



# **Black Well-Being: Health and Selfhood in Antebellum Black Literature**

*Andrea Stone*



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“An innovative interpretation of antebellum black literature as well as a timely contribution to the growing body of scholarship on health and the black body in slavery and freedom.”—Erica L. Ball, author of *To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Black Middle Class*

“Engages productively with discourses of identity and subjectivity, the human and post-human, nationalism and citizenship, and law and medicine in a ‘transcolonial’ framework that includes the United States, the Caribbean, and Canada.”—Gwen Bergner, author of *Taboo Subjects: Race, Sex, and Psychoanalysis*

Analyzing slave narratives, emigration polemics, a murder trial, and black-authored fiction, Andrea Stone highlights the central role physical and mental health and well-being played in antebellum black literary constructions of selfhood. At a time when political and medical theorists emphasized black well-being in their arguments for or against slavery, African American men and women developed their own theories about what it means to be healthy and well in contexts of injury, illness, sexual abuse, disease, and disability.

Such portrayals of the healthy black self in early black print culture created a nineteenth-century politics of well-being that spanned continents. Even in conditions of painful labor, severely limited resources, and physical and mental brutality, these writers counter stereotypes and circumstances by representing and claiming the totality of bodily existence.



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