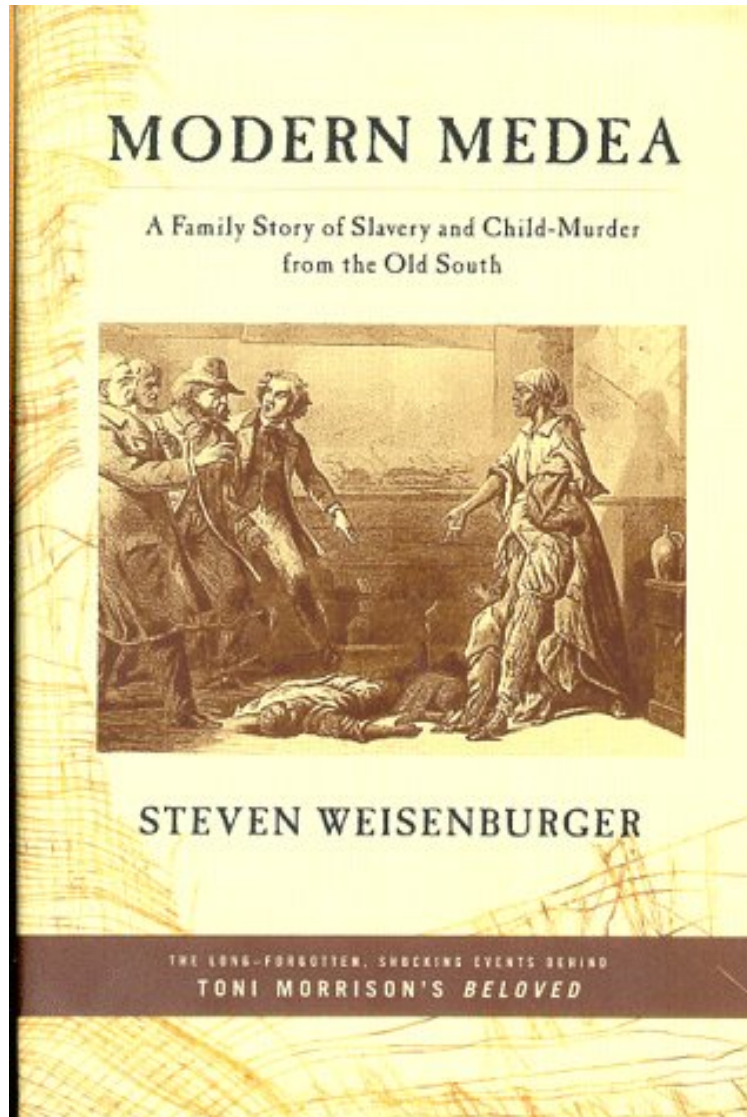


(Ebook free) Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South

Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South

Steven Weisenburger

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Steven Weisenburger : Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder from the Old South:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very accurate research By Dr Jacques COULARDEAU This is a historical book that tries to reconstruct the case of Margaret Garner identified as The Modern Medea by the painter

