
20. Ellen White, "Our Duty to the Colored People," MS-6, 1891.
21. R. M. Kilgore, "Report of Superintendents of Districts," *General Conference Daily Bulletin* 4, no. 2 (March 8, 1891), 21.
22. Ellen White, *Desire of Ages* (1898) (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 503.
23. Ellen White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9 (1909), 206–207; *Selected Messages*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 343.
24. Joan Hedrick, "Writing a Woman's Life," University of Southern Maine, Oct. 22, 2009.
25. White, in describing how people inspired by God get their point across, noted that "Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind." See "Objections to the Bible," MS 24, 1886. I am indebted to Alden Thompson for bringing this quotation to my attention.



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