

“TOO FILTHY TO BE REPEATED”: READING SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE
AGAINST ENSLAVED MALES IN U.S. SLAVE SOCIETIES

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

“To Filthy to be Repeated”: Reading Sexualized Violence Against Enslaved Males in U.S. Slave Societies is an exploration in the operation of male on male sexualized violence and resistance in the Atlantic World, specifically the United States. The work is concerned with the interaction of race, class, gender, and sexuality when a White male slaveholder sexually violates an enslaved Black male. The central task of this thesis is to properly re-read the history of slavery in the United States. Furthermore, this research project attempts to recover the silenced narratives of sexually assaulted enslaved males, while simultaneously asserting Black queer/quare re-reading as a fruitful theoretical and methodological tool for the scholarly and disciplinary labor of Africana Studies.

The thesis draws from two distinct, yet dialogical mediums for primary evidence—visual culture and slave narratives. The work attempts to place these antebellum sources in conversation with a Black queer/quare re-reading. I insist on “re-reading” instead of “reading”, because these visual and written texts were not properly read the first time. Thus, a “re-reading” is required. It is at this point that this thesis seeks to make a critical intervention by exposing the sexual vulnerability of the Black male body and the Black individual and communal resistance against such transgressions.

The first chapter, *Slave Societies in Flux* gives a brief socio-historical framework of slavery. It contextualizes race, class, and gender of the enslaved male as it relates to power and violence, particularly sexual violence. This chapter will address the “plantation” as a model for society, and acknowledge

the importance of crop, region, colonial presence, era/period, urban v. rural, plantation size, enslaved population in determining power dynamics.

Scenes of Inspection opens by acknowledging the Brazilian and Jamaican record of male-male sexual violence, and then moves to the visual record of enslavement, inspection, and sale by way of Trans-Atlantic crossings. The chapter is concerned with the construction and distribution of the Black male body in late 18th and early 19th Century visual culture. The engraving, Marché d'esclaves by Laurent, and the paintings, The Slave Trade by François-Auguste Biard and Slave Market by an unknown American artist are studied with a queer approach. This chapter deconstructs the scene of inspection and the White male pornographic gaze to build upon the structural insights of the first chapter. It demonstrates how the threat of male-male sexual violence operates within the realm of the visual. Like the pervasiveness of the inspection, the omnipotent threat of sexual violence is not only a Brazilian or Jamaican occurrence, rather, a Black Atlantic phenomenon.

Resistance is the central theme of the chapters three and four, *Re-reading Narratives*. The purpose of these chapters is to explore the relationship between male-male sexual violence and resistance in the United States. I employ Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Frederick Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and My Bondage and My Freedom in chapter three and four, respectively. Jacobs and the former enslaved male, Luke, make use of Black vernacular traditions to critique and resist U.S. legal discourse and its support of sexual assault. Meanwhile, the prospect of male-male rape forces Douglass to retreat into a masculine safe space, which nurtures a gender progressive resistance.

The thesis closes by contextualizing Black queer / quare re-reading as a scholarly endeavor within and natural to the Africana Studies project. The conclusion, *The Art of Reading* covers the overall theoretical implications and contributions of burgeoning Black que(e)rying of African American and American history, art, and literature. Lastly, considerations on the possible future directions of this research project are included.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Frederick Charles Staidum Jr. was born on August 23, 1983 in Thibodaux, Louisiana to Frederick Charles Staidum Sr. and Janice Peltier Staidum. In addition to his parents, Frederick was nurtured and encouraged by a close-knit extended family and a supportive church community.

“Slavery was not that bad!” The declaration of a high school history teacher was a blow to the stomach. Frederick was winded and silenced. He was in the course reaping the “benefits” of integration, but what he witnessed was betrayal. This was not the version of the narrative that Frederick had heard at home and at church. Since that moment, his academic career has been a search for the undistorted African American story.

While at Thibodaux High School, he balanced an honors-college prep curriculum with service learning activities. In addition to volunteering and tutoring at local elementary schools and the Circle of HOPE Community Center, he held leadership positions in Student Council, the National Honor Society, and the school newspaper. However, it was at KUJENGA, an African American Catholic youth leadership retreat, where Frederick was introduced to Afrocentric thinking and cultural awareness.

After high school, Frederick attended Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. He was nurtured by the rich culture of the Black community in New Orleans and an HBCU experience. Inspired by the writings of Carter G. Woodson, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Ernest Gaines, Frederick changed his major from Biology / Pre-Med to African World Studies. He was a founding member of “Creating Awareness Using Social Exchange,” which was a student organization that focused on relevant social

issues and community service. Frederick was named one of the “Outstanding Students” in his Academic division, and graduated cum laude from Dillard University in May 2005.

In 2003, Frederick earned the UNCF/Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. It funded a two year research endeavor, which produced his undergraduate thesis, “Identity at the Crossroads: The Black Gay Male Christian Experience.” Employing a secondary analysis of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Say It Loud: I’m Black and I’m Proud and a close reading of James Baldwin’s Go Tell It on the Mountain and Just Above My Head and Randall Kenan’s A Visitation of Spirits, he explored the role conflict of intersecting identities. In addition, Frederick acquired an archival internship at the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History in Atlanta, GA during the summer of 2004. At AARL, he helped organize the Harold Cruse collection and learned how to properly handle delicate primary materials, such as 18th century manacles.

Frederick then pursued graduate studies in the masters degree program at the Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University. His scholarly research interests evolved to include Black queer/quare theory and 18th and 19th century literature and visual culture. In order to re-read and remember sexual violence against enslaved males, Frederick intersected Black Queer discourses, the narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass, and antebellum “images of inspection.” Beyond looking for the presence of male-male sexual violence, he incorporated resistance within his analysis.

After Cornell University, Frederick will begin doctoral studies in the African American Studies department at Northwestern University, where he intends to concentrate in Expressive Arts and Cultural Studies. Influenced by

the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Frederick's research interests are shifting toward Afro-Creole culture of Louisiana and recast Louisiana culture using the rich interdisciplinary tools of Africana Studies. He reasons that the rebuilding process is prejudiced by the inability and refusal to locate the Blackness in Louisiana's historical and cultural narrative. Upon completing his Ph.D., he is determined to become a college professor and scholar-activist.

This work is dedicated to
Jason Staidum,
his veiled life,
his 'undertold' story,
and
his resistance.

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Beyond my special committee, several faculty members have directly influenced and supported the interdisciplinarity of this research. When accepted, I never imagined working “in” and on the nineteenth century; however, the first semester I found myself in an English Seminar on the social constructions of race and sex. Dr. Shirley Samuels, thank you for this critical introduction. Ironically, it was important to the development of this project.

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Introduction

Evidence of Things Not Read

I am an invisible man. No. I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.

-Ralph Ellison¹

The Problem with Reading

Although Ralph Ellison's work is set in Jim Crow America and not Antebellum America, the theme of Invisible Man hints at the African American search for personhood. In the United States, the struggle to maintain personhood began with the arrival of the first Africans in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. This research endeavor expands and reconstructs African American historiography and its inherent relationship with race, class, gender and sexuality. Invisible men and silenced stories are the focus of this study. The emphasis is upon men who were sexually violated while enslaved. The intention is to read through the silences, which allow for the possibility of male-male sexual violence to be heard. Like an enslaved person's literacy, this reading is political, since it betrays the heterosexist grand narrative.

Are these men truly invisible? Or is the invisibility a product of the refusal to see them and their experience? Traditionally, scholars employ only

¹ Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1947) 3.

“figments of their” intellectual “imagination” to envision, illustrate, and interpret the experiences of the enslaved community and by extension the enslaved men of those communities. In Women, Race and Class, Angela Davis asserts, “it is important to remember that the punishment inflicted on women exceeded in intensity the punishment suffered by their men, for women were not only whipped and mutilated, they were also raped”.² Similarly, Caribbeanist scholar, Barbara Bush insists, “Whereas the male slave was valued solely for the economic contribution he made to the plantation, the woman was expected to perform both sexual as well as economic duties”.³ Davis and Bush’s statements justly challenge patriarchal scholarship about the enslaved experience, such as John Blassingame’s The Slave Community.⁴ On the other hand, Davis and Bush’s arguments assume a heterosexist/hetero-normative perspective of brutalization in American slave societies. They, in effect, surround the enslaved Black male victims with “distorting glass”, which renders their stories invisible. As a result, the goal of this project is to bring to light the “flesh and bone, fiber and liquids” of sexually violated enslaved males in the United States.

Returning to the theme of invisibility, Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender writers and theorists pose pertinent questions about visibility, sexuality and the Black community. Similar to Ellison’s unnamed protagonist, activist-scholar, Joseph Beam, asks passionately, “Where is my reflection?” He continues, “I am most often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the

² Angela Y Davis, Women, Race & Class, (New York: Random House, 1981) 23.

³ Barbara Bush, Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838, (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 1990) 11.

⁴ Blassingame’s seemingly gender-neutral use of “slave” is a valid indicator of the patriarchal perspective, or, more appropriately, a masculine normative lens. When referring to women, he writes “female slaves,” but “slave” or “slaves” when discussing uniquely male issues and the entire slave community.

family, or am tolerated if I am silent and inconspicuous.”⁵ This research endeavor is not exactly a homosexual research project, and I do not want to make claims about the sexuality identity of the historical actors, whom I am investigating. That claim would be an anachronism. However, the critical inquiries of Black queer scholars are a key to the conceptual framework. Beam illustrates the acts of voluntary blindness, which ignores what is not normative heterosexuality. Reflecting on an incident in a donut shop, Beam writes, “He no longer speaks, instead looks disdainfully through me as if I were glass. But glass reflects, so I am not even that. He sees no part of himself in me—not my Blackness nor my maleness”.⁶ His words are an appeal to members of the African American community and by extension African American scholars to stop looking past persons, histories and narratives, which exist outside of the realm of normative heterosexuality.

The U.S. slave society is a collection of highly prescribed and uneven social interactions. These interactions are hierarchically arranged and reinforced by a perception of absolute power. Race, class, gender and sexuality, all have an influence on the distribution of power, property, and personhood. How did these power dynamics in the American slave society invite male on male sexual violations? Within the context of gendered power relations, how did sexual attacks on the Black male body operate? Shaped by these questions, I intend to explore the dialectical relationship between male-male sexual violence and enslaved resistance.

⁵ Joseph Beam, “Brother to Brother: Words from the Heart,” Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 284.

⁶ Beam 284.

The Insight of Re-reading

The scars from abuse on the backs of the enslaved, like in “Gordon Slavery” (Figure 1), are engrained into the American popular imagination.⁷ The daguerreotype displays a “former Louisiana slave named Gordon, who escaped to Union lines in 1863, and the image was taken shortly thereafter



Figure 1: “Gordon Slavery”.

⁷ “Gordon Slavery,” AccuNet/AP Multimedia Archive, 09 February 1999, AP/Illinois State Historical Library, 23 January 2007 <<http://ap.accuweather.com>>.

showing beating scars on his back".⁸ The photograph is a visual representation of the omnipotence of violence on the plantation. The state of Gordon's body and its position within the photography epitomize the structure of the slave society in which this body is captured. The pseudo-scientific/anthropological gaze of the camera's lens transforms Gordon from a subject to an object. The focus of the audience's eyes is drawn toward his body and away from Gordon's face, which is only a shadowy profile. Gordon's arched back is at the heart of the photograph; similar to how the enslaved body is at the heart of slavery.

While this is an objectifying moment for Gordon, it is simultaneously a moment of resistance. The scars left by the bullwhip and cat of nine tails crisscross to form an intersecting text. It is a "slave narrative," Gordon's narrative, meant to confront pro-slavery dogma of a brutal institution. I evoke Gordon's resistant text, the intersecting scars, as a point of theoretical departure. Making use of an analysis that employs intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, dismantles the false assumption that these experiences are natural and mutually exclusive. The meaning of Gordon's body and the signifiers of his bondage, i.e. brown skin and scarred back, are both a material reality and social construction. Readings, including Gordon's own interpretation, bring meaning to his body's "textless text."⁹ "The human body, in this view, can be understood only in the context of the social construction of reality; indeed, the body itself is seen as a social construct, a means of social

⁸ "Gordon Slavery".

⁹ Culbertson writes, "The human body is not simply a blank page upon which words have not yet been written. It is, more aptly, a textless text whose meaning is read by many readers, whether they are invited to read or not." Philip Culbertson, "Designing Men: Reading the Male Body as Text," *The Journal of Textual Reasoning* 1998, 15 May 2007 <<http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/tr/archive/volume7/Culbertson1.html>>.

expression or performance by which our identity and value--for ourselves and others--are created, tested, and validated".¹⁰ Each laceration overlaps another. They were created within specific contexts, and Gordon bares them as proof of the infinite possibilities of violence.

The researcher is not looking for proof of homosexuality in slave societies, because that is an entirely different research venture. It is important, however, to look to Black queer theory, because it takes into consideration race, class, gender, and sexuality. Thus, it arms one with the ability to recognize "queer" happenings in historical records. At first glance, the use of "queer" is contestable and possibly an ineffectual political move toward using a word with pejorative connotations. Nevertheless, the conceptual benefit of "queer" or, as E. Patrick Johnson theorizes, "quare" overshadows these connotations. In the nineteenth century, "queer" was likely used to describe the male-male sexual encounters without exclusively being linked to sodomy or a homosexual identity. Consequently, it opens up a conceptual space. In order to construct a more effective tool, Johnson borrows from Alice Walker's work to naming and re-conceptualizing feminism by way of womanism. Johnson defines "Quare" as "*queer*; also, opp. of *straight*; odd or slightly off kilter; from the African American vernacular for queer; sometimes homophobic in usage, but always denotes excess incapable of being contained within conventional categories of *being*".¹¹ "Quare" originates from the unique pronunciation of "queer" in Black vernacular, and is Johnson's undertaking in

¹⁰ Kenneth Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 13.

¹¹ E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) 125.

self-naming. Re-naming and self-identification has been a perpetual endeavor of the Black experience. The peculiar and critical connotations of “quare” signify the unique conceptual position of racial and sexual “being”. It evokes a location at the margins. This marginal position is at once a political disadvantage and conceptual gold mine. Unlike queer theory, “the model of quare studies that I propose would not only critique the concept of ‘race’ as historically contingent and socially and culturally constructed/performed, it would also address the material effects of race in a White supremacist society”¹². The theoretical posturing takes advantage of the anti-normative viewpoint of “quare” to critique and navigate through the mainstream ‘normative’ discourse of racial and economic caste, gender, and sexuality.

Roderick Ferguson corroborates Johnson’s inclusion of the study of “the material effects of race” with inquiries of sexuality. In Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique, Ferguson calls for “an analysis of sexuality not severed from race and material relations”.¹³ His queer of color analysis “interrogates social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from” heteropatriarchal ideology and critique.¹⁴ Ferguson advances the traditional Black feminist approach. Black feminist thought usually makes use of a framework that intersects race, gender, and class.¹⁵ Ferguson elaborates on the necessity of interrogating normative

¹² Johnson 135.

¹³ Roderick A Ferguson, Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 29.

¹⁴ Ferguson 149.

¹⁵ Several Black Feminist scholars have alluded to including “sexuality” in the now canonical triad, “race, class, and gender.” See Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000 or Kimberle’ Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” Critical Race Theory: The Key

heterosexuality. This critical quare intervention assumes the interrelatedness of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Siobhan B. Somerville, author of Queering the Color Line, adds to the methodological approach of this study. Somerville, like Johnson and Ferguson, realizes the shortcomings of White queer theory. She moves the interpretation “ from a singular focus on sexuality to one equally alert to the resonances of racialization” .¹⁶ Somerville critiques the use of a White heterosexual patriarchal interpretive lens as the standard theoretical perspective. Her “readings, therefore, listen for ‘the inexplicable presence of the thing not named’ and are attuned to the queer and racial presences and implications in texts” which are otherwise unnamed.¹⁷ Somerville places emphasis on reading the slippages in a text. The purpose is to discover and uncover what has been lost to heteronormative readings. As a result, Somerville employs racial queer reading as a deliberate attempt to see/hear the nonverbal elements.

Johnson’s quare theory, Somerville’s race sensitive queer reading and Ferguson’s queer of color analysis creates a powerful conversation. For the sake of this project, the product of the conversation and methodological tool is quare re-reading. I depart from Ferguson’s use of “queer of color”, because it trivializes the distinctive experiences of Black, Latino/a, Asian and Native American queer peoples. Quare re-reading involves the close reading of primary sources, which intersects race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Writings That Formed the Movement, Eds. Kimberle’ Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, New York: The New Press, 1995 for representative examples.

¹⁶ Siobhan B. Somerville, Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000) 6.

¹⁷ Somerville 6.

A square re-reading for male on male sexual violence in colonial and antebellum slave societies requires interpretive tools. Sandesh Sivakumaran in “Male/Male Rape and the ‘Taint’ of Homosexuality” offered two major ideas to help work through this project. Sivakumaran hints at the relationship between power relations and rape and the usefulness of the feminist derived power dynamic theory of rape. Sivakumaran indicates,

Notions of power, dominance, and gender, all of which play key roles in feminist analyses of male/female rape, also feature heavily in an analysis of male/male rape. Similarly, ideas of emasculation and feminization present in male/male rape obviously have an impact upon the feminist discourse.¹⁸

However, power, dominance, and gender play a different role in a slave society, which must be addressed. Power dynamic theory of rape offers further insight. Sivakumaran proposes,

The power dynamic theory behind rape considers that there is a hierarchy of power in society, with men placed at the top and women at the bottom. The threat of the existing power dynamic being usurped and those at the top losing their position of power explains why those at the top of the hierarchy rape those lower down. Such threats do not stem from active challenges but simply from being the ‘other.’¹⁹

Unfortunately, this theory in its present state exists within a colorblind vacuum. Sivakumaran challenges that masculinity and femininity are too diverse to use as analytical tools.²⁰ Masculinity is not a uniform concept, but there are other intersecting factors, which create stratification. What happens if we intersect race and class statuses of a slave society? Within the slave societies, men were stratified according to race and class. Thus, enslaved African males are perceived as unequal to free White males. According to the

¹⁸ Sandesh Sivakumaran, “Male/Male Rape and the “Taint” of Homosexuality,” *Human Rights Quarterly*. 27. 4 (2005): 1281.

¹⁹ Sivakumaran 1281.

²⁰ Sivakumaran 1282.

power dynamic theory, if enslaved African men are perceived as “other” and a threat to White men, then rape may occur in order to reinstate the power hierarchy.

Most mark the late nineteenth century as the era of the creation of the “homosexuality” versus “heterosexuality” duality and the codification of the “homosexual” as an identity. This influences how and what historical events were recorded and remembered. Enslaved male victims of sexualized violence and witnesses of this transgression “could not speak about their experiences because they had no words in which to describe them. Once they started to speak, however, they still had to stay within the discourse that was available to them.”²¹ Students of slavery have to use other markers and signifiers of sexual violence in order to combat this methodological conundrum. The fact remains that a colonial and antebellum sexual discourse was used to disclose same-sex behavior, i.e. “sodomy” and “buggery”.

Once more, male on male sexual violation in the early American context cannot be claimed as a homosexual act. Consequently, a discussion of epistemology and primary sources is necessary. Judith Schuyf problematizes the historical study of “homosexuality” or the study of “homosexuality” in history. “Historians have to face the problem” she admits, “that the subject of homosexuality as regards content and source analysis does not fit in the basically nineteenth-century academization of the their discipline”.²² She charges that history had no specific theory, “but a rather rigid methodology of source criticism” flourished “with an epistemology based along more or less

²¹ Judith Schuyf, “Hidden from History? Homosexuality and the Historical Sciences,” Lesbian and Gay Studies: An Introductory, Interdisciplinary Approach, ed. Theo Sandfort, Judith Schuyf, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Jeffrey Weeks (London: Sage Publications, 2000) 65.

²² Schuyf 63.

positivistic lines”.²³ This perspective overlooks the possible flaws in primary sources. These sources are socially constructed and are not natural or inherently “true.” If a bias, such as heterosexism, existed in the initial creation/ production of the primary document, then the interpretation may run the risk of reproducing heterosexual normative scholarship. It demands therefore a new way of reading.

Due to the concerns surrounding epistemology, language, and the quality of evidence, the present research falls outside the traditional parameters of history. By and large this is an experiment in Black cultural studies, I want to force a new way of “seeing” and new visibility through *quare* re-reading.

A New Reading

Male-male rape within the context of “new world” chattel slavery is rarely discussed at length. The thesis is primarily concerned with exploring those exploitative sexual relations; however, I acknowledge the possibilities of consensual same-sex sexual relationships that cross the color line. Performing a *quare* re-reading on narratives will help unveil the unmentionable elements, which are otherwise ignored. I am forced to draw upon a variety of resources and documents from throughout the African Diaspora. This is for two major reasons. First, the penetration of colonial and antebellum sexual norms creates a drought of primary resources. The mention of sexual violence and especially sodomy in most narratives is veiled. Second, the relative newness of this topic creates this need.

As a result, the thesis draws from two distinct, yet dialogical mediums for primary evidence—visual culture and slave narratives. The work attempts

²³ Schuyf 63.

to place these antebellum sources in conversation with a Black queer/quare re-reading. I insist on “re-reading” instead of “reading”, because these visual and written texts were not properly read the first time. Thus, a “re-reading” is required. It is at this point that this thesis seeks to make a critical intervention by exposing the sexual vulnerability of the Black male body and the Black individual and communal resistance against such transgressions. Each chapter will address a different aspect of the male-male rape of the enslaved, and build upon the previous chapter. There are four body chapters and a conclusion.

The first chapter, *Slave Societies in Flux* gives a brief socio-historical framework of slavery. It contextualizes race, class, and gender of the enslaved male as it relates to power and violence, particularly sexual violence. This chapter will address the “plantation” as a model for society, and acknowledge the importance of crop, region, colonial presence, era/period, urban v. rural, plantation size, enslaved population in determining power dynamics.

Scenes of Inspection opens by acknowledging the Brazilian and Jamaican record of male-male sexual violence, and then moves to the visual record of enslavement, inspection, and sale by way of Trans-Atlantic crossings. The chapter is concerned with the construction and distribution of the Black male body in late 18th and early 19th Century visual culture. The engraving, Marché d’esclaves by Laurent, and the paintings, The Slave Trade by François-Auguste Biard and Slave Market by an unknown American artist are studied with a quare approach. This chapter deconstructs the scene of inspection and the White male pornographic gaze to build upon the structural insights of the first chapter. It demonstrates how the threat of male-male sexual violence operates within the realm of the visual. Like the pervasiveness of the

inspection, the omnipotent threat of sexual violence is not only a Brazilian or Jamaican occurrence, rather, a Black Atlantic phenomenon.

Resistance is the central theme of the chapters three and four, *Re-reading Narratives*. The purpose of these chapters is to explore the relationship between male-male sexual violence and resistance in the United States. I employ Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Frederick Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and My Bondage and My Freedom in chapter three and four, respectively. Jacobs and the former enslaved male, Luke, make use of Black vernacular traditions to critique and resist U.S. legal discourse and its support of sexual assault. Meanwhile, the prospect of male-male rape forces Douglass to retreat into a masculine safe space, which nurtures a gender progressive resistance.

The thesis closes by contextualizing Black queer / quare re-reading as a scholarly endeavor within and natural to the Africana Studies project. The conclusion, *The Art of Reading* covers the overall theoretical implications and contributions of burgeoning Black que(e)rying of African American and American history, art, and literature. Lastly, considerations on the possible future directions of this research project are included.

Previous Readings

Same-sex sexual violence is an under researched topic, but within the last decade more scholars have emerged to shed light on this dimly lit history of slavery. Early on, I designated that slave narratives would become one type of primary documents for this research project. As a result, this shaped my search for secondary literature.

Charles I. Nero's "Toward a Black Gay Aesthetic: Signifying in Contemporary Black Gay Literature" contains one of the earliest critical

discussions of homosexuality and homoerotic desire during slavery. Nero attempts to trace a 'Black Gay Aesthetic' in the African American literary canon, and he includes the slave narrative as one of the first African American literary forms. The essay interrogates Esteban Montejo's The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave for evidence of same-sex consensual and exploitative relationships in New World slave societies. While the purpose of Nero's work is focused upon finding and valuing Black male-male intimate relationships, he does allude to the unavoidable exploitation of slavery in Montejo's narrative. He proposes the "need to uncover more and to reread diaries, letters, and narratives to gain a greater understanding of the sexuality of our forebears".²⁴ Nero suggests that even heterosexual sexual encounters were not written about in obvious or unveiled language, but scholars do not doubt its existence. Thus, he proposes a methodological tool of "rereading" to discover the inconsistencies.