Thomas Satterwhite in 1867. She is also evoked in a poem by Mary A. Livermore, *The Slave Tragedy of Cincinnati*, in the *New York Tribune* on February 3, 1856, in a long poem, *The Night of Freedom*, by William Wallace Hebbard recited on March 18, 1856 and in another shorter poem by Frances Harper, *The Slave Mother*, A tale of the Ohio, published in 1874. These three references do not identify her to Medea. Finally her case is in the background of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The events took place in the winter 1856 in Kentucky and Ohio, Covington on one bank and Cincinnati on the other bank of the Ohio river. A family, three generations and eight people, of slaves escape from Kentucky to Ohio across the river that is frozen in the night from Sunday January 27 to Monday January 28. The Garners go to some acquaintances, the Kites who try to get them to the close-by Underground Railroad Station but for unclear reasons the house is besieged by the police at 10 and they are arrested at 12. During the scuffle the Mother, Margaret kills her 3 year old daughter and tries to kill one of her sons and stuns the other. The only one she does not attack is her 9 month old infant. The case is taken to court but it will last more than a month, though the US Fugitive Slave Laws (1793 and 1850) specifically states that the only element to check is the property right of the owners or claimant over the fugitive slaves. Kentucky is a slave state whereas Ohio is not, and that complicates things. Two legal problems are raised by the defense. The first one is that both Robert and Margaret (the younger generation parents) had been brought when children to Ohio by their masters on visits, but since slavery is not recognized by the Ohio Constitution, as soon as they stepped into Ohio they were freed. But the two concerned slaves were young and they were taken back to Kentucky. The question is to know whether that short sojourn in the past with their safe return to Kentucky could be considered as making the slaves free. It will be ruled that it does not. The second is that a capital crime was committed by one of the fugitive slaves and the others were accessories. Then there is a contradiction. For the capital crime in Ohio, the people who commit such a crime are supposed to be brought to court according to the habeas corpus procedure. They are thus treated as human beings in Ohio and are de facto freed if this habeas corpus procedure is implemented. On the other hand they are slaves, hence a piece of property was destroyed by another piece of property and hence there is no capital crime, only the destruction of some property. And it is this sole question of property that has to be considered according to the Fugitive Acts. The court will finally only consider this question of property considering that the habeas corpus procedure can only apply to human beings recognized as such, in the words of the court "the slave does not possess equal rights with the free-man". This decision is finally taken on Tuesday February 26, 1856. The captives are thus remanded to slavery and their owners on February 28. They embark on the Henry Lewis ship on March 7 but the ship Edward Howard rams into the previous one and causes its sinking. In those circumstances Margaret drowns her infant child by throwing her into the water and she tries to drown herself by jumping into the river. She is saved by the black cook of the ship who dives and brings her back. They reach their owner's plantation on March 10, full in the cotton season and are probably sent to work: the older generation of parents, the younger generation of parents and the two surviving sons, in the fields because housework is banned for escapees. This case was heavily used in the debate leading to the Civil War on both sides. This mother killing to of her children was shown as a monstrous un-person by slave-owners. But on the other hand she was shown as inspired by a revolutionary spirit and that she preferred entrusting her children to the angels of God to letting them go back into slavery. She was used equally by male abolitionists and by female abolitionists and feminists to enhance the fight against slavery as well as the fight for women's rights. The feminist and abolitionist Lucy Stone testified in court and brought up three arguments. A religious argument with a quotation from the Bible, Deuteronomy 23:15 that states an escaped slave or servant does not have to be given back to his or her previous owner, escaping meaning freedom. Then the fact that Gaines, the owner of these slaves, would have promised to Lucy Stone to free Margaret when she is back in Kentucky, and Lucy Stone insists on the fact he has to hold his promise that he denies of course. The third argument is that the children have "faded faces", meaning they are mulattos born from a union imposed onto Margaret by her owner. This last element leads to the idea of some kind of vengeance against the rapist owner, though a slave-owner must not give a lot of value to the children he may get from his slaves, except that they can be sold, even if they are his own sons or daughters. Dr Jacques COULARDEAU of 4 people found the following review helpful. A true story of slavery and infanticide By gac1003 In February 1857, slave Margaret Garner fled from her master Archibald Gaines's Kentucky plantation. She, her husband Robert, his parents, and their four children crossed the frozen Ohio River in Cincinnati, hiding out in the cabin of one of Margaret's cousins, a free black. Gaines quickly trailed them to the cabin, and, in one quick moment, Margaret picked up a knife and killed one of her children, not wanting any of them to go back into slavery. In "Modern Medea," author Steven Weisenburger uses court documents, newspaper stories and other sources from the time to examine this almost-forgotten trail that challenged the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. We follow along with the entire trial, seeing all the tricks that both defense and prosecution lawyers used to either bring a quick end to proceedings or to protract them in order to keep the Garners on free soil. The trail also gives us an interesting look into politics, the pro-slavery mindset, abolitionism view, and the media perception and bias of the time. What I found most interesting about this book is that the trial to determine whether or not the Garner's were still the property of Archibald Gaines took precedent over the charge of infanticide. The outcome would have a profound effect not only on state's rights but would spark a tiny flame leading up to the American Civil War. And even after the trial was concluded, the media, poets such as Elizabeth Barret Browning, and other authors used the events to add fuel to the

ever-growing debate on slavery. But, it still remains a little-known trial, falling into the dust of history in part due to public "whitening" of the events and to the events of the Dred Scott decision almost a year later. Yet author Toni Morrison helped to revive interest in this trial by modeling one of the characters in her novel "Beloved" after the ghost of Margaret's slain daughter, Mary. The book sometimes reads more like a college text and asks many questions that are never answered. But the amount of information surrounding the trial and concerning the battle of state's rights versus federal law make this a great book to read. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The story behind (or beside) Morrison's *Beloved* By A Customer Weisenburger, with a meticulous eye and a careful hand, vividly retells the story of Margaret Garner, whose case (or rather, one account of whose case) was the seed from which Toni Morrison grew the central stalk of her novel *Beloved*. It is not exactly facts that he gives us -- Weisenburger is too careful a critic, too aware of the complex nature of the historical record -- but around what facts can be found, he has written a novel of his own, one which richly complements Morrison's thought-experiment with the historical legacy of slavery. Garner's case, though little recalled today, was far better known in its day than many readers of Morrison's novel may realize. The best-known lawyers and abolitionists of the day argued Garner's case, and newspapers across the country reported the story. The most fascinating aspect of the story is the account of the competing legal and rhetorical strategies used to try to free Garner -- or, if she could not be freed, to give her the greatest possible symbolic value for the cause. Garner's act -- killing one of her children rather than allowing her to be returned to slavery -- placed her between two contrary legal systems. Within the slavery system, and the Federally-administered Fugitive Slave Act, Garner was a piece of property to be returned. Yet within Ohio law, as a person accused of murder, she was subject to persecution for her crime as a human being. Her lawyer, paradoxically, had to persuade a judge to issue a writ for her arrest for murder, in order to prevent her from being returned to Kentucky as a slave -- it was in fact her one hope. Weisenburger details how, in the end, this defense too failed, partly due to the complicity of certain Ohio officials with the Kentucky counterparts, and partly due to the inaction of then-governor of Ohio Salmon Chase. The actual tale of Margaret Garner, strangely enough, is even more tragic than that of Morrison's *Sethe*. Margaret was shipped off to cotton-belt slavery with relatives of her Kentucky owner, losing a second child to a steamboat accident en route, and eventually died a horrible death from typhoid fever. I'd recommend this book to anyone engaged by Morrison's novel, or by the recent film -- not as 'the fact behind the fiction,' but instead as a vital counterpoint, an *other* story of Margaret Garner, a woman who stood at the razor's edge of one of American history's most brutal junctures.