The central work of Charles Clifton's "Rereading Voices from the Past: Images of Homo-Eroticism in the Slave Narrative" is to expose the "images of White/Black male sexual relations and abuses, as read in the slave narratives".²⁵ The most useful aspect of Clifton's work is his methodology. He offers a possible method toward examining the narratives of the former enslaved. Clifton proposes "(re)reading" as method. "By (re)reading passages from various slave narratives," argues Clifton, "I posit that the author/narrator's use of intimacy, positioning of the body, and use of

²⁴ Charles I Nero, "Toward a Black Gay Aesthetic: Signifying in Contemporary Black Gay Literature," Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men, ed. Essex Hemphill. (Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1991) 234.

²⁵ Charles Clifton, "Rereading Voices from the Past: Images of Homo-Eroticism in the Slave Narrative," The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities, ed. Delroy Constantine-Simms (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2000) 344.

language, can and should be read in some instances as a attempt to disguise same-sex sexual encounters occurring during captivity".²⁶ Clifton's proposition to (re)read is similar to the queer reading techniques discussed in Nero and Somerville's work. Like Nero, Clifton's methodology relies heavily upon the use of signifying in the African American literary tradition beginning in the slave narratives.

Slave narratives do not exist within a vacuum. Clifton suggests 19th Century morality as the context and romance writing are the models for authors of slave narratives.²⁷ However, Clifton does not acknowledge whether any African or Afro-Creole cultural traits provide a context. One is forced to extrapolate that Henry Louis Gates's conception of "signifyin(g)" is a possible element of African or Afro-Creole cultural influence on the production of the slave narrative.²⁸ The insights gained by intersecting literary theory and historiography are the strength of Clifton's work.

Although this essay is methodologically rich, there are some weaknesses. With his examples of Frederick Douglass, Clifton makes too many large leaps (of faith). It gets to the point that Clifton's theorizing leaves language so malleable that posing an argument becomes redundantly useless. Using the colonial and antebellum periods as backdrops to the larger project is an idea, which is passively mentioned, in the essay. Developing this idea could have salvaged this theoretical dilemma.

The over theorizing of language is also present in the arguments made by Robert Richmond Ellis in "Reading through the Veil of Juan Francisco

²⁶ Clifton 344.

²⁷ Clifton 342.

²⁸ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Manzano: From Homoerotic Violence to the Dream of a Homoracial Bond.” Through literary theory, Ellis also challenges the heteronormative framework used to evaluate narratives and construct historiographies. Regarding methodology, Ellis states, “I read through rather than over the gap and in so doing make visible the homoerotic violence at times operative in the master-slave relationship”.²⁹ Similar to Charles Clifton’s article, Ellis utilizes a close reading technique to reconstruct historiography.

The reader is challenged to acknowledge the awkward silences within the narrative of Manzano. Ellis refers to these silences as a veil, a gap. “This veil denotes a gap in the autobiographical narrative—an empty space that silences a truth but wherein the unspeakable truth of rape (in Manzano’s case, male-male rape) might at last be uttered”.³⁰ The gap in autobiographical narrative is attributed to trauma. Thus, Ellis hints at the possible effects of male/male rape on the victim.

Ellis expands the argument and makes an important point regarding evidence. He explains another possible reason, beyond homophobia that affects the historical record of male-male rape. He writes, “Male victims of slave rape left behind no biological record in the form of offspring, and, given the gender roles in their cultures, were even more constrained than female slaves from verbalizing the experience of sexual abuse”.³¹ To assume that it did not happen is not enough. Thus, the biological sex and the socially defined gender of the victim have very real effects on the historical record. However, Ellis never really lifts the “veil.” He states,

²⁹ Robert Richmond Ellis, “Reading Through the Veil of Juan Francisco Manzano: From Homoerotic Violence to the Dream of a Homoracial Bond,” *PMLA*, 113 (1998): 422.

³⁰ Ellis 422.

³¹ Ellis 422.

Manzano never explicitly articulates the rape of either men or women, yet there are two telling passages in the Autobiografia (one involving his mother and one involving him) where he begins to reveal a terrifying episode of torture and then draws a veil over the scene. This veil denotes a gap in the autobiographical narrative—an empty space that silences a truth but wherein the unspeakable truth of rape (in Manzano’s case, male-male rape) might at last be uttered.³²

It is not enough to recognize a gap in the narrative and conclude that it is rape. The entire text must be taken into consideration. While reading scholarship about male/male rape or more broadly male/male sexual violence against the enslaved, one may be left with the idea that resistance is not a factor. Fortunately, Ellis alludes to the possibilities of resistance. First, Manzano act of writing his narrative is resistant. Second, Manzano’s post-emancipation poetry has themes of resistance. Ellis argues that Manzano suggests that homoeroticism was simultaneously “an instrument of oppression” and contained the capacity to be “an expression of fraternal love and as a means of establishing a bond of racial reciprocity”.³³ Manzano creatively manipulates the very social interaction used to oppress him and hypothesizes its use as resistance. Overall, Ellis tosses around freely the term ‘homosexual’ in describing both people and behavior surrounding Manzano’s life, which is historically inappropriate. Clifton and Ellis represent dangerous rereading tactics, because their work does not take the entire narrative into consideration.

Maurice O. Wallace also chooses to interrogate the narrative of Frederick Douglass. It is a part of a larger work, Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men’s Literature and Culture, 1775-1995, which traces the formation and maintenance of Black

³² Ellis 422.

³³ Ellis 422-3.

masculinity since the American Revolutionary period. He extensively deconstructs the autobiographical narratives of Frederick Douglass, and reveals Douglass's "own sexual vulnerability" through the "recounting the 'most terrible spectacle' of his Aunt Hester's" violent abuse and violation.³⁴ Wallace alludes to Douglass's use of silences. "Sparing his readers any more of the unspeakable details of the event, Douglass eludes the self-implicating triangularity of the scene as voyeur, only to wind up caught by the logic of spectragraphia as the object of Anthony's sadistic desires in his own fearful imagination."³⁵ Wallace suggests that, while Anthony is punishing Hester, Douglass understands the White male preoccupation with all Black bodies, including the body of the young Douglass. Thus, Wallace uses his theorizing of objectification and the gaze and Douglass's "self-implicating" silence to reveal that Douglass perceived a sexual threat from the slaveholder.

Another source, which has been invaluable to thinking through this project, is James H. Sweet's Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770. Sweet's work proves that same-sex sexual violence against the enslaved is conceivable and not a mere abstraction. His project is a historiography of the world created by the Africans and Portuguese in the Americas. Sweet utilizes archival research as his primary method, and employs heavily the Portuguese Inquisition records from Brazil found at Torre do Tombo: National Archives Institute in Lisbon, Portugal.

³⁴ Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775-1995*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) 86.

³⁵ Wallace, Constructing the Black Masculine 87.

Sweet makes use of myriad sodomy cases brought against perpetrators (most often slaveholders or priests) and victims (most often enslaved) during Inquisition-era Brazil. For example, Sweet describes “perhaps the most violent sexual assaults of slaves”.³⁶

...in Pará in the late 1750s and early 1760s. Francisco Serrão de Castro, heir to a large sugar *engenho*, was denounced for sodomy and rape by no less than nineteen male slaves, all Africans. Among those who were assaulted were teenage boys and married men. As a result of these sexual attacks, a number of the victims suffered from “swelling and ...bleeding from their anuses.” Francisco Serrão de Castro apparently infected his slaves with a venereal disease that eventually took more than quarter of his victims to their graves.³⁷

These judicial records provide concrete evidence of male on male sexual violence against the enslaved. More moderate cases reveal the connection amongst race, power, and sexuality. The cases of João Carvalho de Barros display the relationship between coercion and male/male rape. Threat of death was a popular coercive method for Carvalho.

Some of these ‘relationships’ were consummated literally at the end of a whip or the barrel of a gun. ...Similarly, a Benguelan slave named Joseph claimed that he always resisted the acts of sodomy that were imposed on him by Carvalho. Carvalho responded by threatening, and at times, giving ‘rigorous punishments’ to his slave.”³⁸

At minimum, Carvalho threatened three other enslaved African males in similar ways.³⁹ Another case involved Manuel Álvares Cabral and up to six of his enslaved males on separate occasions. One of the testimonies of the enslaved follows:

³⁶ James H. Sweet, Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 74.

³⁷ Sweet 74.

³⁸ Sweet 73.

³⁹ Sweet 73.

a Mina slave named Luís da Costa, confessed that one day while he and his master were out in the woods, his master forced him to submit to anal sex. Cabral threatened to shoot his slave if he did not comply. Luís unwillingly surrendered to his master on this one occasion, but claimed that it never happened again because he fought against his master's continued advances.⁴⁰

The preceding case does not only show the existence of male/male rape against enslaved by enslaver; it gives an example of the enslaved resisting this type of sexual violence. Resistance is a major theme within the Africana experience in the New World, and it is often met with sex-as-tool coercion. "In large sugar-producing areas where slaves often outnumbered whites, the sexual subordination of male slaves was not an unimportant instrument in maintaining social control. Only with some level of submission on the part of the male slave population could white patriarchal order be ensured".⁴¹ Sweet recommends that male/male rape is a reaction to the ongoing everyday resistance executed by the enslaved population. In some cases, the enslaved had an understanding of the intended goal of male/male rape, and was able to resist against perceived emasculation.

Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman's essay, "'The Strangest Freaks of Despotism': Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives" is the latest work to address male on male sexual violence and slavery. It utilizes narratives of enslaved people to draw connections between "institutionalization of sexual violence and racial subordination in slavery and modern theories of sexual difference".⁴² The purpose of her work is to reveal how "the enslavement of Black people, their legal definition as three-fifths

⁴⁰ Sweet 74.

⁴¹ Sweet 74.

⁴² Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, "'The Strangest Freaks of Despotism': Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives," *African American Review*, 40.2 (Summer 2006) 223.

human, and the social, economic, and legislative practices of slavery helped to institute not only whiteness but the very notions of the person, the citizen, the normal, and the heterosexual as well".⁴³ Abdur-Rahman contends that the racialization and othering that begins during slavery forms the foundation for the later othering of the homosexual. While I to use similar texts, I believe Abdur-Rahman's stated goal influences her reading of the narratives.

Describing the rape of Aunt Hester in Douglass, she writes,

His rolling up his sleeves demonstrates the need for some disrobing to perform his violent act as well as the brutal force he exerted while engaged in it the cowskin serves as a phallic replacement, and Aunt Hester's bleeding and shrieking evidence the terrible loss of both sexual purity and her sexual choice in the matter.⁴⁴

Unlike Sweet's work on Brazil, Abdur-Rahman powerful re-reading fails to utilize resistance as a unit of analysis within the U.S. context.

Nell Irvin Painter adds to the discourse centered on same-sex sexual violence of enslaved peoples. Painter investigates this phenomenon as it appears in Sojourner Truth's narrative. Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol is unique as compared to the other works reviewed, since Truth is a woman and her offender is a woman. Painter writes,

Here we lack details, for Truth had two motives for keeping secrets by the time she told her story. Having come through a libel trial in the mid-1830s, she was concerned about her credibility. She also feared that because what had happened to her was "so unaccountable, so unreasonable, and what is usually called so unnatural," readers who were "uninitiated would not believe her."⁴⁵

⁴³ Abdur-Rahman 224.

⁴⁴ Abdur-Rahman 224.

⁴⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996) 16.

Unfortunately, this is simple speculation. Then, Painter adds to her argument and reveals her archival findings.

Besides, she added, her assailant had died, and she did not want to distress the innocent who were still living. When Truth dictated her story to her amanuensis Olive Gilbert in the late 1840s, Sally Dumont had been dead for three years, but John Dumont was still alive and in touch with Truth.⁴⁶

There are minor flaws within the text. Painter makes statements, which devalue the experiences of the enslaved. "Isabella's⁴⁷ life in the workforce began in earnest at the Neelys', where she was the only slave and did household labor under execrable conditions."⁴⁸ Statements like the previous sentence, blurs the line between the enslaved population of a slave society and the "workforce" of a free market economy. However, this slippage does not devalue its contributions to discourses of same-sex sex exploitation.

The commonality of these previously highlighted studies is the near non-existent role that resistance plays in the authors' interpretations. Resistance is continually a major theme in the African American experience. A second trend is the popular use of Jacob and Douglass's narratives. While I do agree with the findings, I feel that putting these texts in conversation with more explicit evidence, such as the Brazilian findings, would enrich the re-readings.

⁴⁶ Painter 16.

⁴⁷ Isabella is Sojourner Truth's birth name.

⁴⁸ Painter 13-4.

Chapter 1

Slave Societies in Flux: Stratification, Power and Sexualized Violence

It's bad to belong to folks dat own you soul an' body...

-Delia Garlic⁴⁹

All human relationships are structured and defined by the relative power of the interacting persons.

-Orlando Patterson⁵⁰

What is Slavery?

Slave societies are constructed spaces. These spaces are products of highly prescribed social interaction. Rigid labor relations become a way of maintaining order and containing the enslaved. Masters, overseers, drivers, and in some cases religious leaders, all wield control over the enslaved, the enslaved body, and the enslaved labor. In this chapter, I argue that while “New World” chattel slavery is an economic institution, it is also a social institution organized around and through power and violence. In addition, the violence witnessed in slave societies, particularly sexualized violence, serves as visceral reenactments of the initial moment of enslavement.

Many definitions are propelled into the academy with the intent to fully capture the true nature of slavery. M. G. Smith’s description in “Slavery and Emancipation in Two Societies” is a great starting point for this study.

The concept of slavery covers a considerable variety of social phenomena, but it is generally thought of as the practice of bringing strangers into a society for use in economic production

⁴⁹ Delia Garlic, Interviewed Montgomery, Ala., n.d., *American Slave*, ser. 1, vol. 6 (Ala.) 129-32.

⁵⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982) 1.

and legally defining them in terms of the category of property. The complete subordination of the slave to the will of the master is regarded as a main defining feature of the institution.⁵¹

Smith's article is largely considered a study in economic history, as are most mid-20th century studies of American chattel slavery. Smith's definition, while concise, reflects his overwhelmingly economic perspective. Slavery attempted to dehumanize the captured Africans, but this type of historical writing runs the risk of dehumanizing the memory of slavery. There is a concern for studying the "complete subordination" in only as much as it relates to "economic production."

Slavery is not only a means of economic production, but it is also a system of perpetual exchange and socialization. As a social institution, slavery changes over time and evolves. It is not monolithic and is different from region to region and crop to crop. In sum, slavery is temporally and spatially diverse. As Orlando Patterson suggests, slavery is "a complex interactional process." "Even at this most elementary level of personal relations it should be clear that we are dealing not with a static [commercial] entity but with a complex interactional process, one laden with tension and contradiction".⁵² Slavery is an economic institution of coercion and its major purpose is the extraction of maximum labor from captured persons. More important, slavery is a social institution; it is dynamic, it changes, and it is a process. It is a constant site of socialization, attempted socialization, and exchange. The structure of this dynamic social institution is as complex as the institution itself.

⁵¹ M. G. Smith, "Slavery and Emancipation in Two Societies," Social and Economic Studies, 111.3-4 (1954): 245-46.

⁵² Patterson 13.

Similar to complex formation of the lattice-like scars on Gordon's back, the infrastructure of United States chattel slavery is a complex web of intersecting oppressions. It is arranged according to race, class, gender, and influences the perception of property, personhood, and power. It is a part of what Vincent Bakpetu Thompson calls the "strategy". In order to better understand the function of male on male sexual violence in a slave society, one must understand the structure and its dependency on violence.

Social Stratification in Slave Societies

Africans did not enter a fully blossomed society with a static organization, rigid institutions, and a well-defined legal system. In the case of what is to become the United States, the first permanent settlement is established in 1607. The first people of African descent arrive only 12 years later in 1619. The brief period between the establishment of the Jamestown colony and the arrival of Black people was not a significant amount of time for a completely established society to flourish. The very presence of subjugated African labor influences the social development of this New World society.

The slaveholding plantations and farms became a model for the structure of the greater society. As Thompson suggests, "the plantation system settled the entire fabric of society".⁵³ The plantations were oppressive and exploitative micro-societies, which are the individual threads that compose this "entire fabric". The plantations and farms are in constant conversation with society. The White slaveholders who own and operate the plantation system have major stakes in the governance of the colonies and later states. This ruling class organizes their respective societies in order to maximize their

⁵³ Vincent Bakpetu Thompson, The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas 1441-1900, (New York: Longman Inc., 1987) 137.

overall profit, specifically the production on their micro-societies, or plantations. The plantation system altered the political, social, and physical landscape. This becomes particularly true with the widespread expansion of the plantation system due to the introduction of Eli Whitney's cotton gin and the resulting evolution in cotton cultivation.

All Whites are not owners of land, owners of enslaved people, or even considered a part of the ruling elite. For instance, most White women and many poor Whites, in general, did not enjoy the same influence and affluence as their ruling class White male counterparts. On the contrary, White privilege operated in very special ways to etch out a space for the otherwise marginalized Whites to become contributors to slavery. Taken together all Whites formed a "slavocracy."

The term 'slavocracy' corresponds to the slave-owning as well as cultivating aristocracy referred to as 'planters', or 'plantocracy', a term which broadened in time to include others such as merchant, brokers and other speculators in slave disposal, who acquired ownership of slaves and plantations by fair or foul means. But the term here is also used more expansively to include the subordinates who assisted in the development and maintenance of the slave system.⁵⁴

Thus, Whites grouped together along a color line, in order to maintain the system of oppression. Although all Whites do not occupy the same economic status, racialization benefits all persons of European descent involved and those not directly involved.

The existence of this racially defined class speaks to the racialized social hierarchy of slave societies. It is not enough to say that there are masters and slaves. This dichotomy does not speak to the complexity of spaces within

⁵⁴ Thompson 131.

slavery. The plantation is a location “where the paramountcy of economic gain ruled the hearts and heads of men, nothing else mattered and the end justified the means”.⁵⁵ The centrality of material prosperity influences the fault lines of class groupings. Although the class groupings fluctuates over time and region, there are generally five major economic categories. The social divisions are as follows: “first, the ruling whites; second, the subordinate whites; third, the white bondservants; fourth, the coloured people and free blacks, and finally, the slaves”.⁵⁶

The ruling Whites include the planters, merchants, and “men of the professions”.⁵⁷ The “subordinate whites” follow the ruling Whites. Members of this lesser group are either waged laborers to the ruling class or own and operate smaller farms.⁵⁸ This upper echelon along with White servants form the aforementioned slavocracy. White bondservants, which include bonded labor and indentured servants, and free people of color make up two smaller groupings respectively. Larger than the previous two but lowest on the economic ladder are the enslaved population, which is the final classification.⁵⁹ The enslaved Africans were further subdivided according to skilled and unskilled labor and location of work. These subdivisions included, but are not limited to mechanics, domestic servants, headmen, and field and boiling hands.

In popular knowledge there is an assumption of class dichotomy between enslaved domestic servants and field hands. It has been proposed that these domestic servants “were among the privileged in the social

⁵⁵ Thompson 137.

⁵⁶ Thompson 137.

⁵⁷ Thompson 138-153.

⁵⁸ Thompson 138-153.

⁵⁹ Thompson 138-153.

setting”.⁶⁰ Furthermore, this segment of the enslaved population “formed the ranks which divulged any attempts at escape or insurrection by slaves” because “they sought to ingratiate themselves with the master”.⁶¹ While these claims are partly true, they do not get at the more complicated consequences of location and space. On one hand, the “house slave” is relatively more accessible to personal violations, due to their more intimate positioning to the master. On the other hand, the distance of the slave quarters from the “big house” allows for the field hands to express a comparative amount of autonomy.

While some historians have used “caste” and “race” interchangeably, caste and race are two distinct, yet interrelated ideas and realities within this study. According to Thompson, *caste* is determined by “shade gradations” or “the colour of the skin”.⁶² However, caste is the intersection of economic positioning and racialization. Within the New World context, enslaved laborer is the economic class occupied by Africans. The racialization of Africans codified their subjugated place by equalizing blackness with enslavement. In addition to race and class, plantation size, population, crop, colonial presence, the amount of urban, all influenced the stratification of the members of slave societies.

The social stratification of the American colonial and antebellum slave society is hierarchal and complex. It does not simply break down according to Black and White. In addition, when it comes to sexual violation, violator and “victim” do not neatly fit into the five prong economic model. Non-slaveholding ruling class Whites and subordinate Whites are still able to

⁶⁰ Thompson 151.

⁶¹ Thompson 151.

⁶² Thompson 137.

commit violence against enslaved people. Thus, race, economic status and labor skills taken separately are only a portion of the full story.

Between the whites and Negroes there was truly a great gulf fixed. That gulf consisted of the "caste line." The dominance of the whites did not rest solely on their legal ownership of slaves, for not all whites, or even a majority, were slaveholders. Likewise, the subservience of the Negro was not exclusively and immediately due to the slavery relationship for although a majority of Negroes were slaves many were freemen. Negroes were not only subject to slave law but also to 'caste law,' that is, to special disabilities attaching to them as Negroes, regardless of their legal status as slaves or freemen. The caste relationship then was wider than the slavery relationship and the features of the former were not exclusively dependent upon the latter. As indicated by Warner not only does a caste arrangement involve unequal division of privileges, duties, obligations, and opportunities among the various social strata but also prohibits marriage between members of distinct strata and allows no opportunity for rising or falling across the caste boundaries.⁶³

The social stratification of the U.S. slave society was arranged hierarchically. Borrowing from DuBois, I propose that the color line is not unique to the 20th century and it is the "great gulf" of early American society. In this case, race and class intersect in a powerful way to create a caste divide. Caste is significant because one cannot transcend their "caste boundaries." Owning property or being property alone did not create divisions. Thus, a subordinate White can harm an enslaved Black and not face any consequences or at most different consequences than what would be sentenced against a Black person, even a free Black, who harmed a White citizen. As long as the injury or offense does not prohibit the economic profit of the ruling class, it is excusable.

Accordingly, certain white slave abusers were required to pay fines, or to directly reimburse an abused slave's master for

⁶³ Wilbert E. Moore and Robin M. Williams, "Stratification in the Ante-Bellum South," *American Sociological Review* 7.3 (June 1942): 346.

damages the owner may have suffered as a result of the slave mistreatment, and the courts were opened to slave owners who sued whites whose brutality caused a slave to die, reduced the slave's property value, or occasioned the master to lose free labor.⁶⁴

While it appears that the transgression against the enslaved is redressed, it functions only in terms of the slaveholder's prosperity. The enslaved body and labor does not belong to the Black person. It has a monetary value that can be replaced and negotiated when the slaveholder experiences a monetary loss.

Wilbert E. Moore and Robin M. Williams composed a schematic depiction of class, legal, and caste lines of the antebellum slave society, which is pertinent to understanding caste. It illustrates how "caste divisions may thus cut across differential valuations" or class distinctions.⁶⁵ The diagram (fig. 2) is triangular, and there are three class lines, one legal line, and one

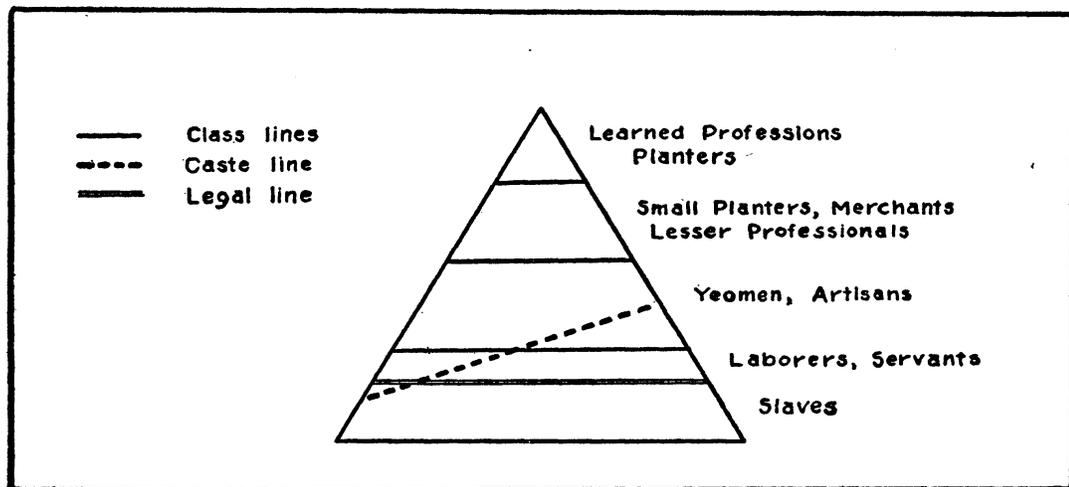


Figure 2. Moore and William's Social Stratification of U.S. Slave Societies

⁶⁴ Andrew Fede, "Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States," *The American Journal of Legal History* 29.2 (April 1985): 96.

⁶⁵ Moore 347.

caste line dividing the entire sketch.⁶⁶ There are parallel groups stacked upon the other, with ruling class Whites at the very top and enslaved Blacks at the very bottom. The three class lines and one legal line are the divisions of labor. There is a class line between the first group of “learned professions” and “planters” and the second group of “small planters”, “merchants”, “lesser professionals”. There is a class line between the second group of “small planters”, “merchants”, and “lesser professionals” and the third group of “yeomen” and “artisans”. Finally, there is a class line between the third group of “yeoman” and “artisans” and the fourth group of “laborers” and “servants”. The legal line exists between the top four groups and the last group of “slaves”. Then to be a “slave” or to be free is a legal status. The caste line straddles across the bottom three groupings, disproportionately leaving most of the fourth and the fifth group on the bottom side. The caption of the original diagrams reveals “the caste line cuts across *both* the legal line and the class lines”.⁶⁷ This means that a Black person can be free, but the black hue of their skin relegates them to a lower subdivision within society. Theoretically, White is always above Black in the slave society and this caste identity can never be transcended.

However, on each side of the caste line, there are constructed differences with very real consequences. Race and class intersect to create the caste-like hierarchal arrangement, which allows land-owning gentry to poor Whites the ability to wield a near limitless violent power over the enslaved African population in the United States. Consequently, this research is concerned with same sex sexual violence that transgresses the “caste line.”

⁶⁶ Figure 2 is a reproduction of Moore and Williams’s original diagram, see Moore 349.

⁶⁷ Moore 349.

In order to sustain the security of the caste line, the non-slaveholding White population must endorse the pro-slavery social contract, the racial contract. Except for slave traders, this particular segment of the population does not have the same type of economic investment in slavery as the ruling class. Racial prejudice must exist for the reciprocal and uneven benefit of the ruling class and subordinate Whites. "Slavery was interpreted by the non-slaveholding whites as essential for maintaining their superiority over the Negro both in the occupational world and in the broader scheme of stratification".⁶⁸ Thus, the non-slaveholding White males and females enter into the racial contract.

The contracting members of society in the colonial and antebellum United States were White men. African and African descendent people occupy (an)other non-contracting position in this White-dominated society. The architects of America's social contract had no intention to grant, preserve, or respect the rights of Africans, or non-contracting persons. By barring Africans and creating caste division, the drawers of the contract create the racial contract. The contracting members also include northern White men and to a lesser degree White women. Non-European people's relationship to the racial contract is characterized by their position as objects or property. These non-Europeans are black and are characterized as "slave." Charles W. Mills writes that,

The Racial Contract is that set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements between the members of one subset of humans, henceforth designated by "racial" (phenotypical / genealogical / cultural) criteria $C_1, C_2, C_3 \dots$ as "white," and coextensive with the class of full persons, to

⁶⁸ Moore 351.

categorize the remaining subset of humans as “nonwhite” and of a different and inferior moral status, subperson.⁶⁹

The social contract takes the form of the racial contract. Basically, White males agree to “make” or categorize Blacks as non-persons. Blacks existed outside the protection of the law, but Blacks were considered property by the law. This is how the dialectical relationship between “land of the free” and slaveholding society is resolved, which is a fundamental contradiction of American history.

During U. S. chattel slavery, the racial contract created European American subjectivity at the expense of the exploitable other. This sense of self, particularly in relation to the subjugated other, benefits even non-slaveholding Whites. Mills continues,

the general purpose of the [Racial] Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them.⁷⁰

The Racial Contract forms the foundation for chattel slavery throughout the United States and dissolves any opportunity for justice. Chief Justice Roger Taney in his majority opinion to the Dred Scott v. Sanford trial evokes the racial contract. Taney suggests that the question, which this case raises, is whether Blacks have citizenship “and are constituent members of this sovereignty?”⁷¹ He proposes:

In the opinion of the court, the legislation and histories of the times, and the language used in the Declaration of Independence, show, that neither the class of person who had been imported as slaves, nor their descendants, whether they

⁶⁹ Charles W. Mills, The Racial Contract (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) 11.

⁷⁰ Mills 11.

⁷¹ qtd in. Kai Wright, ed., The African-American Archive: The History of the Black Experience in Documents (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2001) 280-1.

had become free or not, were then acknowledged as a part of the people, nor intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instrument.⁷²

The formation of the (re)public is a mutual agreement amongst the constituting members, which are inherently a part of the slavocracy. Taney reveals that these contracting members, the “sovereign people,” purposefully did not include Blacks within the body politic. African descendent people “had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the White man was bound to respect,” Taney maintains.⁷³ The constructed otherness of the enslaved African guarantees a position outside of the protection of the law. The racial contract underpins the merciless violation of the Black body. On one hand, this structure does not neatly translate into what is perceived and believed by the African. On the other hand, this caste structure results in a painful material reality, such as flogging, the separation of families, or malnutrition.

While the White ruling class assumed a perspective of total control, a life of absolute oppression was not the only reality of the enslaved. The enslaved Africans lived dual realities. One imposed, and the other self-determined. There was a life that existed outside, yet inside the plantation, where white was on the margins. George P. Rawick alludes to this with the title of his first volume of collected slave narratives, “From Sundown to Sunup”.⁷⁴ The labor of the enslaved population was extracted from sunup to

⁷² qtd. in Wright 281.

⁷³ qtd. in Wright 281.

⁷⁴ George P. Rawick, The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, 19 vols., (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972, Vol. 1).

sundown, but the time between sundown and sunup belonged to the oppressed.

Within the slave society, the plantation “big house” house and slave quarters represent separate metaphorical, when not real, spaces. These spaces are not mutually exclusive and do not exist in a vacuum, and both, Blacks and Whites, experience “transculturation.”⁷⁵ Even though cultural exchange occurs, these spaces nurture different subjectivities. In his groundbreaking work, The Slave Community, John Blassingame attempts to recreate a historical account of slave society through the eyes and voices of the enslaved Africans. The spatial layout of the plantation often resulted in a dichotomous social arrangement. Blassingame expounds on this dual organization and its affect on the socialization of the enslaved. He notes, “The quarters was the slave’s primary environment which gave him his ethical rules and fostered cooperation, mutual assistance, and black solidarity.”⁷⁶ The “secondary environment” was work areas (fields, workshops, big house, etc.), “which most often brought the slave in contact with whites”.⁷⁷ The first environment represented a space where Blacks acted with agency. They spent a large amount of time and energy toward establishing social institutions to address the needs of the community. Thus, “antebellum black slaves created several unique cultural forms which lightened their burden of oppression, promoted group solidarity, provided ways for verbalizing aggression, sustaining hope, building self-esteem, and often represented areas of life largely free from the

⁷⁵ I evoke the anthropological theory of Fernando Ortiz. Transculturation differs from acculturation in that it goes beyond explaining cultural change in binary power relations. It acknowledges that each contact group influences the other, while simultaneously creating something new.

⁷⁶ John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 105.

⁷⁷ Blassingame 105.

control of whites".⁷⁸ Consequently, the "slave community" and its cultural accoutrement, such as signifiyn', testifyn' and witnessin', were an alternative psychological and social refuge.

Within this parallel culture, which was not a subculture, group unity and language develops. As observed by Blassingame, this space "promoted group solidarity, provided ways for verbalizing aggression",⁷⁹ and is an incubator for a counter contract, resistance. This counter contract may be characterized as an anti-racist, yet intra-racial contract. The contract like a counter narrative challenges the grand narrative that the enslaved Africans are happy, content, illiterate, but not dissident or courageous. The oppression, which the ruling caste imposed, did not always yield the intended effect. For example, a harsh overseer may not yield more work, but encourage mysteriously burned crops, broken tools, or sick workers.

The slave community is the site of healing and bandaging after physical and emotional subjugation, and because of its counter effects, it is a site of resistance. This was the space created by the enslaved Africans. They are not simply field slaves or house servants in this space. In the "slave community," there existed mothers and fathers, not slave breeders, not pickaninnies but children. There were certain roles to be fulfilled, such as elder, griot, and healer. As Melville J. Herskovits proved, Africans brought to the "New World" were not blank slates simply to be written upon. Cultural memory filtered the slave experience and influenced the formation of cultural institutions and community among the enslaved.

⁷⁸ Blassingame 105.

⁷⁹ Blassingame 105.

The Master-Slave Dialectic, Power and The Threat of Totality

There is no simple way to explain the violence of the plantation, so a turn toward “power” as a focus of analysis will elucidate this phenomenon. Like the entire stratification of the social structure, plantation power relations are partly real and partly imagined. However, this section will center on real consequences of the uneven power relations. The top-down structure of the social order informs the arrangement of power relations. This highly constructed organization is a part of the greater strategy of the slavocracy. By “strategy”, Thompson suggests that calculated “methods, measures and techniques” are “employed by slave holders and their supporters to sustain the slave system”.⁸⁰ Other than economic gain, the greatest benefit to the slavocracy is social control.

Power, or the ability to control the behavior of the Black population, was the central concern of the slavocracy. Robert Olwell in Masters, Slaves, & Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790 argues that slavery was predicated upon a “culture of power”. He explains, “Taken together, the sites and languages within which domination was exercised and resistance expressed represent what might be termed the “culture of power”.⁸¹ The “sites” are the hull of the slave ship, the auction block, and the field, while “languages” are everything from racial epithets to slave law. In combination, these manifest a “culture of power”. It is at the sites and in the language where oppression is expressed and resistance by the enslaved against oppression is found. Hence, the power relationships of the plantation hierarchy are best described as dialectical confrontations.

⁸⁰ Thompson 131.

⁸¹ Robert Olwell, Masters, Slaves, & Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) 7.

The juridical culture of colonial and antebellum U.S. substantiated the uneven power relations. Both, the judicial and legislative systems, were highly determined by the slavocracy, since most slaveholders held influential political appointments. Thus, the legal system that arose was organized around certain caste concerns. In “Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States”, Andrew Fede outlines the concerns as follows:

- (1) The need to foster slave control, obedience, and submissiveness;
- (2) The individual slave owner's economic investment in her slaves;
- (3) The slave master class interest in perpetuating the plantation economy and preserving slave property values;
- (4) The slave master class need to control overseers and slave hirers, while preserving these individuals' right to discipline slaves;
- and (5) The master class need to control poor white violence and slave abuse, while co-opting poor whites into becoming supporters of the slave economy.⁸²

Slave law functioned to give control over the enslaved, preserve individual and group economic interests, and codify intra-racial class distinctions amongst Whites within the White caste structure.

The obsession with controlling Africans and maintaining them within a caste system was revealed in Louisiana’s Civil Code of 1825. The first line of Article 35 is “A slave is one who is in the power of a master to whom he belongs.” It continues, “The master may sell him, dispose of his person, his industry, and his labor: he can do nothing, possess nothing, nor acquire anything but what must belong to the master.”⁸³ Article 35 of the Civil Code very early establishes the “slave” as the property of the “master”. The Black man or woman’s inability to possess anything, particular his or her body and work further codifies the master-slave power relationship.

⁸² Fede 97.

⁸³ Article 35, Civil Code of the State of Louisiana (1825).

An ideological contradiction between enslaved as property versus enslaved as person ensued. Was an enslaved African property or person? One would do injustice to the study of slavery, if one did not acknowledge that slavery is partly an economic institution. However, the oppressor's obsession with enslaved obedience speaks to a status beyond chattel. The enslaved body was given an economic value and was "valued as property largely because of their masters' ability to extract their labor as subject persons".⁸⁴ If Africans were merely chattel, like cows and horses, there would be no need to criminalize certain behaviors, such as "miscegenation" or assembling. Furthermore, there would not be a need for unequal punishments according to race, such as striking a White person. While stripping away African's legal personality, the laws inherently acknowledge the African's ability to act against the interests of the slaveholders. This idea of non-personhood is a legal construction. It is not intrinsically real and enslaved Blacks nevertheless saw themselves as whole people. The enslaved occupied a contested and contestable position.

Under the legalized asymmetrical power configuration, the slave society becomes a sort of total institution, an imprisonment for the African. Samuel E. Wallace proposes that "concentration camps, slavery, prisons, mental hospitals, army barracks and convents are prime candidates for the label" of total institution.⁸⁵ Slavery is a distinctive type of power relationship, in which total domination is imperative. "Slavery is one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination," boarding on "total power" reserved for the ruling caste, and a state of "total powerlessness" reserved for the enslaved

⁸⁴ Olwell 188.

⁸⁵ Samuel E. Wallace, "Introduction: On the Totality of Institutions," Total Institutions (Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1971) 2.

caste.⁸⁶ The instant that a social institution “begins to exercise total control over its population” it is expressing the major attribute of total institutions.⁸⁷ Undoubtedly, the plantation employs total control over the entire population, including subordinate Whites. Using Erving Goffman’s work on mental institutions in Asylums, Wallace outlines key properties of total institutions. Wallace writes,

Communication between insider and outsider is rigidly controlled or prohibited altogether; those inside the institution are frequently referred to as inmates—subjects whose every movement is controlled by the institution’s staff; an entirely separate social world comes into existence within the institution, which defines the inmate’s social status, his relationship to all others, his very identity as a person.”⁸⁸

The characteristics of total institutions are ahistorical and obviously speak to the arrangement of modern day correctional facilities and mental institutions. With tweaking, these traits of total institutions can be used to discuss the distribution of power on the plantation and other institutions of the slave society. Firstly, the effort to restrict communication grows into an attempt to limit contact between the enslaved and free Black populations or more importantly the idea of freedom. The enslaved populations are the insiders and the free Blacks are the outsiders. This is reflected in the slavocracy’s fears of a large free Black demographic. This is also reflected in the slavocracy’s anxiety of enslaved people’s literacy. The objective is to prevent the enslaved from sensing freedom.

Secondly, the subjects of contemporary total institutions are renamed “inmates”. Similarly, Africans who were Igbo, Ashanti, or Akan people were

⁸⁶ Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982) 1.

⁸⁷ Wallace, “Introduction” 1.

⁸⁸ Wallace, “Introduction” 1-2.

re-labeled with a the blanket term, “slaves.” The renaming is imbued with meaning and conflates the condition with the identity of the subject. Finally, slavery as an institution scripts a social status for the enslaved, but as previously discussed, a distinctive world develops parallel to the “dominate” social world. In this separate world, the enslaved Africans redefine their social status, relationships, and identity, usually through building fictive kinships. Once again, this is the “slave community”, and it is a significant site of resistance. The very presence of the “slave community” challenges and threatens the totality of the plantation, the slave society, and slavery. The existence of the slave community does not completely rid, but diminishes the capacity of the ruling caste to shape the lives of the enslaved. The slavocracy constantly worked toward totality, but total institutions only exist in theory and power, violence and resistance operate in a delicate cycle.

In order to maintain the integrity of this almost total institution, the monitors of the institution (in this case, the slavocracy) must implement their power through violence. “Once the absolute corruption of absolute power has come to dominate an institution,” admits Wallace, “even the most benign establishments brutalize everyone in their midst”.⁸⁹ Additionally, “the most salient distinction between the master-slave relationship and other human interactions was the unlimited violence and oppression that the slave master could legitimately inflict upon his bondsman”.⁹⁰ The interdependence of power and violence is complex. Like the legally sanctioned power relationship, violence is a means by which to maintain slavery. Furthermore, power and violence are reciprocal, because the power relations authorize the

⁸⁹ Wallace, “Introduction” 3.

⁹⁰ Fede 94.

use of violence, but violence reifies the master-slave power relation and the caste stratification. The words of Thomas Ruffin, a North Carolina judge embodies the slave society's dependency upon violence.

Such services can only be expected from one who has no will of his own; who surrenders his will in implicit obedience in the consequence only of uncontrolled authority over the body. There is nothing else which can operate to produce the effect. The power of the master must be absolute, to render the submission of the slave perfect.⁹¹

Ruffin as an agent of the legal structure sanctioned absolute power and absolute violence in the effort to produce docile laboring bodies. Thereby, the entire caste order is a breeding ground for unbridled violence against the enslaved.

Sexualized Violence and Re-Making the "Slave"

Acts of brutality were the physical manifestations of power on the plantation. These manifestations can be organized according to three characteristics. The first characteristic is coercive, and it is by and large an individualistic property. The abusive interaction occurs between slaveholder, overseer, or driver and the enslaved person; and the purpose of the abuse is to extract labor, respect, or fear. The next feature of violence is a symbolic quality in which the display of violence is paramount. Olwell contends that dominant groups "rulers have understood that their dominion rests on more than force alone" and "employed public spectacles and cultural metaphors to disguise, symbolize, and enact their rule".⁹² When physical brutality becomes a public spectacle, it is fixed to the memory of the body politic. It informs the customs and conventions of the community. In this sense, violence is one

⁹¹ John S. Bassett, Slavery in the State of North Carolina (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1899) 23-4.

⁹² Olwell 7.

method of the greater socialization process, which occurs in slave societies. Lastly, the coercive property and symbolic property intersect to form the third quality. This property, through a figurative reenactment of the initial loss of freedom, attempts to (re)establish the inequality of the master-slave power relationship. In short, the purpose of violence within the slave society is to serve as a coercive force, a cultural referent, and a reinstatement of the “slave” identity.

The story of the enslaved man, George, illuminates how corporeal violence attempts to reenact enslavement. George was a preacher and spiritual leader in the slave community. His owner forbade him from preaching to the other enslaved people and threatened to give him 500 lashes. Like many enslaved peoples, George used his agency to resist, and continued preaching against his owner’s wishes. His master found out and George escaped out of fear of punishment.⁹³ Using the threat of violence a member of the ruling caste attempted to negotiate his role as superior, and establish the place of the African within the social order.

Unfortunately, George’s story does not end with his escape. It is only the beginning of a more brutal dialogue with the power of the slaveholder. Moses Roper a fellow enslaved person and witness to this “conversation”, reports

He was then pursued by Mr. G., who endeavoured to knock him down with the butt end of the piece, unsuccessfully. George wrenched the rifle out of his hands, and struck his pursuer with it. By this time several persons were collected, George was secured, and put into Greenville jail. The facts having transpired, through the newspapers, his master came to

⁹³ Moses Roper, Letter to Thomas Price, 27 June 1836 Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies ed. John W. Blassingame (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) 24-5.

Greenville to claim him as his property, but consented, upon being required to do so, to receive 550 dollars as his value, with which he returned home. Shortly after this, George was burnt alive within one mile of the court-house at Greenville, in the presence of an immense assemblage of slaves, which had been gathered together to witness the horrid spectacle from a district of twenty miles in extent.⁹⁴

Roper offers three valuable insights. First, we see George confront a group of White men, probably patrollers. George strikes his pursuer and temporarily transcends his socially constructed role as passive, chattel property. He steps out of his racially and economically informed caste. By preaching, escaping, and striking back, George resists. Second, the contradiction between slave-as-person versus slave-as-property debate is exhibited. While George is held criminally responsible for his behavior, his owner is compensated for the assumed economic loss. Third, the heinous and very public execution reveals the social function of George's torture. His death is just as much about restoring the social order at large as it is about forcing George back into the master-slave hierarchy. As Michel Foucault explains, the public execution "is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular".⁹⁵ Essentially, George is transformed from man to chattel property to ritual item.

The objective of violence is to deconstruct the enslaved and remake them, as the "master" would want them. Africans were expected not only to do the work but function to the advantage of the 'master.' The slaveholders strived to produce "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies".⁹⁶ They attempted to fashion laboring bodies, bodies with the sole purpose to produce without objection. Therefore, George's owner hoped that the threat of

⁹⁴ Roper 25.

⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) 48.

⁹⁶ Foucault 138.

physical violence in the form of “500 lashes” would prevent political forces or resistance. The Fanonian conception of colonial violence deepens the understanding of the significance of violence to the pro-slavery project. Fanon informs that “the violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world” is the same violence “which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference.”⁹⁷ Using the brutal spectacle, the members of the slavocracy work to restore the sovereign power over the enslaved population. Through the attempted ‘destruction’ of African customs and cultural referents, violence contributes to the manufacturing of objects instead of people.

In addition, being forced into the voyeur-like participation of George’s torture also victimizes the enslaved witnesses. The forced spectatorial involvement is crucial to the ruling caste, since the enslaved “must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it”.⁹⁸ Foucault describes the witnessing as a “right” but in the case of slavery “witnesses” are forced to watch. Regardless, when successful, the witnesses are instilled with a fear of disobeying Whites, or at least a fear of the whip.

In order to prevent resistance and reify the social order of the plantation and slave society at large, violence became an invaluable resource to Whites. Whipping, branding, and maiming, all became methods “to repeat the original, violent act of transforming free man into slave”.⁹⁹ Vinnie Busby, a former enslaved person recounts the brutality he witnessed on a Mississippi Plantation. Busby discloses,

⁹⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 40.

⁹⁸ Foucault 58.

⁹⁹ Patterson 3.

One ob de cruelest things I ever seen done to a slave wuz done by my Master. He wanted to punish on ob de slaves what had done some 'em dat he didn't lak, a kinda stubborn one. He took dat darkie an' hitched him to a plow an' plowed him jes' lak a hors. He beat him an' jerked him 'bout 'till he got all bloody an' sore, but ole Marse he kept right on day after day.¹⁰⁰

Busby's master continued this torture until the sufferer died. The slaveholder used whipping to purge the enslaved of his stubbornness and resistance. The abusive slaveholder initiates a socially and politically sanctioned offense against the body, and "its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance." Instead, it operates to "re-establish" the original social "dissymmetry".¹⁰¹ According to the dominant discourse, a slave cannot be stubborn, because a slave is obedient. He or she is supposed to be obedient like a beast of burden, into which Busby's owner quite literally attempts to transform the victim. His abused body is positioned into the same plow to which a horse or mule would be fastened. "Whipping was not only a method of punishment. It was a conscious device to impress upon the slaves that they were slaves; it was a crucial form of social control".¹⁰² Under the power of the lash and for all on the plantation to see, the "darkie" is worked "jes' lak a hors." Whipping and by extension all violence in this context is an attempt to transform the enslaved person into a slave.

Like whipping, branding, and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violations are also a means to restore the master-slave dialectic. I contend that violent sexual transgressions are the greatest materialization of plantation violence. It is the ultimate reenactment of capture, coercion, and perceived

¹⁰⁰ Vinnie Busby, Interview, Rankin County, Mississippi, n.d., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography 10 vols. George P. Rawick, ed., (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972, Ser. 1, vol. 6) 308-311.

¹⁰¹ Foucault 48-9.

¹⁰² Rawick 59.

submission. MacKinnon writes, "Rape is an act of dominance over women that works systematically to maintain a gender-stratified society in which women occupy a disadvantaged status as the appropriate victims and targets of sexual aggression."¹⁰³ Gender alone does not operate as a category of oppression within the U.S. slave society. More specifically, the slave society is arranged by race, class and gender, which mean that White slaveholding men are at the very top, while Black enslaved women fall lowest in a patriarchal caste-stratified system. Within this context, it is possible that sexualized violence "is an act of dominance over" any person not protected by the White, male, and slaveholding status. The attacks against the Black enslaved woman have long been acknowledged. Sexually violent encounters that cross the caste line but lay within the same gender have been less explored.

Within the last three decades, attention has been called to the critical study of sexual violation of Black women under slavery. The scholarship that has been done theorizes the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality as it relates to rape and enslavement. Hilary Beckles discusses sexual violation in economic terms and in terms of property rights. He insists that slaveholders held the "right to unrestricted sexual access to slaves as an intrinsic and discrete product".¹⁰⁴ Under this system, there is "no clear distinction between the slave-based production of material goods, and the delivery of sexual services".¹⁰⁵ The sexual services include reproduction of

¹⁰³ Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Reflections on Sex Equality under Law," The Yale Law Journal 100.5 (March 1991): 1302.

¹⁰⁴ Hilary Beckles, "Property Rights in Pleasure: The Marketing of Enslaved Women's Sexuality," Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader, Ed. Verene A. Shepherd and Hilary Beckles (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 692.

¹⁰⁵ Beckles 692.

another enslaved body and labor. The outcome, however, was not only reproductive, but also the satisfaction of the violator's sadistic pleasures.