The first in-depth historical account of the events that inspired Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. In the middle of a frigid Sunday night in January 1856, a twenty-two-year-old Kentucky slave named Margaret Garner gathered up her family and raced north, toward Cincinnati and freedom. But Margaret's master followed just hours behind and soon had the fugitives surrounded. Thinking all was lost, Margaret seized a butcher knife and nearly decapitated her two-year-old daughter, crying out that she would rather see her children dead than returned to slavery. She was turning on her other three children when slave catchers burst in and subdued her. Margaret Garner's child-murder electrified the United States, inspiring the longest, most spectacular fugitive-slave trial in history. Abolitionists and slaveholders fought over the meaning of the murder, and the case came to symbolize the ills of the Union in those last dark decades before the Civil War. Newspaper columnists, poets, and dramatists raced to interpret Margaret's deeds, but by the century's end they were all but forgotten. Steven Weisenburger is the first scholar to delve into this astonishing story in more than a century. Weisenburger integrates his innovative archival discoveries into a dramatic narrative that paints a nuanced portrait of the not-so-genteel Southern culture of slavery and its destructive effect on all who lived in and with it.

.com "This is a story of slavery and child-murder, and it begins in northern Kentucky." Toni Morrison's *Beloved* was based on a real incident: an 1856 infanticide committed by 22-year-old Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who, when recapture was imminent, cut her daughter's throat with a butcher's knife. "The ensuing public opinion battle raged for months," writes Steven Weisenburger. For the abolitionist movement, "no case more incisively revealed the pathology of slavery, and no deeds better symbolized the slave's tragic heroism." But to those in favor of slavery, "her deeds demonstrated that slaves were subhuman. Only a beast would kill its offspring, they reasoned, so Margaret's child-murder proved the bondservant's need for Southern slavery's kindly paternal authority." Weisenburger's account of Garner's life has a novelistic flair of its own, laying out the facts in crisp detail. He guides readers through the controversial month-long trial and its aftermath, with her return into bondage and, for a time, obscurity. Modern *Medea* provides a rich understanding of the realities of life in the antebellum South and the legal and cultural battles that took place over the institution of slavery. From Library Journal The events that inspired Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Beloved* (LJ 9/1/87), recently released as a film starring Oprah Winfrey, are the subject of this true account by Weisenburger (English, Univ. of Kentucky; *Fables of Subversion: Satire and the American Novel*, Univ. of Georgia, 1995). The gruesome act of Margaret Garner, who killed her children rather than allowing them to be slaves ("Let us go to God rather than go back to slavery"), touched off a firestorm of controversy just a few years before the

Civil War. Weisenburger is the first scholar to attend to this drama that uncovered dirty truths about our nation's past and the burning drive to escape bondage. He details not only the crime of infanticide and a desperate mother but skillfully portrays the country, the South, and the lives of both slaves and whites. Weisenburger integrates scholarly research and a fine narrative approach in relating this "drama of disunion, a prelude to fratricidal war." Kay Meredith Dusheck, Univ. of Iowa, Anamosa Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist In *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison drew on a long-forgotten historical incident to produce a fictional masterpiece. In *Modern Medea*, English professor Weisenburger explores that incident and its impact on contemporaries. In January 1856, a family of slaves named Garner left Kentucky and crossed the Ohio River to Cincinnati. Within 24 hours, a posse knocked on the door of the relatives' home where they had stopped. The Garners resisted. When the posse burst in, it found that Margaret Garner had cut the throat of her three-year-old daughter, Mary, and cut, but not seriously injured, older sons Tom and Sam; she did not want them to return to slavery. The capture, court action, and return of the Garners to their owner was a cause celebre, symbolizing different certainties for slavery's attackers and defenders. Recent studies of domestic life under slavery and records of the court cases and the (better-documented) lives of the white Southerners and Northerners involved are among Weisenburger's sources in recapturing what Margaret Garner did that day. Mary Carroll