While Angela Davis's early hetero-normative understanding of sexual violence is problematic, she offers enlightened ideas about the role and operation of rape on the plantation. It is the enslaved person's caste, which leaves him or her "inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion".¹⁰⁶ "Rape, in fact, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder's economic mastery and the overseer's control over Black women as workers".¹⁰⁷ Overseers are included in the indictment of sexual predators, because they situated above of the slave society's caste-line, which gave them along with other subordinate Whites, White privilege.¹⁰⁸ "It would be a mistake to regard the institutionalized pattern of rape during slavery as an expression of white men's sexual urges".¹⁰⁹ While sadism and pleasure plays a role in sexual violence, it operates within the power structure of the plantation. "Rape was a weapon of domination, a weapon of repression, whose covert goal was to extinguish slave women's will to resist".¹¹⁰ Davis stops short of calling rape a weapon of mass destruction.¹¹¹ The intent was to destroy the will to resist and community organization. Thus, the rape of enslaved people is at once a pleasurable property 'right' of the slaveholder and an act of terroristic conquest. The two are not mutually exclusive, and

¹⁰⁶ Angela Y. Davis, Women, Race & Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1981) 7.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, Women, Race & Class 7.

¹⁰⁸ Beckles, Bush and Deborah Gray White all include black drivers in the mix, which reveals the way race and gender (racism and patriarchy) influences rape.

¹⁰⁹ Davis, Women, Race & Class 23.

¹¹⁰ Davis, Women, Race & Class 23-4.

¹¹¹ Comparing the use of rape on the plantation to the use of rape during war, particularly the Vietnam War, Davis reveals, the terroristic quality of sexual violence. Patricia Hill Collins, Deborah Gray White and Wilma King corroborates the terrorist-style tool of sexual exploitation and its links to the slaveholder's status (White "Female Slaves in the Plantation South" 103 and King 108-9)

they inform each other to make rape of enslaved, what Winthrop Jordan calls, “a ritualistic re-enactment of the daily pattern of social dominance”.¹¹²

Sexualized violence is the epitome of the reenacted conquest, because it is not only an epidermal transgression against the enslaved, but the actual invasion of his or her body. This forced entry into the private anatomy of the enslaved African by members of the slavocracy reinforces their subjugated status without legal rights and claims to their body. Rape against enslaved males that involve only one biological sex is still a very gendered act. The sexualized attack against the enslaved male is imbued with meanings of race, class and gender. Within a patriarchal context, male on male sexual violence inherently attacks the enslaved male’s masculinity.

In 1865, a soldier in the Confederate army, George McClauthery, included the following line in an epistle addressed to his sister: “The boys...rode one of our company on a rail last night for leaving the company and going to sleep with Captain Lowry’s black man”.¹¹³ This Civil War-era letter is a rare written account of a sexual encounter crossing the racialized caste line, while remaining within the same sex. As Jonathan Ned Katz inquires, “Why would a Southern, white soldier have left his company to go and ‘sleep with’ his captain’s black servant?”¹¹⁴ McClauthery’s use of the possessive form of “Captain Lowry” indicates the enslaved condition of the Black man. Katz’s question resonates twofold. Why would a White confederate leave his company of soldiers, but also the camaraderie of

¹¹² Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968) 141.

¹¹³ Qtd. in Thomas P. Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn’t Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Penn.: Stackpole Press, 1994) 112.

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 137.

whiteness, to bed down with an enslaved Black man? Similarly, why would a White confederate leave his company of soldiers, but also the camaraderie of whiteness, to have sex with an enslaved Black man?

The phrase, “to sleep with”, can simply denote slumber, but within the context, “slumber” is not the only connotation of this expression. By the eighteenth century, “to sleep with” is not an uncommon phrase used to indicate sexual intercourse or physical intimacy.¹¹⁵ The type of punishment administered to the White soldier, nevertheless, alludes to a more serious offense. To ride someone on a rail “is a savage punishment inflicted by an excited crowd upon a person who has exasperated a community by some real or fancied outrage”.¹¹⁶ The severity of the punishment reveals that there was more than simple fraternizing with an enslaved person.

In addition, “to sleep with” is an extremely passive phrase to apply to a sexual act across the caste line. More attention is given to the punishment, rather than the actual act being punished. Within the context of the totalizing slave society, there is rarely a passive or consensual sexual encounter. The White male involved is a Confederate soldier, and it is by way of his racialized, gendered and economic position that he engages the Black male body. “There could hardly be a basis for ‘delight, affection and love’,” posits Davis, “as long as white men, by virtue of their economic position, had unlimited access to black [...] bodies”.¹¹⁷ As a result of the hierarchal social stratification and uneven power relations, “it was as oppressors—or, in the case of non-slaveholders, as agents of domination—that white men

¹¹⁵ Oxford English Dictionary Online. Ed. John Simpson. 2007. Oxford University Press. 8 March 2007 <<http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/misc/3862894>>.

¹¹⁶ M. Schele De Vere, Americanisms; the English of the New World (New York: C. Scribner & Company, 1872) 194.

¹¹⁷ Davis, Women, Race & Class 25.

approached Black [...] bodies.”¹¹⁸ That being so the White male perpetrator brings his social privileges with him to the site of sexual encounters.

The case Souther v. Commonwealth gives insight into how sexualized violence is not limited to rape and coerced intercourse. According to court records,

The negro was tied to a tree and whipped with switches. When Souther became fatigued with the labour of whipping him he called upon a negro man of his, and made him cob Sam with a shingle. He also mad a negro woman of his help to cob him. And, after cobbing and whipping, he applied fire to the body of the slave; about his back, belly and private parts. He then caused him to be washed down with hot water, in which pods of red pepper had been steeped. The negro was also tied to a log and to the bed post with ropes, which choked him, and he was kicked and stamped by Souther. This sort of punishment was continued and repeated until the negro died under its infliction.¹¹⁹

The punishment being applied to Sam’s private parts demonstrates how the genitals of the enslaved are not off limits to the “sovereignty” of the slaveholder. It is well within the jurisdiction of their absolute power and tyranny according to property rights. This power over sexual organs is also evidenced by the slaveholders control over who “breeds” with whom and when. The mutilation of Sam’s body, specifically the genital mutilation is a form of sexualized violence, since it was a conscious attack on Sam’s sexuality. It, literally, was a castration by fire. If the penis is an anatomical representation of masculinity, the punishment is a destructive act against Sam’s maleness.

In addition, Sam is first tied to a tree, and then, later he is removed from the tree and bound to a bedpost. This suggests a change in location.

¹¹⁸ Davis, Women, Race & Class 25-6.

¹¹⁹ qtd. in Paul Finkelman, The Law of Freedom and Bondage: A Casebook (New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1986) 259.

With limited details, it is difficult to draw a hard conclusion, but it is possible that Sam's body was tied to a bed. The bed is a place of sleep and repose, but also it is the "place of the conjugal union" and procreation.¹²⁰ Not only does the site of punishment change, but also the punisher. Souther, the slaveholder, begins the violence and then forces another enslaved man and an enslaved woman to continue the punishment. The enslaved, who are forced to abuse Sam, are participants in and witnesses to the ritualized re-enslavement. Once, Sam is bound to the bed, Souther resumes the assault. The positioning of Sam's body adjacent to the bed and Souther's resumption as violator transforms the assault into a metaphorical rape, symbolic of the intrusive power of the slavocracy. Hence, the goal of Sam's sexually violent punishment is to kill any sense of manhood and resistance.

¹²⁰ [Oxford English Dictionary Online](#).

Chapter 2

Scenes of Inspection: The Gazing Slavocracy and Sexual Vulnerability

And prospective buyers would visit the 'block' accompanied by doctors, who would feel of, thump, and examine the 'Nigger' to see if sound.

-Rias Body¹²¹

To be felt and inspected, talked of as a thing, transferred from place to place, bought and sold—that was the common pulse of the slave experience through two and one half centuries of Afro-American history.

-Nathan Huggins¹²²

The Black Atlantic and the Scenes of Inspection

As previously argued, the African's introduction to their new caste situation was often a moment of violence and violation. "To be felt and inspected" was an initiation into chattel slavery. The purpose of these first experiences is to establish the master-slave power relationship. It is the loss of every prerogative. I contend that by creating a conversation between James Sweet's work on Brazil and eighteenth and nineteenth century visual culture, one can see that male on male sexualized violence against the enslaved is not exclusively a Brazilian phenomenon, but one that is truly Black Atlantic. Laurent's Marché d'esclaves, François-Auguste Biard's The Slave Trade, and Slave Market by an unknown American artist exhibit how the threat is transmitted throughout the Black Atlantic.

In Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770, James Sweet presents some of the most

¹²¹ Rias Body, Interview, The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, (1941) 12.1 Ed. George P. Rawick (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1974) 86-90.

¹²² Nathan Irvin Huggins, Black Odyssey: The African American Ordeal in Slavery (New York: Vintage Books, 1990, 1977) 115.

extensive primary evidence of male-male rape against the enslaved. Similarly, Trevor Burnard's Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World contains a brief passage about the presence of sodomy and other sexual encounters involving enslaved males in the infamous Thomas Thistlewood diary. Burnard writes,

Some male slaves were sexually assaulted by male owners—Thistlewood notes two instances of this (“Report of Mr. Watt Committing Sodomy with his Negro waiting Boy” and “strange reports about the parson and John his man”)—and others were tormented by amorous female owners—Thistlewood reported one rumor of a white woman who was reputed to be “making free” with male slaves—but the incidence of such sexual exploitation was undoubtedly low compared to the almost continual sexual molestation of slave women.¹²³

Sweet and Burnard's focus on the African-Portuguese and the Anglo-Jamaican worlds, respectively, fall outside of parameters of the United States slave society. Demography is a possible reason for the existence of male on male sexualized violence in the Brazilian and Jamaican context, but Sweet suggests that the Portuguese Inquisition's hunt for sodomites explains the rich primary sources of this abuse.¹²⁴ In addition, relying solely on a demographic explanation is dangerous. A demographic hypothesis attributes the disproportionately high number of males in the Caribbean and Latin American colonies as a breeding ground for situational “homosexuality.” This perspective assumes that there are no “male” members of the colonies, which

¹²³ Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 207.

¹²⁴ Sweet acknowledges the richness of Brazilian primary documents as it relates to sodomy. This is due to the Portuguese and Spanish Inquisitions' search for “sodomites.” For more in-depth discussion on sodomy, the Portuguese Inquisition, and the Atlantic world, see Louis Crompton's Homosexuality & Civilization. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2003. 314-320.

have a desire to participate in same-sex sexual behavior.¹²⁵ Furthermore, it ignores the social control properties of sexualized violence and rape. Thus, ‘situational homosexuality’, desire, and social control are all possible conditions for male on male sexualized violence.

The type of transgressive abuses expressed against the enslaved on the Brazilian and Jamaican plantations were not a “New World” creation. Brazil and Jamaica do not exist in regions void of diasporic contact, and both slave societies are major sites of importation. The trans-Atlantic slave trade forms the Black Atlantic through the constant movement of Black bodies.¹²⁶ The methods of controlling these Black bodies follow the them into these major trading ports.

Through the Black Atlantic, Africa, Europe, and the Americas are temporally and spatially married. Fueled by racial slavery and colonization, the Middle Passage is what ties these three areas together. The perpetual crisscrossing of the Atlantic Ocean produces an “intercultural positionality” for the historical players involved.¹²⁷ The Black Atlantic reflects “a concern with the Atlantic as a cultural and political system” which has been forged “by the economic and historical matrix in which plantation slavery— ‘capitalism with its clothes off’—was one special moment”.¹²⁸ It is “an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” where by the Atlantic is

¹²⁵ See Aldrich Robert, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹²⁶ I use “Black Atlantic” instead of “African Diaspora”, because African Diaspora includes voluntary and involuntary movement of Africans before the start of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Black Atlantic is more temporally and geographically specific.

¹²⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993) 6.

¹²⁸ Gilroy 15.

“one single, complex unit of analysis”.¹²⁹ The African is made a slave through violence on the African coast. It is through this diasporic crossing that people and places are redefined.¹³⁰ Violent methods of control are perpetuated on the slave ship and at the final destination in order to reinstate the African’s subjugated status. Some conditions, such as demography, may influence the quantity of punishment, but these conditions do not negate the presence of the threat.¹³¹

The moment of enslavement, which creates the master-slave power relationship, is a “scene of subjection”, according to Saidiya Hartman. The performance of violence exhibits “the origin of the subject and demonstrates that to be a slave is to be under the brutal power and authority of another”.¹³² Violence, especially sexual violence, and its resulting terror are central to this subjection. One such scene of subjection is inspection. Inspection is the act of examining someone in an attempt to evaluate his or her physical health and commercial profitability. It is a terrorizing act imbued with the threat of sexual assault. It is a specific type of subjection that best exhibits the idea of the terrible spectacle and the primal scene. Inspection is a type of subjection that is more primal, more natal than the ordinary beating and flogging. This is what I call the scene of inspection. Scenes of inspection are a part of the ceremonial reception of the African into New World chattel slavery.

¹²⁹ Gilroy 15.

¹³⁰ Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz, Introduction, *An Economy of Colour: Visual culture and the Atlantic world, 1660-1830*, Eds. Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003) 8.

¹³¹ Traditional historiography represents the Caribbean or Latin America as more brutal than the British formed United States, which I do not want to argue here.

¹³² Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 3.

The slave society is a compilation of many sites and spectacles of re-enslavement. The scenes of inspection are pivotal, because they are a part of the initial ceremonial loss of freedom along with the capture and coffle. The inspection is replicated on the African coast, at the market in the Americas, and during the seasoning process on the plantation. It is a reminder of the “extremity of power involved” and “the qualities of coercion that brought the relation into being and sustained it”.¹³³ The African’s body, labor, and reproductive potential are objectified and commodified through “medical” examination. Thus, the probing must happen over and over again in order to recreate the ‘slave.’ Vincent Bakpetu Thompson calls this the “ceremonial reception” of “examination, then sale, and then the ‘breaking-in’”.¹³⁴ Controlling and mitigating the resistance of the enslaved is the central concern of this ceremonial reception. As a consequence, the inspecting gaze involved in this process sets the tenor of the enslaved African experience in the American slave societies.

With the expansion of European conquest and colonization, the visible and the gaze gained a new importance.

With a mania for categorization and an urge to impose order on the world, naturalists turned their attention from flora and fauna to the human race and its diversities in skin color, types of hair, and physiognomy. In these respects they found Africans and Europeans at the furthest remove from one another and placed them at either end of a scale determined by exclusively visual and very largely aesthetic criteria.¹³⁵

The social stratification is based upon the physical appearances of the members of society. Cultural beliefs and hierarchy are presented in and

¹³³ Patterson 2.

¹³⁴ Thompson 136.

¹³⁵ Hugh Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989, Vol. 4 Pt. 1) 12.

maintained by in the visual culture produced by the society. “Visual images are always part of a culture’s structure, not simply expressions of its religious beliefs, historical myths, moral codes, aesthetic preferences, internal social system, and relationship with outsiders”.¹³⁶

Visuals can say things that may be unspeakable in certain contexts, because of language barriers. People do not necessarily speak a different language visually. Thus, the transnational movement of inspection as a social control tactic is perceptible in both pro-slavery and abolitionist visual culture. In addition, the Black subject’s role in Western art reflects White dependency on Black persons for definition and place. When present within the same visual plane in antebellum art, Black subjects are used to fix the economic class, political status, and racial location of the White subject. “Racial discourses, though they are discourses of power, ultimately rely on the visual in the sense that the visible body must be used by those in power to represent nonvisual realities that differentiate insiders from outsiders”.¹³⁷ Thus, slavery is an “economy of colour” as posited by Geoff Quilley and Kay Kriz¹³⁸ and within this type of economy the visual is indispensable. Skin color, hair texture, broad noses, and thick lips are all markers of an enslaved status. The commonality of these antebellum images is their dependency on the corporeal, since “the individual physical body eventually symbolized in various ways one’s membership in a particular social body or body politic”.¹³⁹ The violated body represents and becomes a placeholder for the Black social body. This vulnerable figure epitomizes the perceived social hierarchy.

¹³⁶ Honour 14.

¹³⁷ Michael D. Harris, Colored Pictures: Racial and Visual Representation (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 2.

¹³⁸ Quilley 9.

¹³⁹ Harris 2-3.

Visual representation had to sustain the racial and class ideologies that reassure an economy supported by slavery. However, this representation of the Black male body is a contested space because the Black body is both socially weak and physically dangerous, which needs to be contained and controlled.

Some of the very “first visual images of the Atlantic slave trade were in [...] travel books”.¹⁴⁰ Trans-Atlantic travelogues generally contained impassioned narratives of exploration, colonization, and life in the Americas. One sees the influence of scientific typography in these early transatlantic travelogues. When addressing slavery, the authors wrote of slavery and the enslaved population in ways that would be deemed racist by today’s standards. Travel book illustrations of slavery were “drawn in the same neutral, matter-of-fact spirit as the written descriptions they illustrate”.¹⁴¹

Marché d’esclaves appears in one such travel book, Le commerce de l’Amérique par Marseille, by Chambon.¹⁴² Marché d’esclaves (Fig. 3), or Slave Market, is “the first visual image that provides a full” itemized-like “account of the operation of the” trans-Atlantic trade of enslaved people.¹⁴³ “The book is no more than a factual account of maritime commerce in coffee, chocolate, indigo, tobacco, cotton, and so on with helpful hints” on the exportation and importation enslaved people.¹⁴⁴ The likening of enslaved people to commercial goods, such as coffee, indigo, or cotton, reveals the commodification of humans involved. In addition, the book gives

¹⁴⁰ Honour 51.

¹⁴¹ Honour 51.

¹⁴² Laurent, fec. Illustration for [Chambon], Le commerce de L’Amérique par Marseille (Avignon, 1764), vol. II, pl. XI, facing p.400: Marché d’esclaves. Copper engraving. Page: 249x190 mm.

¹⁴³ Honour 52.

¹⁴⁴ Honour 53.

recommendations on how to maintain the health of the enslaved Africans.¹⁴⁵
The recommendations are not an appeal to humanity, but a guide to protecting the slave-traders' investment.

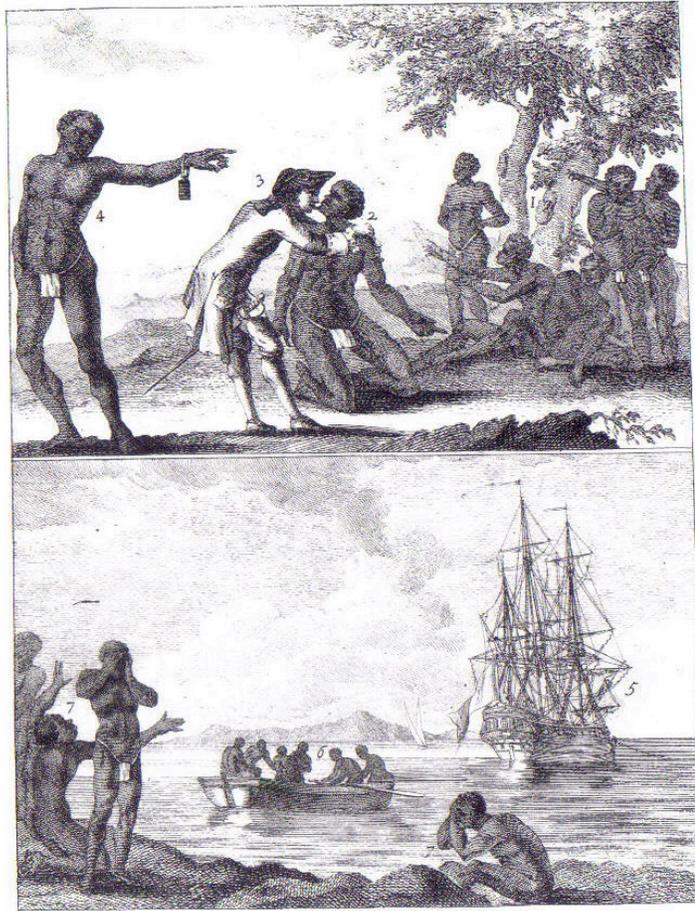


Figure 3. "Marché d'esclaves"

Like the illustration, the corresponding description of Marché d'esclaves details all of the constituent parts of the slave trade. Thus, the numerals within the plate refer to the following:

1. Negroes exposed on sale in a public market.
2. A Negro Slave whom one examines before buying it.
3. A Britishman licks the chin of a Negro to verify his age and to discover, by the taste of his sweat, if he is ill.
4. A Negro slave carrying on the arm the mark of slavery.
5. Slave-trading vessel in roads, while waiting

¹⁴⁵ Honour 53.

for the draft to be completed. 6. Loaded rowboat of purchased slaves that one leads to the Vessel. 7. Negroes on the shore who deplore and cry out while seeing their parents or friends taken on board.¹⁴⁶

The entire image and description reads as a single movement. More importantly, the image not only exhibits the step-by-step trade of enslaved people, but it shows the making of a “slave”. Numerals 1 through 4 are most telling. Within the first image, the Africans are still relatively free. Here, the African is captured but not yet sold into bondage as a commodity. While in the fourth image, the African is displaying “the mark of slavery.” It is during the second and third depictions (Fig. 4) that a transition from captured to enslaved occurs. Numerals 2 and 3 taken together are a scene of inspection. The African is waiting to be examined and the European purchaser is inspecting. He licks the flesh of the African, in order to determine the African’s state of health, which is not an uncommon act for the time period. However, this normal medical examination is embedded with meanings of power, because the African is licked against his will. The African males grimaced face portrays the licking as an uninvited transgression.

¹⁴⁶ The original French caption reads as follows: 1. Nègres exposés en vente dans un marché public. 2. Un Esclave Nègre qu’on examine avant de l’acheter. 3. Anglois qui leche le menton du Nègre pour s’assurer de son âge, & découvrir au gout de la sueur s’il n’est pas malade. 4. Esclave Nègre portant au bras la marque de l’esclavage. 5. Vaisseau Négrier en rade, en attendant que la Traite soit achevée. 6. Chaloupe chargée d’Esclaves achetés qu’on conduit au Vaisseau. 7. Nègres sur le rivage qui se lamentent & poussent des cris en voyant embarquer leurs parens ou amis.



Figure 4. Marché d'esclaves (detail)

Marché d'esclaves makes visible the uninhibited access of the slaveholder to the enslaved body, without respect to private space and ownership. There is an obvious difference between tasting sweat and licking a body. Tasting sweat is possible without actually placing one's mouth or tongue on the body of the African. The forced exchange of bodily fluids is tainted with the threat of sexualized violence.

Furthermore, the positioning of the Black male body in relation to the White male body is telling. Marché d'esclaves is an example of how Western visual culture functions "to naturalize and legitimate European political and cultural hegemony and validate the developing criterion of whiteness

representing that hegemony".¹⁴⁷ Within numerals 2 and 3, the two opposing bodies form a geometric triangle. The triangularity of the scene is a "visual encoding of hierarchy and exclusion".¹⁴⁸ The triangular composition and the slightly higher positioning of white subject above the black subject "in the same visual space" reinforce the social stratification and master-slave power relationship. Then, the African being licked is at "the bottom of the social, as well as the visual, pyramid".¹⁴⁹

Similarly, the African, who is scarcely clad, is kneeling submissively. While the 'finely dressed' White man stands over the African with a saber. The semi-nudity of the African reveals a 'pathological' morality and sexuality in the imagination of the European. The well-dressed European represents civilization and high culture, while the saber is the violent force needed to protect European 'high culture' and contain the African's untamed sexuality.

"The Slave Trade" and the Pornography of Enslavement

Laurent's Marché d'esclaves represents one of only a few images of slavery in Western culture. Compared to the social and economic importance of slavery to Europe, images of slavery are meager in Western art.¹⁵⁰ Unlike Laurent's work, "Almost all the images of slavery with which we are familiar are in fact abolitionist images".¹⁵¹ One of the most well-known abolitionist portrayals of slavery is François-Auguste Biard's La Traite des Nègres, or The

¹⁴⁷ Quilley 8.

¹⁴⁸ Albert Boime, The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990) 16.

¹⁴⁹ Biome 17.

¹⁵⁰ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992) 53.

¹⁵¹ Pieterse 58.

Slave Trade (fig. 5).¹⁵² In this work, Biard follows in the tradition of English painter, George Morland, and fellow Frenchman, Théodore Géricault. Morland's The Slave Trade and Géricault's The African Slave Trade (which is actually an unfinished study) are influenced by the abolitionist ideologies brewing in England and employ a similar setting: the African coast.



Figure 5. "The Slave Trade"

Biard's eccentric professional training and personal hobbies heavily influenced his artistic style. Initially, Biard trained for the priesthood. He had an enthusiasm for "collecting ethnographic artifacts", such as "torture

¹⁵² Biard, Auguste-François. The Slave Trade. Signed. Royal Academy, London, 1840, no. 441. Canvas. 162.5x228.6 cm. Kingston-upon-Hull, Hull City Museums and Art Galleries, Wilberforce House.

instruments used by slavers”¹⁵³ and his work reflected an anthropological and ethnographic perspective. Biard’s perspective has been criticized, and Albert Biome admits that Biard’s “approach was frankly propagandistic and commercial”.¹⁵⁴ Biome argues that Biard makes use of “an almost encyclopedic treatment of the known atrocities and sadistic brutalities endured by African slaves: flogging, branding, manacling with iron collars and wrist shackles, family separation, and the objectification and systematic degrading of the individual’s personhood.”¹⁵⁵ However, this “encyclopedic treatment” is to the benefit of the researcher, because while all of the atrocities may not happen simultaneously in the same space, all of these atrocities do occur before the boarding of the slave ship. Biard’s treatment reflects “the rise of anthropology and colonial expansion”.¹⁵⁶ The powers behind the colonial project “encouraged the ambitions of a certain class of artists who, like Biard, were commissioned for expeditions to record the topography, the flora and fauna, and the activities of the indigenous peoples”.¹⁵⁷ As a result, Biard was part artist and part ethnographer, which is demonstrated by the empirical-like depiction of tortures in The Slave Trade.

The scene was set on the African coast, and Biard, like Gericault seems to have looked back to Morland. But instead of attempting to elevate the theme by treating it in the grand style with a few figures of tragiheroic stature, he expanded it anecdotally. Illustrating the cruelty and callousness of several types of slave traders and all the pains and humiliations suffered by the slaves, the picture is an inventory of miseries.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ Biome 64.

¹⁵⁴ Biome 64.

¹⁵⁵ Biome 64.

¹⁵⁶ Biome 64.

¹⁵⁷ Biome 64.

¹⁵⁸ Honour 149.

This is yet another reason why The Slave Trade is important, because sentiment and heroism was not always available, but inspection and subjugation were inevitable.

The art of the abolitionist movement attempted to create sympathy for the enslaved by evoking emotions, such as dread, dismay and horror. Like most abolitionist visual art, The Slave Trade “is poised on the cusp of classicism and Romanticism, and abolitionist poetry was a Romantic genre.”¹⁵⁹ Besides the depicted action, Biard employs emotive oil pigments on a canvas medium in order to achieve his sentimental goal. The searing white flash of the branding iron or the burning reddish-orange horizon signifies the finality of the enslaving process. The sheer abundance of dark browns and blacks frame the whiteness of the Europeans, and suggests the numerical immensity of the human trafficking. Yet, color holds another significance.

It was the African’s color of skin that became his or her defining characteristic, with all its associations in Western culture of gloom, defilement, baseness, and wretchedness. This paved the way for the objectification of black people, for the stereotyping that shifted the connotative meanings to a denotative level and categorically fixed the “meaning” of black skin.¹⁶⁰

Color symbolism is a central device in this genre of visual culture. The symbolic contrast of white and black demark the potential to be enslaved.

In The Athenæum, England’s premier art criticism journal of the time, a writer describes what he sees as the two “worst moral features of the traffic in human blood”.¹⁶¹ On one side of the trade is the active participation of the African. However, “on the other side, more ghastly still, the supercargo lying listlessly along, with the ledger, containing such a fearful record of the human

¹⁵⁹ Pieterse 58.

¹⁶⁰ Biome 7.

¹⁶¹ qtd. in Honour 149-50.

agony, at his side, and his white ministers binding and branding their prey, with a remorseless indifference as to the deep though ill-expressed feelings of manhood with tyranny and torture are crushing and searing out of their victims for ever.”¹⁶² According to the observation of The Athenæum writer, masculinity is being crushed out of the African male, while the European is attempting to express a sadistic form of manhood. A scene of inspection is at the center of the painting. The “tyranny and torture” is manifested by the representation of a pinned-down African male being inspected. Penetration figures heavily within this image, as the European enslaver pries the African male’s mouth open and peers in. Like the use of the tongue in the previous engraving, this act of insertion is seemingly asexual, but the White man’s ability to trespass on to and into the Black male body speaks to absolute power to transcend any boundary.

Biard’s The Slave Trade is filled with scenes of subjection. There is shackling, branding, flogging, and, of course, inspecting the African body. As acknowledged by Edward Lucie-Smith, “A work of art may be full of sexual feeling without depicting sexual activity”.¹⁶³ With this in mind, Biard’s work can be re-read as a complex sexual fantasy. “One deviant sexual fantasy” prominent within “European art [...] concerns the plight of the bound and helpless victim”.¹⁶⁴ The sadomasochistic gaze and projection of “pleasurable pains” are central to viewing victimization. As Thomas Jefferson reveals in Notes on Virginia, 1782, “the whole commerce between master and slave is a

¹⁶² qtd. in Honour 150.

¹⁶³ Edward Lucie-Smith, “Introduction,” Sexuality in Western Art (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1972, 1991) 7.

¹⁶⁴ Edward Lucie-Smith, Sexuality in Western Art (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1972, 1991) 211.

perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other”.¹⁶⁵



Figure 6. “The Slave Trade” (detail)

Within the center plane of Biard’s The Slave Trade, two crucial actions occur (fig. 6). Along side the inspection of the African male, but less prominent, is the branding of an African female. These two actions fight for the attention of the viewer. While the inspection of the African male is at the center, the lighting of the branding leaves the sizzling flesh more visible. This alludes to the historical murkiness of the violation of the Black male. The juxtaposition of the abused male and female parallels their vulnerability to the wanton despotism of the slavocracy. Both sets of action form a pyramidal

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Jefferson, The writings of Thomas Jefferson, Ed. Paul Leicester (New York : G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1892-1899, 3rd vol.) 266.

shape reinforcing the dominating social hierarchy. While the African traders appear at a higher horizontal, they are further pushed to the background by shadows and become spectators. This visual marginalization partially reduces the African traders to witnesses to rather than agents of the actions of the painting. Essentially, all of the Africans in the picture plane are spectators and witnesses of enslavement. Through witnessing the inspection, they are reminded of their vulnerability.

Thus, spectatorship is another central theme of the painting (fig. 7). While the observation of the fellow Africans constructs one type of gaze, the nonchalant posture of the accountant establishes another. This gaze is pleasurable and powerful. It is a slavocratic gaze, and it is codified by the



Figure 7. "The Slave Trade" (detail)

presence of the enslaver's gun and dagger. The gun rests in his lap, but he is grasping his knife's handle in preparation to crush resistance. In an effort to imply that the inspection is enough, the inspecting slaver stops the accountant from fully drawing his weapon. The African being inspected is a subordinated "object", and his semi-nudity and exposure suggests sexual availability to the European eye. The ability to gaze and control was a power and privilege at the exclusive leisure of the White I/eye. Biard reveals this asymmetrical authority through the accountant.

By patriarchal standards the loss of control, individual and familial, heightens vulnerability.¹⁶⁶ It is a feminine vulnerability. By including the physical abuses of both women and men together within the same plane, The Slave Trade suggests a relatively equalized oppression of males and females. It is epitomized in the sympathetic, or more accurately empathetic, stare of the bare breasted African woman. She is most likely the female property of one of the chiefs, and "while also enslaved, she suggests erotic possession".¹⁶⁷ Again, "the sexual component implied in the possession of human bodies was a basic concern of the abolitionists and an erotic fantasy expressed in both art and literature".¹⁶⁸ Compared to harem paintings influenced by the French colonial efforts in North Africa, "Biard's slave-trade picture carried clues to the taste of contemporary middle-class males" to possess bodies.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ For an in-depth discussion of the representation of control and masculinity in the art, see Michael Hatt, "Making a Man of Him: Masculinity and the Black Body in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture," Oxford Art Journal, 15.1 (1992) 21-35.

¹⁶⁷ Biome 64.

¹⁶⁸ Biome 64-5.

¹⁶⁹ Biome 65.

By the apex of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the prominence of the male nude in art had lessened, while the use of the female nude became more acceptable.

As a figment of heterosexual wish-fulfillment, the female nude serves primarily to guarantee the stability of a phallogentric fantasy in which the omnipotent male gaze sees but is never itself seen. The binary opposition of seeing/being seen which informs visual representation of the female nude reveals that looking is never an innocent or neutral activity, but is always powerfully loaded by the gendered character of the subject/object dichotomy in which, to put it crudely, men look and women are there to be looked at.¹⁷⁰

According to this patriarchal context of the male gaze of the body, to be peered at is a loss of control and transformation into fantasy object. However, in the inspection of the Black male body, the gaze is unavoidable and penetrable. Being that both artist-enslaver and model-enslaved “are male sets up a tension of sameness which thereby transfers the frisson of ‘difference’ from gender to racial polarity”.¹⁷¹ Race, or at least the visibility of race, becomes the crux of the subject/object dichotomy. The racialized African male is a “passive visual object” under “the active control” of the white male gaze.¹⁷²

The inspection is reductive and dehumanizing, and involves a gaze that is pornographic. The racially stratified and patriarchal slave society nurtures a “sexual investment in looking”¹⁷³ at the Black male anatomy. As a result, Marcus Wood calls for the need to create a conversation around eighteenth

¹⁷⁰ Kobena Mercer, “Just Looking for Trouble: Robert Mapplethorpe and Fantasies of Race,” *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindborg (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 282.

¹⁷¹ Mercer 282.

¹⁷² Mercer 282.

¹⁷³ Mercer 283.

and early nineteenth century pornography and race.¹⁷⁴ This conversation is unavoidable considering the constant presence of the exposed Black body during the period of enslavement. Like the classical and neoclassical nude, the African bodies being enslaved “are aestheticized and eroticized as ‘objects’ to be looked at”.¹⁷⁵ “As such, they offer an erotic source of pleasure in the act of looking. But whose pleasure is being served?”¹⁷⁶ Thus, images of nude and semi-nude African males in bonded and tortured conditions can very well be read as pornography. Many of the visual representations of slavery are pornographic, but as cultural critic, Kobena Mercer recognizes that “unlike the explicitly politicized pornographies directed against the clergy or aristocracy in the fallout from the French Revolution, had no clear basis in satire. It is also pornography that has never been called pornography, which is not to say that it hasn’t been seen or enjoyed as pornography”.¹⁷⁷ The intention of nudity is not to praise the beauty of the body like classical Greco sculptures or even neo-classical sculptures of the European (Italian) Renaissance. The exposure of black skin becomes something nasty and debased. As such, Western artists “drew, engraved, sculpted and painted the slave body as a site for the infliction of physical pain”.¹⁷⁸ These writings and paintings charge the White ruling class with relegating enslaved Blacks, including men, to fetish objects.

Whereas the abolitionist depiction of the exploitative and eroticized treatment intended to indict the slavocracy, Biard’s The Slave Trade has an

¹⁷⁴ Marcus Wood, “John Gabriel Stedman, William Black, Francesco Bartolozzi and empathetic pornography in the Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam,” *An Economy of Colour: Visual culture and the Atlantic world, 1660-1830*, Eds. Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003) 129.

¹⁷⁵ Mercer 282.

¹⁷⁶ Mercer 282.

¹⁷⁷ Wood, “John Gabriel Stedman...” 130.

¹⁷⁸ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, Inc., 2000) 216.

ulterior objective. It has a pornographic quality. Gloria Steinem gives one of the first feminist critiques of pornography. Steinem's etymological deconstruction of "pornography" is telling.

"Pornography" begins with a root "porno," meaning "prostitution" or "female captives," thus letting us know that the subject is not mutual love, or love at all, but domination and violence against women. (Though, of course, homosexual pornography may imitate this violence by putting a man in the "feminine" role of victim.) It ends with a root "graphos," meaning "writing about" or description of," with puts still more distance between subject and object, and replaces a spontaneous yearning for closeness with objectification and voyeurism.¹⁷⁹

The original connotation of "female captive" reveals the intersection of power and sexual violation involved in pornography. Its relationship to domination, violence, objectification and voyeurism makes it extremely applicable to images of racial slavery. Steinem continues with a definition of pornography.

It is a

depiction of sex in which there is clear force, or an unequal power that spells coercion. It may be very blatant, with weapons of torture or bondage, wounds and bruises, some clear humiliation, or an adult's sexual power being used over a child. It may be much more subtle: a physical attitude of conqueror and victim, the use of race or class difference to imply the same thing, perhaps a very unequal nudity, with one person exposed and vulnerable while the other is clothed. In either case there is no sense of equal choice or equal power.¹⁸⁰

The Slave Trade follows the criteria of pornography, and depicts unequal and coercive power. This power is illustrated through shackles, the branding iron, and whips. These implements of torture are not unique to slavery, but their positioning next to black skin uniquely cast them as the accoutrement of Black disenfranchisement and enslavement. Although there is no sexual act explicitly portrayed, the oral penetration by aggressive White fingers and eyes

¹⁷⁹ Gloria Steinem, "Erotica and Pornography: A Clear and Present Difference," Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography, Ed. Laura Lederer (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980) 37.

¹⁸⁰ Steinem 37.

is a subtle implication. The uneven exposure of Black flesh as compared to the more clad Europeans generates a similar sexual tone. In sum, “pornography is about power and sex-as-weapon”,¹⁸¹ and the Biard reveals inspection as a sexualized enslaving weapon.

The Auction Block and Abolitionist Contradictions

Instead of projecting the obvious enslaving actions, like shackling or whipping, Slave Market (fig. 8) depicts the public sale of enslaved people.¹⁸² It is by an unknown artist, but subscribes to the romanticism of White abolitionism and the general sentimental mood of 19th century cultural production. The brutality and sorrow expressed encourages an emotional response, which is lacking in the faces of the White participants. “This work seems to have been conceived as a programmatic abolitionist image in the manner of Morland’s Execrable Human Traffick.”¹⁸³ The evocation of Morland’s work gets at the intricate and contemplative expression of the enslaved, which is meant to resonate with the imagined White audience and create sympathy for the anti-slavery cause.

Slave Market is housed at the Carnegie Museum of Art, and its description reads:

Slave Market was painted just before the Civil War as controversy about slavery reached a peak. The artist expresses the anti-slavery view, condemning the trade in human beings as cruel and immoral. Two tragedies in the making are depicted here. In the center, a young woman has been taken away from the man she loves and sold to a dissolute planter; to the left, two traders brutally separate a mother and child in a tableau that evokes the biblical Massacre of the Innocents. This depiction of traders and buyers as violent, predatory, and immoral scoundrels supports the abolitionist view of the slave trade as

¹⁸¹ Steinem 38.

¹⁸² Slave Market. ca. 1850-1860. The Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh, PA. Carnegie Museum of Art. 26 April 2007
<<http://www.cmoa.org/searchcollections/Details.aspx?item=1010870>>.

¹⁸³ Honour 206.

degrading to all.¹⁸⁴

Unfortunately, this description does not lay bare all of the nuances within the painting. First, does the young boy only experience trauma in the form of kinship separation? Second, the positioning and characterization of the mulatto woman speaks to an intersection of color, gender, and sexual violation that destabilizes the abolitionist artistic discourse.



Figure 8. Slave Market

Slave Market is mainly composed of two overlapping and horizontal visual registers. The first is violent and foreground. Within this scene, a mother resists and clings to her child in an attempt to prevent the separation

¹⁸⁴ Slave Market.

of her family. Another mother firmly embraces another child out of fear of a similar fate. She stares at the chaos as the whip prepares to befall on the resistant mother's exposed back. In the same lower register, a man is seated and gazing at a different (trans)action. His tilted head invites the viewer to watch the auctioning of a mulatto woman. The lighting, shadows, and position of the mulatto female body in this background scene eclipse the other actions. This becomes the center, while the darker experiences are marginalized. The intention is to arouse empathy from the White viewer, who can "half" relate to the "half" White woman. All of this is framed by the casual conversation of the man on a horse and the river and riverboats in the backdrop. This background action situates the Slave Market/ slave market as a customary and integral element of this society, a slave society. Furthermore, the entire landscape of the painting is presided over by the "Planter's Hotel". Like the planter's big house presence on the plantation in the American imagination, the Planter's Hotel looms over all actions and creates shadows. The veranda envelops the auctioneer and accountant, and typifies the public's investment in the slaveholder's economic interests. Moreover, the hotel is a place of bedding, and the mulatto woman's proximity to the hotel's entrance alludes to her sexual vulnerability.

The actions in the foremost region of the painting require more scrutiny. The auctioning of Africans and their descendents, like the shackling, branding, and licking on the African coast, is another scene of inspection. Most would read that the mother and son are being torn apart, and that it is a moment of resistance. One White man attempts to suppress the woman's assertion of motherhood and put her back in her proper place as breeder. Another White man inspects the ear cavity of the youth. His violating

examination, like the lick, attempts to make a slave out of the young boy. It is to make him passive, docile, and without masculine control. What if the mother is hoping to stop something much more traumatic and visceral? What does she know that we do not know? What knowledge causes her to temporarily abandon and leave vulnerable her infant to save the older child? The older child is not being pulled away. The painting does not indicate any movement to remove him from her arms. He is only being examined, felt, gazed upon, and gazed into. The gaze of the auction and the accompanying inspection is reductive, dehumanizing, and a sexualized violation.

In addition, the mother knows that the older child is still quite small for fieldwork, carriage “boy” duties, or skilled labor. The purchasing slaveholder would be most interested in the young boy as a house servant or body servant. The location of this potential work places the boy in a more vulnerable position. As house or body servant, his physical closeness to the White male slaveholder transforms him into a potential source of plutonic and/or sexual pleasure.

There are two overall readings of this artistic interpretation of the slave auctioning. On one hand, the painter employs the “tragic” mulatto as a romantic/sentimental trope and central figure to plead to the hearts and minds of abolitionists. On the other hand, the painting reads as an indictment of traditional abolitionist discourse. The “nubile mulatto girl, whose features conform with European aesthetic ideals, is the central figure” in this painting.¹⁸⁵ “The auctioneer indicates the ‘points’ of the girl”, which the painter’s contemporaries and audiences “would have had no doubt of the fate

¹⁸⁵ Honour 206.

of the almost white girl".¹⁸⁶ The recently mature female mulatto highlights the abolitionist preoccupation with female chastity. However, the middle position and more intense lighting of the young mulatto woman encourage the viewer to ignore the darker enslaved people at the anterior in favor of the more relatable simile. While problematic, this fascination with and method to curbing sexual immorality through placing it squarely in the antebellum face, influences the attitude of the painting. The mood is eroticized, and the inspected boy is caught in the crossfire of this gaze.

The choice of body part to exhibit as a site of inspection is further telling. "In nineteenth-century iconographics and physiognomy, ears were constructed, as were genitalia, as organs that exposed pathological essence, particularly of prostitutes and sexual women."¹⁸⁷ Physicians and other medical professionals concerned with physical anthropology and public health attempted to construct scales of sexual deviance by cataloguing facial features, such as the ear.¹⁸⁸ Thus, within the world of 19th century medical conventions and aesthetics, there is a sexual value attached to the aural anatomy. Examining the ear, then, is likened to examining the genitalia for reproductive potential or sadistic pleasure.

Once more, the African on the coast being enslaved is a conquered person, but when introduced to the United States economic and legal system, the enslaved are part commodity. They are bought, sold, and advertised from

¹⁸⁶ Honour 206.

¹⁸⁷ P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Manifest in Signs: The Politics of Sex and Representation in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," Eds. Garfield, Deborah M. and Rafia Zafar, *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 95 n14.

¹⁸⁸ Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1 (Autumn, 1985) 223-4.

the porch of the “Planter’s Hotel”. The health examination of the body of the enslaved is tightly wedded to the success of the auctioning. The inspection is a part of the marketing of the human commodity.

Clothing and a presentable appearance play a role at auctions, but the unclothing of the enslaved body is even more crucial, as communicated in

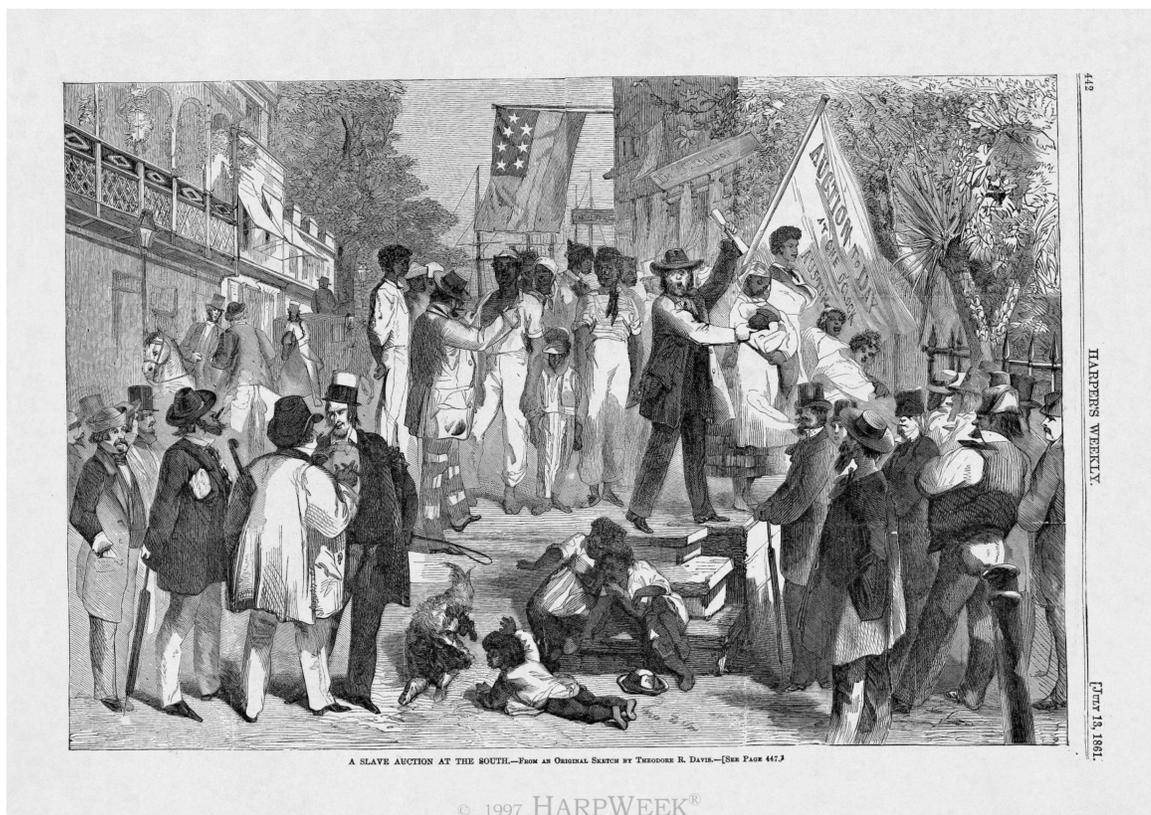


Figure 9. A Slave Auction at the South

“A Slave Auction at the South” (Fig. 9).¹⁸⁹ The act of uncovering reveals the product, which is to be bought and purchased. More importantly, it evidenced the power of the slaveholder and potential slaveholder to conceal and expose the body. Thus, it illustrates the extension of this power over the

¹⁸⁹ Theodore R. Davis, “A Slave Auction at the South,” *Harper’s Weekly* 13 July 1861: 442.

actual body. The enslaved loses the ability to protect his body; there are no barriers between the nudity of the enslaved Black male and the power of the White male purchaser. The nudeness accentuates the vulnerability of the position of enslavement. James Redpath,¹⁹⁰ an anti-slavery English journalist, who made several trips to the South to interview enslaved people, recounts,

The slave was dressed in his pantaloons, shirt and vest. His vest was removed and his breast and neck exposed. His shoes and stockings were next taken off and his legs beneath and knees examined. His other garment was then loosened, and his naked body, from the upper part of the abdomen to the knees, was shamelessly exhibited to the view of the spectators.¹⁹¹

He continues with the orders given to the enslaved to disrobe. “‘Turn around!’ said the body-seller. The negro obeyed, and his uncovered body from the shoulders to the calves of his legs was laid bare to criticism.”¹⁹²

Redpath’s language shows what was done to the enslaved Black male and not what the Black male did voluntarily. The clothing of the enslaved man was “removed”, “taken off” or “loosened”. The inspection becomes a spectacle to determine what and how much can be done to this passive being.

Finally, the “other garment” was removed. Redpath stops short of explicitly describing the moment of full exposure, which doubles as the moment of unabridged subjugation. He states, “from the upper part of the abdomen to the knees”, but the reader understands that it is the genitals that are now on display. It is “shamelessly” displayed. If the enslaved man stands upon a raised platform or stage, which is usually the case, his penis would be at the spectators eye level and inescapable of the slavocratic gaze. As in the

¹⁹⁰ John Koontz, “James Redpath,” *The Literary Encyclopedia* 13 Jun. 2003 The Literary Dictionary Company 26 June 2007 <<http://www.litencyc.com>>.

¹⁹¹ James Redpath, *The Roving Editor: or, Talks with Slaves in the Southern States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968, 1859) 9-10.

¹⁹² Redpath 9-10.

words of Franz Fanon, “in relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level”.¹⁹³ Furthermore, Redpath labels the auctioneer a “body-seller”, alluding that he is in the bartering of bodies and not persons. Like describing the private parts as the area between abdomen and knees, Redpath recounts the buttocks as the place in the middle of the shoulders and calves. Likewise, the buttocks are subjected to criticism and examination. This scene of inspection epitomizes the genital and anal vulnerability of the Black body under slavery.



Figure 10. “Slave Auction at Richmond, Virginia”

Images of slave auctions were popular within the abolitionist press, such as Harper’s Weekly and The Illustrated London News. “A Slave Auction at the South” and “Slave Auction at Richmond, Virginia”, engravings by Theodore R. Davis and an unknown illustrator respectively, demonstrate the

¹⁹³ Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, Trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 157.

ever-present susceptibility to sexualized violation. In “A Slave Auction at Richmond, Virginia”, one observes the moments following a typical examination (Fig. 10).¹⁹⁴ A man steps out from behind the auction block with one boot in tow and one on his right foot. He attempts to re-cover himself by putting back on his shirt. First, he placed the right arm in the sleeve, and now, the left. Being stripped naked was a humiliating, debasing, and depraved act, and a closer examination of the engraving shows a sullen, yet vexed victim (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. “Slave Auction at Richmond, Virginia” (detail)

Like the criticism against the Biard, Slave Market by the unknown painter is accused of being list-like, a quantitative interpretation of oppression.

¹⁹⁴ “Slave Auction at Richmond, Virginia,” The Illustrated London News 27 Sept. 1856: 315.

Sidney Kaplan critiques, “The ‘types’ of the oppressed are all present—but the outcome is a dead illustration for an antislavery potboiler by a goodhearted author”.¹⁹⁵ Why would a critic be so harsh on a painting espousing a humanitarian cause? It is the abolitionist contradiction, which renders these works dead. The castigating treatment and positioning of the Black body threatens freedom and perpetuates the slavocratic gaze.

The unknown artist of Slave Market did not exist in a social vacuum or outside of society’s influences. It is a part of the fabric of society, which justifies the use of abolitionist images to research male on male sexualized violence. Images, like texts, have meaning, which is constructed by society and influenced by that society’s ideology.¹⁹⁶ The abolitionist genre operates within the same system of power relations that subjugate the African. Slavery was pervasive, and

no single human being attempting to make a verbal or visual statement about it could be free from bias. One of the most grotesque inconsistencies in the development of the Americas was the idea that a utopian enterprise could be founded on the backs of slaves. The most benign as well as the most vicious representation of a black person by a white North American artist would have to have worked through this gross contradiction.¹⁹⁷

Hence, abolitionist art is created through a White gaze for a White gaze in a racist, classist, and patriarchal society. The artist had to work through these inconsistencies. Moreover, these visual texts form a narrative by freezing a moment in time, real or imagined, and make use of visible signifiers to fashion its story. All of these visual road signs, such as manacles, the branding iron,

¹⁹⁵ Sidney Kaplan, Notes on the Exhibition, The Portrayal of the Negro in American Painting (Brunswick, Maine: The Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1964).

¹⁹⁶ David Birch, Language, Literature and Critical Practice: Ways of Analysing Text (New York: Routledge, 1989) 15.

¹⁹⁷ Biome xiii-xiv.

the cowhide, and the inspection, point to the subordinate condition of the subject.

The abolitionist image captures the enslaving ceremony and the inspection in a static condition. Although the intent of the abolitionist painter is to be subversive by using the visual to reveal the horrors of slavery, the image, like the behavior it replicates, does the same thing to the body of the victim and the psyche of the witness. Dominating Whites “constructed images of blackness and Black people to uphold and affirm their notions of racial superiority, their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave. From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination.”¹⁹⁸ Then, even abolitionist art, reaffirms racial superiority, political imperialism, and domination by leaving Africans and their descendents in a perpetual state of abuse. The victim is frozen in place to forever be penetrated and violated. It does not question the existence of racial domination or hierarchy, but instead the methods by which it is performed.

Slave Market attempts to use Romanticism to critique slavery, but freezes the abused little boy to be perpetually inspected. In addition, the position of the mulatto woman on the steps between the Whites and Blacks reinstates social Darwinist ideology. “Blacks were not imagined visually as full participants in society so even in sympathetic renderings they were relegated to marginal social roles consistent with racial readings of social order”, such as in the masthead of William Lloyd Garrison’s The Liberator.¹⁹⁹ There is a discernable color prejudice that permeates the painting. In addition

¹⁹⁸ bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992) 2.

¹⁹⁹ Harris 40.

to the hierarchical positioning of the mulatto woman, there is a striking difference between the inspection of the darker-skinned boy and the lighter-skinned woman. While she is gallantly escorted off of the porch of the Planter's Hotel, the little boy's arm is restrained and his head is forced to the side in order to commence the examination.

Abolitionism of slavery is not equivalent to the full emancipation of enslaved Black people. It, "no matter how well intended, was not the same as the victory over racism".²⁰⁰ The visual culture produced by this movement treaded dangerous ground. "Abolitionism promoted new stereotypes of blacks—the movement ... popularized the image of blacks as victims".²⁰¹ The Black man or woman in kneeling supplication is the epitome of this contradictory ideology. "It made emancipation conditional—on condition of conversion, on condition of docility and meekness, on condition of being on one's knees".²⁰² In sum, the image of a docile victim is worthy of emancipation, while a representation that challenges dominant racist stereotypes are not.

Overall, there is more than racial and class oppression going on in the visual culture of the late 18th and 19th century. It displays very gendered and sexualized violations; to which enslaved Black men and women are susceptible. These are visual representations of simultaneous economic and sexual vulnerability of the Black body in the Atlantic world. The medical examination is not the first encounter with enslavement, but inspection codifies the status of property. Unlike the portrayal of the inspected, docile slave, the real enslaved community resisted, like the mother and child in Slave

²⁰⁰ Pieterse 60.

²⁰¹ Pieterse 60.

²⁰² Pieterse 60.

Market. Furthermore, the abolitionist gaze, which is ideologically similar to the slavocratic gaze, transcends time, and while attempting to be subversive, reinstates uneven power dynamics over and over again. The African is perpetually licked, perpetually probed, perpetually inspected.

Chapter 3

Re-reading Narratives: Luke Resists Enjoyment

The natural place to start an investigation of narrative, memory, and slavery, I suppose, would be with that genre of literature known as “the slave narrative.”

-W. J. T. Mitchell²⁰³

...[T]here is no shadow of law to protect [the enslaved] from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men.

-Harriet Jacobs²⁰⁴

The ubiquitous threat of male on male sexual violence, as exhibited by Trans-Atlantic visual culture, enlightens the reading of U. S. slave narratives, particularly Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, and Douglass’s second narrative, My Bondage My Freedom. As previously acknowledged, a perusal of abolitionist art impresses upon the viewer that the enslaved Black was a static, helpless, and pitiful rag doll subject to the power and desire of White men. Except for the image of the fighting mother in Slave Market, the paintings—while effectively evidencing the threat of male-male rape—are absent of resistance. The power and desire displayed by the sexualized violence in the visual culture is only one aspect of the complex interactions that made up the plantation. Keep in mind; the master-slave relationship is built on interaction. While one side attempts to use violence to increase power, the other employs resistance to gain ground. Thus, incorporating

²⁰³ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Narrative, Memory, and Slavery,” Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) 183.

²⁰⁴ Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001, 1861) 26.

resistance as a unit of analysis illuminates the methods employed by the enslaved to negotiate their sexuality.

From insurrections and revolts to day-to-day opposition, such as breaking tools or feigning illness, the resistance of enslaved Blacks on the plantation acquires myriad shapes. However, the next two chapters are concerned with resistance, as it existed on the micro-level. Personal interaction between the enslaved Black and the White male slaveholder is central, since this is also the location of sexual violation. In Incidents, the resistance of the violated male, Luke, exists within an already intricate network of Jacobs's own discursive struggle. While Douglass's violation only occurs a couple of times, his entire narrative, like Jacobs's, becomes a gendered journey to achieve and protect a 'normative' sexuality.

In simplest terms, the very creation of the slave narrative is an act of resistance. It is not unlike the act of complaining about the master in the courtyard of the quarters or whispers about the advancement of the Union Army at the water well. It is insolent speech put to paper. It is a means of expressing dissent and spreading knowledge, and all the while making others literate. In this aspect, it is a part of the African American oral tradition, and "the slave narrative represents the attempts of blacks to *write themselves into being*."²⁰⁵ The slave narrative dares to utter what is forbidden and outlawed. It cries out that the narrator is not a 'slave'.

However, the slave narrative is not without flaw. Some would argue that the slave narrative falls short of resistance, due its relationship to genre.

²⁰⁵ Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Introduction, The Slave Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) xxiii.

For example, Raymond Hedin criticizes “the formal framework of the slave narrative”.²⁰⁶ The structure provided by “the framing letters signal the unavoidable presence of the white audience” and the White editors.²⁰⁷ The middle text becomes dependent upon the framing text. The framing letter is like an abolitionist version of the pass—granting perpetual permission to the fugitive to escape. Thus, this pervasive editorial presence is another form of the abolitionist contradiction.

Yet, while the narrative is dependent on the framing letters, the White authors of the framing letters are dependent on the slave narrative. This middle text is the evidence for the abolitionist cause. This staging of the body text

is also not unlike the staging of abolitionism, the carting out of black bodies onto the stage to bear witness to their authentic experiences of slavery. It was, after all, common for the slave narrators to deliver their testimonies orally on the abolitionist ‘lecture circuit’ before the accounts were committed to paper and published as narratives.²⁰⁸

This “lecture circuit” framing is like the auction block. It prepares the Black body text and the Black body as text to be a gaze-worthy spectacle. In the search for truth, “Black authors and speakers were valued precisely because their bodies stood in its rhetorical stead and displaced Southern apologist versions” of plantation life.²⁰⁹ The abused, mistreated, and scarred body stood as a truth-telling placeholder. Still a relic, the tortured body is now in service

²⁰⁶ Raymond Hedin, “Strategies of Form in the American Slave Narrative,” The Art of Slave Narrative: Original Essays in Criticism and Theory, Eds. John Sekora and Darwin T. Turner (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, 1982) 25.

²⁰⁷ Hedin 25.

²⁰⁸ Dwight A. McBride, Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony (New York: New York University Press, 2001) 4.

²⁰⁹ Foreman 77.

to the faith of abolitionism. And when the body was not readily available, the narrative must recreate the spectacle.

Like the visual manifestations of abolitionism, the literature borrows from Romanticism. “In the United States, literary Romanticism (roughly 1836 to 1865) is nearly concurrent with the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society (1833) and the rise of the Garrisonian variety of abolitionism, culminating in the epic conflict of the Civil War”.²¹⁰ The slave narrative, in particular, is influenced by the techniques of the sentimental novel tradition. The uncovering of the true brutality of slavery is meant to evoke emotions and sentiment. Nevertheless, the slave narrative often does what the art does not and cannot. The antebellum slave narrative usually documents the autobiographical and heroic escape from slavery. This is still somewhat romantic, but by the end of the narrative an “image” of emancipation and humanity is “painted”. However, the narrator simultaneously expresses resistance, since the slave narrative also borrows heavily from the African American oral tradition. The use of signifyin, testifyin, and the trickster figure creates a space, where resistance to the editorial presence and the abolitionist contradictions is possible.

Fugitive Slave Law and the Right of Enjoyment

Toward the end of Incidents, Harriet Jacobs recounts the story of Luke, an enslaved boy submitted to vulgar and obscene abuses. Luke’s story appears in the form of a flashback, and is framed by Jacob’s chapter long condemnation of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. The Fugitive Slave Law gave nearly unbridled entitlement to members of the slavocracy to recapture former enslaved Blacks, who escaped to the North, and threatened the

²¹⁰ McBride 18.

freedom of the free Black populations of the North and South. By situating Luke within this chapter, Jacobs “unveils” the relationship amongst the White male’s ‘Right of Enjoyment’ (of labor and body), the Fugitive Slave Law, and male-male sexualized violence rape against the enslaved Black male body. Within the sexual and textual milieu of Incidents, and Luke and Jacobs, respectively, resists and reverses the ‘right of enjoyment’.

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850²¹¹ was created in reaction to the waning effectiveness of the original fugitive slave act passed in 1793, which threatened stability of the slaveholding system. It forced federal and municipal marshals and deputy marshals to apprehend any alleged runaway. Even if the only evidence was the claimant's sworn testimony of ownership, the marshal had to make the arrest or face 1,000-dollar fine. As an incentive, the act allowed marshals that succeeded in capturing alleged runaways to charge a fee. Any free person found aiding the accused or preventing the arrest (by providing food or shelter) could face upward to six months of incarceration and a 1,000-dollar fine. Furthermore, the act sanctioned the use of violence and nullified the testimony of the suspected fugitives. The slaveholder, his attorney, or hired official had the authority “to use such reasonable force and restraint as may be necessary, under the circumstances of the case, to take and remove such fugitive person back to the State or Territory whence he or she may have escaped”.²¹² It further reads, “In no trial or hearing under this act shall the testimony of such alleged fugitive be admitted in evidence”.²¹³ The alleged runaway is physically and orally bound. He or she is silenced (again or for

²¹¹ Fugitive Slave Act of September 18, 1850, ch. 60, 9 Stat. 462.

²¹² Fugitive Slave Act

²¹³ Fugitive Slave Act

the first time) into nonbeing and property.

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 ushers in a re-codification of the White male's right to property and right of enjoyment of said property, which had been in constant evolution since the colonial period. The United States law of slavery undoubtedly began in the early constructions of legal discourse in Britain's American mainland colonies. There is no single legislative flashpoint to look to as the 'beginning' of legalized slavery. However, slavery always existed culturally in the United States, and was in constant legal development.²¹⁴ Slave law was not static. The legitimization of slavery depended upon the passage of statutes at the provincial level "in response to particular problems perceived as urgent".²¹⁵ By the eve of the American Revolution, many statutes were in place to define the role of the African in society, and the legal status of slavery was in unison throughout the colonies. "When the statutes, by the mid-eighteenth century, had defined [the] four basic elements of slavery—lifetime status, *partus sequitur ventrem*, racial identification, and slave-as-chattel—slavery as a legal institution was fully fledged".²¹⁶ What is of most interest to this square re-reading of Incidents is the classification of the enslaved African as chattel.

The foundational legal documents of the British American colonies are infused with a discourse concerning possession and property. For example, much of the Charter of Carolina of 1663, like most colonial charters, revolves around granting 'rights' and privileges, particularly the 'Right of Enjoyment'.

²¹⁴ Jonathan L. Alpert, "The Origin of Slavery in the United State—The Maryland Precedent," American Journal of Legal History, 14 (1970): 189-98; and William W. Wiecek, "The Statutory Law of Slavery and Race in the Thirteen Mainland Colonies of British North America," William and Mary Quarterly, 34 (Spring 1977): 259-260.

²¹⁵ Wiecek 259.

²¹⁶ Wiecek 264; "Partus sequitur ventrem" refers to the condition of the child following the condition of the mother.

In an effort to populate the Carolina colony, the 1663 Charter grants all “people” (read: White men) who enter the colony and their male descendants the authority to

inherit or otherwise purchase and receive, take, hold, buy and possess any lands, tenements or hereditaments within the same places, and them may occupy, possess and enjoy, give, sell, aliene and bequeathe; as likewise all liberties, franchises and priviledges of this our kingdom of England, and of other our dominions aforesaid, and may freely and quietly have, possess and enjoy, as our liege people born within the same, without the least molestation, vexation, trouble or grievance of us, our heirs and successors, any statute, act, ordinance, or provision to the contrary notwithstanding.²¹⁷

Charters gave the colonizer the ability to hold property without obstruction of the government, which naturalizes the right to benefit from the ownership of property. Through American slave law, the African is objectified and defined as property. By objectifying the person, labor is not the only “hereditament” / property to be possessed. The whole body becomes an object available to be occupied and enjoyed by the owner.

The right to enjoy the enslaved relates to slavery’s characteristics as a total institution and the resulting ability of any White male to wield power over the Black body. Saidiya Hartman calls the enslaved, “the property of enjoyment”. “From the vantage point of the everyday relations of slavery,” Hartman writes, “enjoyment, broadly speaking, defined the parameters of racial relations, since in practice all Whites were allowed a great degree of latitude in regard to uses of the enslaved”.²¹⁸ Overall, the stimulating conversation Hartman creates between “enjoyment” and racial chattel slavery

²¹⁷ Francis Newton Thorpe, *The Federal and State Constitutions Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909).

²¹⁸ Hartman 23.

speaks to the ambivalent social status of the enslaved male and his susceptibility to punishment and desire.

According to Black's Law Dictionary, "enjoy" is "to have, possess, and use with satisfaction; to occupy or have benefit of".²¹⁹ In comparison with "enjoy", the definition for "enjoyment" has a similar tone, but incorporates pleasure. "Enjoyment" is "the exercise of a right; the possession and fruition of a right, privilege or incorporeal hereditament. Comfort, consolation, contentment, ease, happiness, pleasure and satisfaction. Such includes the beneficial use, interest and purpose to which property may be put, and implies right to profits and income there-from".²²⁰ By legally rendering the enslaved person a chattel property, American slave law in conversation with colonial charters makes enslaved people commodities of "comfort, consolation, contentment, ease, happiness, pleasure and satisfaction." Thus, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 restores the White slaveholding male's right of enjoyment. The statute not only extends the reach of White Southern male enjoyment, but also nationalizes the vulnerability of the Black body to the pleasure and possession of all White men.

Enjoying Luke

Similar to Frederick Douglass's situation, Luke's original owner dies, "leaving a son and daughter heirs to his large fortune".²²¹ The father's property, including enslaved people, was apportioned between the son and daughter. "In the division of the slaves, Luke was included in the son's

²¹⁹ Black, Henry Campbell. *Black's Law Dictionary: Definitions of the Terms and Phrases of American and English Jurisprudence, Ancient and Modern*. 6th ed. (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1990) 529.

²²⁰ Black 529.

²²¹ Jacobs 148.

portion".²²² The parceling out of Luke's body, like a work of art or piece of furniture, codifies his condition as property.

Luke's new owner was a "young man", who had become accustomed "to the vices growing out of the 'patriarchal institution,' and when he went to the North, to complete his education, he carried his vices with him".²²³ He returned to the South in poor health, "deprived of the use of his limbs, by excessive dissipation".²²⁴ "Dissipation" could refer to a host of excesses, such as drunkenness or gambling. Jacobs introduces his dissipation as something related and unique to "the patriarchal institution". The use of "patriarchal" to describe slavery is a sophisticated critique, which speaks to the types of gendered vice, which develops on the plantation. Thus, Jacobs implies that the slaveholder has contracted a venereal disease through excessive sexual encounters. The depiction establishes a mood of moral decay and sexual excess.

It became Luke's charge to serve and care for "his bed-ridden master, whose despotic habits were greatly increased by exasperation at his own helplessness".²²⁵ The "bed-ridden master" is irritated by his new sense of powerlessness, a self-perceived femininity. With this feeling of helplessness, came the need to express power over the will of Luke. "He kept a cowhide beside him, and, for the most trivial occurrence, he would order his attendant to bare his back, and kneel beside the couch, while he whipped him till his strength was exhausted. Some days he was not allowed to wear anything but his shirt, in order to be in readiness to be flogged".²²⁶ The narrator leads the

²²² Jacobs 148.

²²³ Jacobs 148-9.

²²⁴ Jacobs 149.

²²⁵ Jacobs 149.

²²⁶ Jacobs 149.

reader to believe that Luke's despotic slaveholder flogs him on the back. However, if the corporeal target of the whipping is the back, why is Luke made to wear a shirt without pants or underwear? Luke is made to strip in an effort to construct a more effective abuse. The forced nudity is a gendered violation, due to the exposure of Luke's genitals. Like the enslaved man on the auction block, Luke's penis and buttocks are in plain view of slaveholder. He is vulnerable to the gaze of the despotic, bed-ridden slaveholder, and the forced nudity is an expression of power over and enjoyment of human property.

The account of Luke within the chapter dedicated to critiquing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 acts as a text within a text. It operates as evidence for the indictment Jacobs's brings against the government's support of slavery. "If the slightest resistance was offered, the town constable was sent for to execute the punishment" and suppress Luke's resistance.²²⁷ As a result of Luke's initial resistance, the government plays a significant role in the molestation of Luke. Luke is also expected to assume a passive position and when he resists, it threatens the right of enjoyment. Like the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, the government steps in to abuse Luke. It reinstates the temporarily threatened right. When the master's paralysis spread to his arms, the role of the town constable in the mistreatment increased. "The arm of his tyrant grew weaker, and was finally palsied; and then the constable's services were in constant requisition".²²⁸ The constable's presence represents the role of the government in maintaining the master-slave power dynamic. It reinforces the despot's right to enjoyment. It is the law that protects the

²²⁷ Jacobs 149.

²²⁸ Jacobs 149.

master's right of enjoyment and it is the law in this case that actively participates in this enjoyment.

It is the most telling passage in Jacobs's narrative, but the "veil", gaps, silences, and slippages exist. These veils and gaps help Jacobs's case against Fugitive Slave Act, because it employs Luke's body as evidence. It reveals the extremity of the institution of slavery. Jacobs's writes,

As he lay there on his bed, a mere degraded wreck of manhood, he took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism; and if Luke hesitated to submit to his orders, the constable was immediately sent for. Some of these freaks were of a nature too filthy to be repeated. When I fled from the house of bondage, I left poor Luke still chained to the bedside of this cruel and disgusting wretch.²²⁹

The veil appears in the line, "some of these freaks were of a nature too filthy to be repeated." This line does not necessarily equate to male-male sexual violence, but it is a thinly veiled allusion to an "incident". At first glance, it appears to be most logical to simply read it as a severe flogging or any nonsexual form of torture. The chaining of a stripped Luke to the bed further elucidates the sexual tone of the abuses Luke experiences. The quarere--reading becomes understandable when this scene is read in the context of the entire narrative.

The ninth chapter of Incidents is filled with examples of the types of punishments and violence reserved for the offenses of slaves. Most of these recountings involve enslaved males. Many of these examples also involve nudity or partial nudity, but the similarities to Luke's ordeal ends there. Unlike the story of Luke, Jacobs is extremely illustrative of extreme punishments and inhumane treatment. Describing the tortures on Mr. Litch's

²²⁹ Jacobs 147.

plantation, the narrator recalls, "Various were the punishments resorted to. A favorite one was to tie a rope round a man's body, and suspend him from the ground. A fire was kindled over him, from which was suspended a piece of fat pork. As this cooked, the scalding drops of fat continually fell on the bare flesh".²³⁰ The reader is a witness to torturous despotism. The narrator continues about the abusive actions of Mr. Litch's brother. His bloodhounds "were let loose on a runaway, and if they tracked him, they literally tore the flesh from his bones".²³¹ Jacobs accuses another neighbor, Mr. Conant, of a similar brand of brutishness. Mr. Conant's "body servant gave him some offence. He was divested of his clothes, except his skirt, whipped, and tied to a large tree in front of the house. It was a stormy night in winter the wind blew bitterly cold, and the boughs of the old tree crackled under falling sleet".²³² Even begging from the Conant family members did not even sway Mr. Conant's brutality. "I could tell of more slaveholders as cruel as those I have described. They are not exceptions to the general rule".²³³ All of the descriptions found within this chapter are explicit and painted with a gruesome hue. Jacobs feels well within her narrative morality to reveal the gory details of these macabre rituals. Matter of fact, Jacobs even expresses the ability and willingness to relate more stories of similar torture. Meanwhile the retelling of Luke's 'punishment' goes without the same details due to its graphic/dirty/'filthy' nature.

These examples of torture are often variations of flogging, but what is it about Luke's torture, which is unspeakable? Jacobs's telling of Luke's story is

²³⁰ Jacobs 40.

²³¹ Jacobs 40.

²³² Jacobs 41.

²³³ Jacobs 43.

more like the descriptions of the threatened sexual abuse from her master, Dr. Flint. In her under-describing, Jacobs asserts, “the degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would be willingly believe”.²³⁴ Again, she appears silent, and her words are veiled. However, the narrator’s admission informs the re-reading. By turning away from the narrative to the reader, she challenges her imagined spectator to think of what one cannot believe, or refuses to believe, and this is the experience of the enslaved. She describes the particulars by precisely under-describing them. Within this perceived silence, Jacobs informs the reading.

While arguing against simply grafting “literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions” on to the African American literary tradition, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. maintains, “each literary tradition, at least implicitly, contains within it an argument for how it can be read”.²³⁵ Gates reasons for an interpretation of African American literary production, which includes and understands signification as a device. He makes use of the verbal tricksterism of Esu-Elegbara as a metaphor for the signifyin theory. Jacobs’s veiled diction is more like the “doubled-voiced utterance” of Esu,²³⁶ and the narrator leaves little hints of sexual assault along the way. Signifyin is to reconstitute old words with new and sometimes anti-normative meaning. Jacobs’s “doubled-voiced utterance” is her authorial resistance. Within this trickster tradition she tells not just of Luke’s abuse but also constructs him as a resistant agent.

²³⁴ Jacobs 26.

²³⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Introduction to The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism” African American Literary Theory: A Reader, Ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 340.

²³⁶ Gates, “Introduction to The Signifying Monkey” 341.

Her rape is never explicitly described, unlike the physical abuse, which includes step-by-step portrayal of scalding bare skin or tearing flesh. However, it is an unavoidable reading because Jacob's narrative is inherently a sexual narrative. Karen Sanchez-Eppler argues that "sexual harassment, sexual intercourse, and childbirth are not tangential to a narrative of enslavement, escape, and emancipation; they are that narrative".²³⁷ As revealed by the plot of Incidents, it is undoubtedly a sexual narrative.

When contextualized within the abolitionist sentimental/romantic time period, Jacob's double-talk becomes logical, and a re-reading of it becomes inescapable.

'Delicacy' and 'modesty,' virtues valorized in women's, and even in African American male's narratives, allowed for and even demanded that narrators systematically come short of the 'truth,' that they maneuver in the field of what I call the undertell. Tracing the signs of the undertell complicates Jacobs's traditional script and offers an alternative reading: that Dr. Norcom did rape Jacobs, rather than that Linda triumphed over Dr. Flint, not only in her material escape, but in her sexual one. [...] Rather, I mean to call into question the politics of transparency that often frame our consideration of Incidents and our approach to black sentimental writing, and I would like to offer less determinate, if more tortuous, readings of the relation between coded silences and "truth," between signs and literal script.²³⁸

The "undertell" is the delicate balance between giving an abolitionist audience what they want/need/desire, while working within the shifting mores of the 19th century. The coded silences and signs are constituents of the truth. "Jacobs may well have understood her implicit contract with her

²³⁷ Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 84.

²³⁸ P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Manifest in Signs: The Politics of Sex and Representation in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays, Eds. Garfield, Deborah M. and Rafia Zafar (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 77.

readers, and could expect her White bourgeois female audience to play its part—to perceive, but be ‘delicate’ enough never to admit to the comprehension of the sexually determined black ‘back regions’ of her textual performance.”²³⁹ Jacobs’s readers exist within the same historical context and are equipped with the tools to decipher the coded silences. These readers are a part of a writer-reader contract and are required to decode Jacobs’s description of incidents and sexual exploitation. Remaining virtuous and giving the abolitionist the required body of evidence is Jacobs’s paradoxical situation. The context and the attempt to be delicate generate “the very codes through which those who would be readers of the slave narrative understand the experience of slavery”.²⁴⁰

Jacobs ‘undertells’ that the earliest awareness of her sexual vulnerability comes when she turns fifteen. At this age, which Jacobs describes as “a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl”, Dr. Flint “began to whisper foul words in my ear”.²⁴¹ The diction used to represent what was whispered is all coded. Dr. Flint’s words are meant “to corrupt the pure principles” of the young Jacobs “with unclean images”, which Jacobs responds with “disgust and hatred”.²⁴² The adjectives that under-describe her principles, Dr. Flint’s images, and her response are the codes. It is meant to lead the reader to the image of a molested Jacobs. The ravishing of her ear meant the ravishing of her mind, and by extension her body. The sheer persistence of Dr. Flint denotes the right of enjoyment.

²³⁹ Foreman 78.

²⁴⁰ McBride 3.

²⁴¹ Jacobs 26.

²⁴² Jacobs 26.

There are no words that explicitly name these ‘incidents’ as sexual or of a sexual nature. However, certain codes are written in to signify this as a sexual incident or imbued with sexual threat. Very similar codes are sprinkled throughout Jacobs’s description of Luke’s ordeal. If the contemporary reader frees himself or herself of the heterosexist lens, then interpretations of slavery would not require a male master-female enslaved formula for sexual violence. This type of reading reveals that the text does not wear the veil, but that it is the reader who is veiled.

Lydia Maria Child, the editor, in the introduction further elucidates the un-veiling of the “delicate” and “indelicate” subjects to which Jacobs calls attention. Child specifically credits Incidents as a narrative that reveals the intersections of sexuality and slavery. As acknowledged by Child, “This peculiar phase of Slavery has generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn”.²⁴³ The “peculiar phase”, which Child mentions, is sex and its uses within the peculiar institution.

Like the claim made by Lydia Maria Child, the veil is withdrawn from the primary document. The logic follows as such: An antebellum reader would be receptive to the signs, because sodomy was deemed a behavior and not yet linked exclusively to an identity, such as homosexuality.²⁴⁴ The audience would be outraged by this (queer) interpretation, but not resistant to it. And this outrage is the intended product. In terms of identity, if there was

²⁴³ Child, Introduction 6.

²⁴⁴ For a discussion of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century “invention of the homosexual”, See Katz, Jonathan Ned. Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary. New York: Harper & Row, 1983. 137-174.

no homosexual, the heterosexual was not yet created either.²⁴⁵ Thus, anyone was able to commit sodomy, buggery, or the “unspeakable” sin, which is reflected in the language of anti-sodomy law. Commenting on early American sodomy laws, Jonathan Katz admits, “Sodomy was not a secret, not unspoken, not unnamed.”²⁴⁶ As a result of the capital status of sodomy, Katz maintains that it “was also raised to a relatively high degree of public consciousness”.²⁴⁷ It is a law not against a person, but the legislation is opposed to the “depraved” act. The antebellum reading public understood sodomy and buggery to be behaviors and not strictly linked to a rigid identity. Consequently, everyone had the potential to participate in same-sex sodomy, including slaveholders.

The opening words of the published narrative are the preface written by Jacobs, but signed “Linda Brent.” This preface appears before the introductory letter. Jacobs’s foremost positioning of her voice pushes back against the White editorial presence. She writes, “Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction. I am aware that some of my adventures may seem incredible; but they are, nevertheless, strictly true”.²⁴⁸ Jacobs acknowledges that her narrative may seem unbelievable and that some of the events she illustrates may appear unimaginable, but she insures that what she has written is true. She encourages her audience to read and receive the text with an unbiased lens. Jacobs’s plea attempts to crush our doubt of Luke’s degradation. She continues, “I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my descriptions fall far short of the facts. I have

²⁴⁵ For a complete discussion of this concept, see Katz, Jonathan Ned. The Invention of Heterosexuality. New York: Dutton, 1995.

²⁴⁶ Katz, Gay/Lesbian Almanac 40.

²⁴⁷ Katz, Gay/Lesbian Almanac 40.

²⁴⁸ Jacobs, Harriet. Preface. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001, 1861) 5.

concealed the names of places, and given persons fictitious names”.²⁴⁹ The preface is an admission to the use of coded and doubled language. She confesses that the degradation in Incidents is mild compared to what Jacobs had witnessed. If the text is not fictitious but fell short of the facts, then there are truths alluded to but not expounded.

Jacob’s Insolence and Luke’s Trickery

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is a narrative of struggle and resistance, like most slave narratives. Jacobs’ attempt to make literate her experience would be considered an act of insolence in the antebellum South. Yet, she is talking back. It is what Harryette Mullen calls “resistant orality”.²⁵⁰ She is testifyin’ against the Fugitive Slave Act. Reflecting on enslaved life, Jacobs and others in the community “were aware that to speak of them was an offence that never went unpunished”.²⁵¹ To speak of the degradation of slavery, as degradation is insolence—talking back.

Central to the Fugitive Slave Act was that the alleged runaway could not testify on his or her behalf, but the slave narrative functions as a resistant substitute for an affidavit. In this light I would like to evoke the African American oral tradition of “testifyin” as resistance. As elucidated by Geneva Smitherman in Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America, “testifyin” is a “speech event” and a verbal witnessing by someone who can recall the potency, authority, and veracity of the collective experience.²⁵² Incidents is overall Jacob’s testimony against slavery, but her

²⁴⁹ Jacobs, Preface 5.

²⁵⁰ Harryette Mullen, “Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Our Nig, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, and Beloved,” *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, Ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 244-5.

²⁵¹ Jacobs 27.

²⁵² Geneva Smitherman, Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture, and Education in African America (New York: Routledge, 2000) 8, 212.

use of Luke is an indictment of slavery's extreme despotism. And Jacobs adds to her witnessing / testifying resistance by casting Luke as a trickster figure—a self-enjoyed trickster. An indispensable feature of these early African American autobiographies is “the use of deceit and the trickster motif as thematic, stylistic, and structural elements in many of the narratives. In most cases, the narrative can only exist because the narrator has managed, through masking, forgery, or lying, to reach a place of relative security from the power of slaveholders”.²⁵³ Luke's deceitful role as the trickster in *Incidents* is critical. It is both, a site of resistance and a method to restore humanity to the dehumanized Luke.

Years later, Harriet Jacobs met Luke by chance in New York. Luke had escaped from the speculators, who were charged with selling him after his bed-ridden master died. Jacobs mentions to him the Fugitive Slave Law, and Luke shares with Jacobs his intentions to make off to Canada. Then, Jacobs inquires about the money necessary to travel to Canada. Luke responds,

I tuk car fur dat. I'd bin workin all my days fur dem cussed whites, an got no pay but kicks and cuffs. So I tought dis nigger had a right to money nuff to bring him to de Free States. Massa Henry he lib till ebery body vish him dead; an ven he did die, I knowed de debbil would hab him, an vouldn't vant him to bring his money 'long too. So I tuk some of his bills, and put 'em in de pocket of his ole trousers. An ven he was buried, dis nigger ask fur dem ole trousers, an dey gub 'em to me.²⁵⁴

Luke amuses himself, lets out a little chuckle and continues, “You see I didn't *steal* it; dey *gub* it to me. I tell you, I had mighty hard time to keep de speculator from finding it; but he didn't git it”.²⁵⁵ Luke's reversal of the

²⁵³ Keith Byerman, “We Wear the Mask: Deceit as Theme and Style in Slave Narratives,” *The Art of Slave Narrative: Original Essays in Criticism and Theory*, Eds. John Sekora and Darwin T. Turner (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, 1982) 70.

²⁵⁴ Jacobs 149-50.

²⁵⁵ Jacobs 150.

dominant moral code evidences his resistant thinking. His logic does not reflect the happy darkie stereotype. Luke is like the resistant trickster figure of the African and African American oral and literary tradition. Luke's behavior operates somewhere between animal and John-the-slave tricksterism. He demonstrates both cleverness of the animal tales and mother wit of the John-the-slave tales.²⁵⁶ Thus, executing his plan to dupe the family of Henry to "gub" him the pants with the planted money is thoughtful act of resistance. Furthermore, when Luke shares his story of escape, he entertains himself. He finds delight in his outwitting the slavocracy. He turns White male privilege and the Right of Enjoyment on its head and enjoys himself. Luke possesses, comforts, and pleasures himself.

In the African American oral tradition, the trickster is a central character of many folktales in which an animal is a personified hero. The trickster is crafty and employs double-dealing (and double-language) to defeat larger animals and overcome oppression.²⁵⁷ While the abolitionism would paint Luke's heroism as a crisis of morality due to enslavement, it is not. Jacobs pays lip service to this sentiment, but the rhetorical laughter of Luke overshadows Jacob's plea. It is what Winston Napier calls "resistant signification".

Such oppositional semantics represents arguably the first line of available systematic counteraction by Africans in the Americas and involves a traditional self-conscious play with language, a ready reception of signifying freeplay as a survivalistic tool of life. In the proto-deconstructive spirit of a trickster, African

²⁵⁶ Byerman 70-1.

²⁵⁷ For more in-depth treatment of the "trickster", see Zora Neale Hurston, Mules and Men; Jay Edwards, The Afro-American Trickster Tale: A Structural Analysis; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism; John W. Roberts, From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom; Robert Farris Thompson, Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy

American slaves, for example, constantly had to deform signature, sign, and context in order to undermine and survive in a world where, leaving them at the mercy of tyrannical whimsy, laws negated the racial equality of black being.²⁵⁸

Luke, undoubtedly, plays with language. He makes use of a signifying freeplay to establish the difference between “steal” and “gub”. Similar to David Walker’s re-conceptualization of natural rights in his Appeal, Luke deconstructs and reconstructs the Right of Enjoyment for his personal freedom by forcing it to “work ideologically and structurally against itself”.²⁵⁹ Luke, now, possesses himself, and has the ability to enjoy his body, labor, and all social and economic benefits of his physical work.

²⁵⁸ Winston Napier, Introduction, African American Literary Theory: A Reader, Ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 7.

²⁵⁹ Napier 7.

Chapter 4

Re-reading Narratives: Frederick Douglass and 'Resistant Masculinity'

Because the black slave belonged chiefly to a commercial order of domestic livestock, his or her sex was not the same determinant of power or protection it was in the community of slaveholders.

-Maurice O. Wallace²⁶⁰

Could the reader have seen him gently leading me by the hand—as he sometimes did—patting me on the head, speaking to me in soft, caressing tones and calling me his 'little Indian boy'

-Frederick Douglass²⁶¹

Within his two antebellum autobiographies, Frederick Douglass offers dramatic glimpses at sexualized plantation violence and the Black male's resistance against it. Douglass's three major episodes with male on male sexualized violence illustrate his negotiation with the gaze, traumatic memory, and resistance. The autobiographies of the former enslaved, through "constructing an alternative history that challenges hegemonic ways of knowing," are activism and resistance.²⁶² Douglass's texts are no different. His concern with the attainment and maintenance of his masculinity is central to the narrative milieu, and manifests in Douglass's reversal of the master-slave dialectic and his editorial presence.

De-gendering the Nude

On the plantation, there is an overall attempt to de-gender enslaved Black males through symbolic re-gendering. The de-gendering serves as part legitimization for sexualized transgressions and part maintenance of social

²⁶⁰ Maurice O. Wallace, Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775-1995 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) 85.

²⁶¹ Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom, Ed. John Stauffer (New York: Modern Library, 2003, 1855) 33-4.

²⁶² Margo V. Perkins, Introduction, Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000) xii.

inequality. This de-gendering process is played out through the punishments. For example, “a more sophisticated punishment was devised by Louisiana planter, Bennet H. Barrow, who made one habitual troublemaker ‘ware womens cloths for running away & without the least cause’”.²⁶³ Clothing is given a significant role in plantation management. In the preceding example, clothing has a symbolic relationship with gender, and the Louisiana planter considered the forceful alteration of these symbols a punishment. Similarly, the absence of clothing emphasizes the power of the slavocracy and also functions as punishment or a part of a larger punishment.

Henry Bibb helps elucidate the nullifying effects of nudity. In the Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Bibb describes the preparation for one of his most brutal floggings.

At the sound of the overseer’s horn, all the slaves came forward and witnessed my punishment. My clothing was stripped off and I was compelled to lie down on the ground with my face to the earth. Four stakes were driven in the ground, to which my hands and feet were tied. Then the overseer stood over me with the lash and laid it on according to the Deacon’s order.²⁶⁴

This is the punishment administered for Bibb’s flight. As previously argued, the stripping down and exposure of the genitals of the enslaved is a reductive spectacle. It signifies the loss of control, and according to patriarchal discourse, the loss of manhood. This time it is not on the auction block, but accompanies a flogging. Bibb is not only exposed to the White master and overseer, but also to his fellow community members who are forced to witness.

²⁶³ William Kauffman Scarborough, The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984) 93.

²⁶⁴ Henry Bibb, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, I Was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives, Ed. Yuval Taylor, Vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999) 67.

As Jacob's eloquently captures in Incidents, slavery is just as much about controlling the borders of gender and sexuality, as it is about controlling the borders of race. Douglass recognizes this and offers gendered resistance against gendered violation. In Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself (1845) and My Bondage and My Freedom (1855), his first willful act of resistance arises at the threat of nudity and the slavocratic gaze.

When Captain Anthony, one of Douglass's early masters, dies without leaving a will, Douglass is thrown into a situation comparable to Jacobs's Luke. An appraisal of Captain Anthony's property is necessary to ensure the proper division of assets, which includes the enslaved people. The enslaved are subjected to an examination to determine their worth, and a scene of inspection ensues:

We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination. Silvery-headed age and sprightly youth, maids and matrons, had to undergo the same indelicate inspection. At this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder.²⁶⁵

The inspection is "brutalizing" and its reductive qualities are accentuated by the presence of the horses, sheep, and swine. In addition, women, men and children experience the debasing and humiliating scrutiny of the slavocratic gaze—"the intensified degradation of the spectacle."²⁶⁶ Like Biard, Douglass illustrates the comparable vulnerability of the Black male body. Douglass

²⁶⁵ Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself, Ed. Williams L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997, 1845) 35-6.

²⁶⁶ Douglass, My Bondage 94.

characterizes the inspections as “narrow” and “indelicate.” The animals and humans received the same type of examination, without much variation between the two or sensitivity to the human condition or anatomy. This solidifies the enslaved person’s subhuman status, and Douglass exclaims, “Manhood lost in chattelhood!”²⁶⁷

After much movement, Douglass finally comes under the ownership of Thomas Auld, again. However, Auld found him unsuitable for enslavement and sent him to Edward Covey, the “nigger-breaker”.²⁶⁸ At Covey’s, one of Douglass’s first assignments was to collect wood in a cart attached to untamed oxen, but Covey disapproved of his performance. In order to discipline Douglass, Covey decides to flog him.

He then went to a large gum-tree, and with his axe cut three large switches, and, after trimming them up neatly with his pocket-knife, he ordered me to take off my clothes. I made him no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made him no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after. This whipping was the first of a number just like it, and for similar offences.²⁶⁹

Douglass refuses to be an object of the violent spectacle. He is outraged by the request, and inwardly thinks, “If you will beat me [...] you shall do so over my clothes”.²⁷⁰ The full bareness of the abuse challenges Douglass’s notions of humanity and manhood. It is gendered violence. Conversely, Douglass’s silent refusal temporarily destabilizes Covey’s racialized patriarchy and paternalism.

²⁶⁷ Douglass, *My Bondage* 94.

²⁶⁸ Douglass, *Narrative* 42.

²⁶⁹ Douglass, *Narrative* 43.

²⁷⁰ Douglass, *My Bondage* 119

When contextualized within the homosocial quality of masculinity, Douglass's response and Covey's savagery become slightly more comprehensible. "Modern American manhood" is a homosocial phenomena shaped by "an endless rivalry for the power and privileges of [masculinity] animated by the psychic discomfiture of men's mutual fears and desires for one another, often in sexually charged contexts".²⁷¹ However, masculinity was racialized, and race informed these interactions between men. The "racial difference" exaggerated by slavery "exacerbates an already contentious [male] rivalry".²⁷² The stripping of the enslaved body before and as punishment is an attempt by male members of the slavocracy to negotiate these homosocial interactions with Black men. It is an effort to reproduce the racial and gendered frame not unlike the framing around Biard's passive Black male victim.

As literary scholar, Maurice O. Wallace reveals, "*the gaze*" functions by way of "fixing or 'enframing' [...] black male images narrowly within a restricted representational field"—the "stereotype".²⁷³ The gaze creates the other, and takes the Black male out of the masculine competition. The enframing and entrapment is a means of control, containment, and enslavement. However, Douglass refuses to disrobe. He resists the enclosure of forced nudity. His silently defiant act temporarily stalls the reproduction of inspection, the resulting re-enslavement, and encroaching sexual vulnerability.

²⁷¹ Wallace, Constructing the Black Masculine 1.

²⁷² Wallace, Constructing the Black Masculine 2.

²⁷³ Wallace, Constructing the Black Masculine 6-7.

Hester's Rape and Douglass's Memory

Covey's vicious attack on Douglass is not the first of such scenes; rather, it is a recasting of Douglass's autobiographical primal scene. Douglass refers to the abuse of his Aunt Hester as an introduction to the "terrible spectacle".²⁷⁴ Cultural critic, Saidiya Hartman, suggests that by beginning his narrative with this episode, "Douglass establishes the centrality of violence to the making of the slave and identifies it as an original generative act equivalent to the statement 'I was born'".²⁷⁵ She recognizes it as a "primal scene." Furthermore, this original scene attests to sex and sexuality as a central theme to slavery and the slave narrative. Like Luke, Douglass attempts to negotiate control over his body, ergo his masculinity. I propose that it is Douglass's trauma and memory of Hester's rape that encourages his silent, combative, and editorial resistance.

Douglass, in the first chapter of Narrative, opens with a discussion conceptualizing the birth of the slave. One birth is literal, while the other is figurative, but no less real. The very first words of his narrative are, "I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot, Maryland".²⁷⁶ Douglass situates himself spatially on the American landscape, which is not an unusual start for autobiographical writing. His literal grounding is an existential act and naturalizes his right to all of the privileges of imagined American social contract. However, the second birth compromises his claim. He describes the first time he witnesses the abuse of an enslaved person, which is the figurative parturition of the slave. "It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was

²⁷⁴ Douglass, Narrative 15

²⁷⁵ Hartman 3.

²⁷⁶ Douglass, Narrative 12.

about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it".²⁷⁷ In My Bondage, he moves the abuse of Aunt Hester from the beginning to a later chapter entitled, "Gradual Initiation into the Mysteries of Slavery". Although this is a later chapter, the title embodies the baptismal-like "initiation" of the African descendent person into the folds of slavery through violence.

Aunt Hester is punished after associating with Ned Roberts, or "Lloyd's Ned", when this behavior was forbidden by Captain Anthony. Douglass declares, "Why master was so careful of her, may be safely left to conjecture".²⁷⁸ Douglass leaves the reader to speculate about Anthony's reasons for barring Ned and Hester from interacting with each other. Hester, Douglass describes, "was a woman of noble form, and of graceful proportions, having very few equals, and fewer superiors, in personal appearance, among the colored or white women of our neighborhood."²⁷⁹ His physical description of Hester hints at the slaveholder's sexual coveting of Hester. "I have seen him in a tempest of passion, such as I have just described—a passion into which entered all the bitter ingredients of pride, hatred, envy, jealousy, and the thirst for revenge".²⁸⁰ Douglass's intense representation of the slaveholder foreshadows Hester's rape, but also discloses the homosocial struggle between the Black male, Ned, and the White male, Anthony. In this case, Ned is a sexual rival, and Hester's agency jeopardizes White patriarchy. This sets up the coming abuse as something sexual.

²⁷⁷ Douglass, Narrative 15.

²⁷⁸ Douglass, Narrative 15.

²⁷⁹ Douglass, Narrative 15.

²⁸⁰ Douglass, My Bondage 36.

While the undertone of homosocial rivalry encourages a sexual interpretation, the moment of abuse furthers this reading. Douglass indicates that he would be jolted out of his slumber “at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of” Aunt Hester.²⁸¹ The dawn—before the household is awake and the beginning of the workday—is an unusual time to administer a whipping. Douglass’s description leads one to imagine that the victim of these early morning beatings would be dragged out of her bed to be whipped. This would require Douglass’s owner to wake up before dawn, leave the house in darkness and silence, find his way to the kitchen/quarters, and attack an enslaved person, which is often Aunt Hester. Douglass regards the time that Anthony selects as “singular”.²⁸² It is peculiar and exceptional. The use of “singular” conveys that this is a special time chosen specifically for Hester. Douglass through his diction, temporal order, and re-imagining of the events is hinting at another, more sexual form of abuse.

Like Jacobs’s ‘incidental’ clues, Douglass’s narration intimates a critical reading. His staging of the event in My Bondage is certainly announcing a sexual encounter. He evokes religious morality to construct his case against slavery. He is convinced that it is unfathomable for enslaved women to lead “a holy life” due to her “strange lot” and the “passion of her owner”.²⁸³ This segue into the Hester episode compellingly casts it in a sexual light. In addition, Douglass’s seemingly veiled language has the same effect. He claims to observe “but few of the shocking preliminaries”.²⁸⁴ Although Douglass professes to not witness the “preliminaries”, he admits that these are

²⁸¹ Douglass, Narrative 14.

²⁸² Douglass, My Bondage 38.

²⁸³ Douglass, My Bondage 37.

²⁸⁴ Douglass, My Bondage 38.

shocking. He remains silent about the few details that he is able to discern. It is analogous to two other “veiled” comments: “I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it”.²⁸⁵ And “language has no power to convey a just sense of its awful criminality”.²⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the details that the narrator is able to disclose are sadistic and brutal. After Anthony stripped Hester naked from the waist up and binding her hands to “a large hook in the joist.”²⁸⁷ Standing tiptoe on a stool and bond to a ceiling beam, “she now stood fair for his infernal purpose”.²⁸⁸ “Infernal” illustrates all things hellish, damnable, and wretched. Then, Hester is vulnerable and exposed to the sinful purposes of Captain Anthony. The reader is fully aware of Anthony’s “infernal” desires through the narrator’s characterization of the slaveholder. Anthony “could himself commit outrages, deep, dark and nameless”.²⁸⁹ The slaveholder in a slave society is without restraints.²⁹⁰ According to Douglass, Anthony is a man without decency and morality. His “motives were [...] abhorrent, as his methods were foolish and contemptible”.²⁹¹ In sum, Anthony is detestable and repugnant, and he is fully capable of molesting Hester.

The recounting of Hester’s abuse in the 1855 autobiography, My Bondage, contains significant differences from the 1845 version, Narrative.²⁹² First, Douglass’s diction in the later narrative is more explicit and telling. Unlike in the previous Narrative where the chest is not mentioned, Douglass

²⁸⁵ Douglass, Narrative 15.

²⁸⁶ Douglass, My Bondage 38.

²⁸⁷ Douglass, Narrative 15.

²⁸⁸ Douglass, Narrative 15.

²⁸⁹ Douglass, My Bondage 33.

²⁹⁰ Douglass, My Bondage 33.

²⁹¹ Douglass, My Bondage 37.

²⁹² Another minute difference is the name change from Aunt Hester to Esther in the 1855 text. Nevertheless, all of the circumstances concerning Hester/Esther are the same.

divulges the nudity of Hester's back, shoulders, and breasts. "Here she stood," Douglass writes, "her arms tightly drawn over her breast".²⁹³ Anthony deliberately prolonged the torture and suffering, "as one who was delighted with the scene".²⁹⁴ The slaveholder's sadistic delight at a visibly abused and bloody Hester transforms the episode into a pornographic scene. The uneven nudity and graphically violent power relations signify a rape. What is more, Hester "had never yet been severely whipped, and her shoulders were plump and tender".²⁹⁵ Being that he includes Hester's breasts in this version, "plump" and "tender" are curious language for the description of shoulders, and these adjectives suggests an attention paid to the more fleshy body parts. It is a way to encapsulate the attack on Hester and Douglass's innocence and perceived femininity. "Each blow, vigorously laid on, brought screams as well as blood".²⁹⁶ Hester "had never yet" experienced this sort of transgression, and she is a virgin to the penetrating violence of the slavocracy.

Second, Douglass makes it clear that he was already in the closet, which doubles as his sleeping quarters.²⁹⁷ While many White Queer scholars have theorized "the closet" as an oppressive room, I would like to evoke the Black Feminist notion of the "safe space." It is the "private, hidden space of Black women's consciousness, the 'inside' ideas that allow Black women to cope with and, in many cases, transcend the confines of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality".²⁹⁸ For the young Douglass, his social status as Black enslaved boy leaves him vulnerable and scrambling for a "safe

²⁹³ Douglass, *My Bondage* 38.

²⁹⁴ Douglass, *My Bondage* 38.

²⁹⁵ Douglass, *My Bondage* 38.

²⁹⁶ Douglass, *My Bondage* 38.

²⁹⁷ Douglass, *My Bondage* 38.

²⁹⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2000) 99.

space.” Patricia Hill Collins further theorizes that “theses spaces are not only safe—they form prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other”.²⁹⁹ In the closet, the young narrator is able to resist the pornographic gaze and prevent becoming Anthony’s next bloodstained fetish object. In the closet, Douglass occupies a semi-voyeur position. He is like a child accidentally catching his parents having sex. He is shock and confused. Considering Douglass’s suspicions that the White master is his biological father, he is trapped in an Oedipal-like drama, which restages the Black male-White male homosocial struggle.

Despite the deviations, the young Douglass in Narrative and My Bondage reach similar conclusions about Hester’s rape and the “safe space.” The author explains his reason for remaining hidden in the closet. He shares, “I expected it would be my turn next”.³⁰⁰ This is the last major action of the first chapter and the enslaved boy’s indoctrination to plantation life. In his traumatic re-imagining of Hester’s rape, Douglass again situates himself as the recipient of sexual violence. Vulnerable and fearful of sodomitic rape he runs to a safe place. With a similar chapter ending in My Bondage, Douglass explains, “From my heart I pitied her, and—child though I was—the outrage kindled in me a feeling far from peaceful; but I was hushed, terrified, stunned, and could do nothing, and the fate of [Hester] might be mine next”.³⁰¹ The witnessing both functions in favor of and against the slaveholder’s interests. It sparks dissentient thinking. Douglass is outraged. However, he is silenced by fear, trauma, and an effort to protect his boyhood.

²⁹⁹ Collins, Black Feminist Thought 101.

³⁰⁰ Douglass, Narrative 15.

³⁰¹ Douglass, My Bondage 38.

Douglass emphasizes the emotional effects of witnessing the spectacle. He is forced to narrate through both, Hester's violent introduction to sex and his initial awakening to his enslaved status. The author divulges, "I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it".³⁰² He continues and reveals a telling quality of witnessing. "I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant".³⁰³ Douglass's words—part vow and part traumatic utterance—honors Hester's rape/punishment as slavery's "originating moment, and thus lodges a memorial urge inside his rhetoric of indictment armed at exposing slavery's 'foul embrace'".³⁰⁴ The trauma of the spectacle is permanently fixed in Douglass's memory. If he does not remember anything else, he "never shall forget *it*."³⁰⁵ "Memory, in short, is an image text, a double-coded system of mental storage and retrieval,"³⁰⁶ and young Douglass's cognitive storage and retrieval is tainted by Hester's rape and the possibility of his own vulnerability. Hester's rape becomes a traumatic psychosocial referent for Douglass's behavior. Wallace suggests that the "first-person narrative" tradition "rests upon the autobiographer's success in repressing" what is painful, unnerving, unpleasant, or shameful.³⁰⁷ "It's the ongoing repression of the primal scene of subjection that [Douglass] wants to

³⁰² Douglass, Narrative 15.

³⁰³ Douglass, Narrative 15.

³⁰⁴ Jenny Franchot, "The Punishment of Ester: Frederick Douglass and the Constitution of the Feminine," Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays, Ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 150.

³⁰⁵ My emphasis.

³⁰⁶ Mitchell 192.

³⁰⁷ Wallace, Constructing the Black Masculine 83.

guard against and linger in.”³⁰⁸ Thus, when demanded to disrobe and face Covey’s White, patriarchal gaze, the “memorial urge” of Hester’s ravished body nurtures his resistance.

Douglass’s ‘Resistant Masculinity’

The legal constraints and the economic exploitation of the enslaved condition influenced gender performance. Slavery did not “destroy black men and women’s inherent identities as gendered human beings, with certain ideas, values, and beliefs that influenced how they responded to specific social/historical events”.³⁰⁹ Resistant masculinity, as conceived by Hine and Jenkins, is one such response to gender’s contestable ground nurtured by slavery.³¹⁰ Patriarchal conceptions of the ‘essential’ constituents of masculinity, such as property ownership and familial responsibilities, influenced Black male’s construction of manhood.³¹¹ “In the New Republic, the dominant ideal equated manhood with the state of being free and powerful, power being understood as authority over other men as well as women and children”.³¹² The “Masculine Achiever” and the “Self Made Man” were the ideal types. Against these models the enslaved Black male could not compare; however, enslaved men had to work through this and often used these ‘universals’ to seek freedom.

³⁰⁸ Fred Moten, “Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester’s Scream,” In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 4-5.

³⁰⁹ Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, Introduction, “Black Men’s History: Toward a Gendered Perspective,” A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity, Ed. Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, Vol. 1 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999) 2.

³¹⁰ Hine 1.

³¹¹ Scholars have engaged more thoroughly, the influences of African gender roles versus European gender roles, but what is important here is not a measurement of the amount of patriarchy. (All patriarchy is bad...) Rather, the invest of Black men into the “American manhood” that they helped construct. See, (Hine and Jenkins 5); (Drake 92, 93-4); (hooks 90)

³¹² Hine 13.

However, the resistant masculinity model must be nuanced. Male writers of slave narratives, like Douglass, would not 'tell' of violation in the same way in order to retain newly achieved manhood, which is reflected by Douglass's concern with constantly creating, shaping, and reconstructing his public image and self. Enslaved Black men are not able to execute the same type of male privilege, and gender does not protect enslaved males from sexualized violence. As a result, of using the contestable ground of masculinity as a medium for resistance, enslaved Black men run the risk of suffering from a patriarchal torture. Patriarchal torture is a special type of gendered torment, which exists when a male is barred from fully enjoying the advantages of male privilege in a patriarchal society. However, Douglass recognizes the pitfalls of patriarchy and the kindred relationship between sexism and racism.

Douglass operates out of progressive 'resistant masculinity'. Commenting and offering support of the recent Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, Douglass uses his editorial presence at The North Star and proclaims that "we hold woman to be justly entitled to all we claim for man".³¹³ He continues his written support for gender equality and women's suffrage:

We go father, and express our conviction that all political rights which it is expedient for man to exercise, it is equally so far woman. All that distinguishes man as an intelligent and accountable being, is equally true of woman, and it that government only is just which governs by the free consent of the governed, there can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the exercise of the elective franchise, or a hand in making and administering the laws of the land.³¹⁴

³¹³ Frederick Douglass, "The Rights of Women" (July 28, 1848) Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality, Ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001) 28.

³¹⁴ Douglass, "The Rights of Women" 28.

The preceding manifesto is found in the July 28, 1848 edition of Douglass's anti-slavery paper, which is only a little over six months after its establishment. This early stance establishes The North Star as an antebellum pro-feminist periodical. Douglass's position corroborates the maxim of the paper. In the masthead of The North Star contained the motto: "RIGHT IS OF NO SEX—TRUTH IS OF NO COLOR—GOD IS THE FATHER OF US ALL, AND ALL WE ARE BRETHREN." Douglass understands the intersection of racial slavery and patriarchal systems of oppression.

Douglass's physical struggle against Covey is the climax of his two antebellum slave narratives. Like his earlier stubbornness to undress, his will to fight is encouraged by his Hester memorial (allegorically speaking) and his progressive-resistant masculinity. He opens the climatic episode by writing, "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man".³¹⁵ This opening evokes Hester's rape memory, which served as Douglass's slave-making moment. In addition, it testifies to Douglass's gendered view of slavery and his overall concern with man-making.

The narrator recounts a sudden illness that overcame him while fanning wheat. Covey kicked him as a means to force Douglass back to work, but Douglass could not. He took off to complain to Auld about Covey, but Auld blamed him and told him to return. While returning, Douglass is intercepted by Covey, and Douglass runs in the forest in order to avoid further abuse. In the forest, he encounters Sandy Jenkins, a fellow enslaved man, who gives Douglass a root for protection. When he returns, Covey is kind and he ascribes Covey's warm demeanor to Sandy's root. The narrative

³¹⁵ Douglass, Narrative 47.

swiftly changes course. The following day, which is a Monday, Covey attacks Douglass in the barn. While Douglass fed the horses,

Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope; and just as I was half out of the loft, he caught hold of my legs, and was about tying me. As soon as I found what he was up to, I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, he holding to my legs, I was brought sprawling on the stable floor. Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment—from whence come the spirit I don't know—I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose.³¹⁶

Douglass's resistance is a great equalizing force and it is embedded in an internal and external gendered struggle. Douglass and Covey's homosocial altercation is as much a struggle over control of gender and sexuality as it is racial and class.

Douglass's "spirit" to fight comes out of his safe space—where he repeatedly witnesses and participates. It is the memory of violation and the anxiety of gender vulnerability. As Wallace agrees, "Apart from the immediate danger of Covey's whip, Douglass's violent retaliation against him in chapter X of *Narrative* is fundamentally a psychosexual reaction to the whipping/rape of Hester indelibly inscribed in Douglass's memory".³¹⁷ Like in Hester's attack, rope figures significantly as a device of torture. The rope is the physical manifestation of bondage and the loss of control. Douglass is fighting against this loss of control and the loss of manhood. He refuses to be vulnerable to the silence-inducing violence as experienced by his Aunt Hester. He will not be bond like Hester and stripped like in the forest. Douglass refuses to allow Covey to "do what he pleased".³¹⁸ The narrator explains, "He

³¹⁶ Douglass, *Narrative* 49-50.

³¹⁷ Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine* 91.

³¹⁸ Douglass, *Narrative* 49-50.

held on to me, and I to him".³¹⁹ Through his reciprocating grip of Covey, Douglass questions, 'Am I not a man and a brother?' However, he is not like the humble, kneeling, and near begging Black male image on the abolitionist coin. Douglass "rose" and expresses a resistant masculinity.

In spite of this, Covey's initial attempt is to tie Douglass up and "do what he pleased." The attempted bondage, the nudity, and uneven power relations, which are reinforced by racial slavery are all characteristic of Hester's rape. Douglass's fighting spirit does not appear until the moment Covey took hold of his legs and his body was stretched out on the floor—a position that leaves Douglass open to Covey's pleasures.

Covey is equally invested in this struggle. He is driven to maintain his status as "nigger-breaker" and White patriarch. "My resistance was so entirely unexpected, that Covey seemed taken all aback".³²⁰ Douglass is destabilizing the grand narrative. He is not Sambo. He is not the "effeminized" (according to patriarchal standards) docile, vulnerable caricature of the White popular imagination. This reversal of and challenge to the master-slave power relationship causes Covey to shake "like a leaf".³²¹ According to the politics of the slavocracy, Covey has to be in control. This is evidence by his initial attempt to punish Douglass for leaving the plantation. Sexual assault is an available tool to put Douglass back in his place.³²² In this sense, the fictitious "sambo" is a metaphor for the grand narrative of the slavocracy.

³¹⁹ Douglass, *Narrative* 50.

³²⁰ Douglass, *Narrative* 50.

³²¹ Douglass, *Narrative* 50.

³²² Making use of Angela Davis's theorizing on the function of sexual assault on the plantation. "If Black women had achieved a sense of their own strength and a strong urge to resist, then violent sexual assaults—so the slaveholders might have reasoned—would remind the women of their essential and inalterable femaleness. In the male supremacist vision of the period, this meant passivity, acquiescence and weakness" (Davis, *Women, Race & Class* 24).

Through his resistance and acclamations, Douglass re-envisioned his birth, rights, and freedom. “The fighting madness had come upon me, and I found my strong fingers firmly attached to the throat of my cowardly tormentor; as heedless of consequences, at the moment, as though we stood as equals before the law. The very color of the man was forgotten”.³²³ Douglass employs the choking of Covey to restage the American legal dogma. Although this meta-narrative, excludes Black women, White women, and Black men, Douglass illustrates a battle for freedom and humanity.

When expressing his feelings about the altercation, Douglass likens freedom with regained manhood. “It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free”.³²⁴ Even though “manhood” possesses a patriarchal etymology, Douglass’s use of “manhood” is a signifier for universal humanity. This assertion holds true considering his continuous proto-feminist support of gender equality and women’s suffrage. He continues,

I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact.³²⁵

By painting an image of resurrection, Douglass likens slavery to death and resistance to new life. Douglass maintains that he is now only a slave in name. In My Bondage, he comes to similar conclusions.

³²³ Douglass, My Bondage 137.

³²⁴ Douglass, Narrative 50.

³²⁵ Douglass, Narrative 50.

It rekindled in my breast the smouldering embers of liberty; it brought up my Baltimore dreams, and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before; I WAS A MAN NOW. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be A FREEMAN. A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot honor a helpless man, although it can pity him; and even this it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise.³²⁶

Through resisting, Douglass shows a gendered transformation. This is a turning point. In one, swift discursive move, Douglass is reborn and by resisting creates a new primal scene. It is evidenced by the words that are chosen for capitalization: "I WAS A MAN NOW" and "A FREEMAN." His freedom and humanness "was affirmed when he fought man to man with the slave overseer."³²⁷ Consequently, Douglass and Covey's brawl replaces Hester's rape as an originating moment.

Douglass also involves himself in discursive resistance. In the same way as Jacobs utilizes resistance embedded in oral tradition, Douglass makes use of the trickster motif. In addition, he deploys visual representations of his body to oppose the editorial power of White authenticating text. Long before struggling with Covey, Douglass is introduced to discursive resistance, or at least the use of discourse, words, and text to resist. He reasons that literacy offers a means of escape.³²⁸ For Douglass, writing is survival and resistance.

Douglass's characterization and descriptions of behavior of Bill and Caroline inserts the trickster into the climatic fight scene. The trickster operates as an alternative form of resistance. Covey calls to Bill.

"Bill," who knew precisely what Covey wished him to do, affected ignorance, and pretended he did not know what to do.

³²⁶ Douglass, *My Bondage* 140.

³²⁷ hooks 90.

³²⁸ Douglass, *Narrative* 34. "...as I might have occasion to write my own pass."

“What shall I do, Mr. Covey,” said Bill. “Take hold of him—take hold of him!” said Covey. With a toss of his head, peculiar to Bill, he said, “indeed, Mr. Covey, I want to go to work.” “This is your work,” said Covey; “take hold of him.” Bill replied, with spirit, “My master hired me here, to work, and not to help you whip Frederick.” It was now my turn to speak. “Bill,” said I, “don’t put your hands on me.” To which he replied, “MY GOD! Frederick, I aint goin’ to tech ye,” and Bill walked off, leaving Covey and myself to settle our matters as best we might.³²⁹

First, Bill puts on a charade of stupidity, while completely understanding Covey’s demands. Next, he logically argues with doubled language out of participating in Douglass’s abuse. After Bill refused, another enslaved person, Caroline, answers Covey’s demands with similar logic.³³⁰

Douglass reframes the slave narrative and performs an editorial role reversal through deployment of his self-image. In both versions of Douglass’s slave narrative, he includes engravings of himself opposite the title pages. The portraiture of the formerly enslaved Douglass and his autobiographical writings are discursive man-making and constructs a resistant presence of Black humanity. “Man-making, in other words, is scarcely a different enterprise than image-making”.³³¹ Unlike the framing of Laurent, Biard, the unknown abolitionist artist, Douglass constructs a self-confident, astute, emancipated Black body as evidence. He is not ‘captured’ in perpetual victimhood.

Furthermore, the details of the illustrations attempt to recreate and authenticate the dignity of his image as a newly free Black male. In both versions, Douglass’s dress is tailored and formal, and his hair is neatly parted. The use of images was a part of Douglass’s constant revisions to his public

³²⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage* 139.

³³⁰ Douglass, *My Bondage* 139.

³³¹ Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine* 82-83.

image.³³² Hence, there are some noticeable differences between the 1845 and 1855 depictions. Overall, the variation between the two “signals Douglass’s growing awareness of the performativity of his self-representations and maps his bolder claim to conventional sources of authority (and authorship)”.³³³ His relaxed, but crossed arms and vaguely crossed legs conveys a casual attitude. “The later work shows a darker, more physically powerful Douglass”.³³⁴ This Douglass is standing and his jacket is fully buttoned. His entire upper body is illustrated in this engraving; whereas, the majority of his body disappeared and fade into the white paper of the earlier illustration. There is a weight given to Douglass’s physical attributes, such as “the firm lips, the neat but coarse beard” and the aggressively clasped fists.³³⁵ “Douglass looks directly into the camera lens in a dramatic and crafted pose. The pose sends a message that is repeated throughout the book—one of artful defiance” and readiness.³³⁶ The overall thrust of Douglass’s visual manifestations is one of authority and readiness.

More importantly, these self-portraits precede any and all authenticating letters, prefaces, and introductions. In the case of The Narrative, the author’s image comes before William Lloyd Garrison’s preface and the letter from Wendell Phillips, Esq.; while, his 1855 portrait precedes James M’Cune Smith’s introduction. This means that Douglass literally prefaces the prefaces and introduces the introductions. From a formalist position, he delegitimizes the White authenticating voice by offering a visual

³³² John Stauffer, The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) 45.

³³³ Peter A. Dorsey, “Becoming the Other: The Mimesis of Metaphor in Douglass’s My Bondage and My Freedom,” PMLA, Vol. 111.3. (May, 1996) 445-6.

³³⁴ Dorsey 445-6.

³³⁵ Stauffer 46.

³³⁶ Dorsey 445-6.

representation of his body as proof. His body becomes a new tangible authenticating text to the slave narrative. Thus, Douglass reframes the slave narrative and enframes the White male text, which are suppose to authorize and recognize Black subjectivity. Douglass resists the editorial presence and moves from the margins to the center.

As Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs reveal, resistance is not simply ever-present threat, but a constant reality. It is as significant to the enslaved experience as violence. Violence and resistance are involved in a continuous dialectical relation. Regardless, resistance or perceived resistance is often a catalyst for violent episodes. Hester courting, Douglass breaking the gate or seeking asylum, and Luke refusing to submit to the 'strangest freaks of despotism' stimulated sexual violation. Conversely, sexual violation nurtured resistance, such as Luke's tricksterism and Douglass's fighting back and image making. Thus, it is hard to imagine male-male sexualized violence in a slave society without resistance.

Conclusion

The Art of Reading

The sexual question and the racial question have always been entwined, you know. If Americans can mature on the level of racism, then they have to mature on the level of sexuality.

--James Baldwin³³⁷

Evidentiary statements in historical documentation must give more than a chronicle and should present instead an interpretation that penetrates the social meaning, in human terms, of the important *stages* in the movements of history.

-James E. Turner³³⁸

The time period between the mid 1950's and mid 1970's may be considered as the most explosive era of the 20th century. This explosion occurred when African Americans took action against educational inequalities, Jim Crow segregation and political disenfranchisement. Although this period is sometimes generically labeled "The Black Revolution," it was not a monolithic movement driven by a monolithic organization with a monolithic agenda. The two major waves of the "Black Revolution" include the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. During these revolutionary social movements, college students and young people were amongst the ranks of freedom fighters. For example, in early February of 1960, Black college students executed an influential sit-in, which contributed to developing direct-action as a methodology of civil disobedience in the Civil Rights movement. In addition, the Student Non-violent Coordinating

³³⁷ James Baldwin, "Go the Way Your Blood Beats: An Interview with James Baldwin," By Richard Goldstein, *James Baldwin: The Legacy*, Ed. Quincy Troupe (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989) 178.

³³⁸ James E. Turner, "Forward: Africana Studies and Epistemology, a Discourse in the Sociology of Knowledge," *The Next Decade: Theoretical and Research Issues in Africana Studies*, Ed. James E. Turner (Ithaca, NY: Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, 1984) ix.

Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality planned and implement significant demonstrations, like “freedom rides.”

With the emergence of “Black Power,” the movement and its students took a more aggressive position against White supremacy. The legislative gains of the Civil Rights Movement resulted in more opportunities for higher education of African Americans youth. This produced an increase in the number of African Americans students enrolling into pre-dominantly White universities and colleges. Although there was an increase in the African American student population, the curriculum and pedagogy remained Euro-American centered. Students on several college campuses, like Cornell University and San Francisco State University, decided to demand more intellectually relevant courses, which led to protests and demonstrations. This was the birth of Black Studies (later called Africana, African American, and/or African World Studies).

However, Africana Studies did not simply spring forth from the earth. The rapid social change of the 1960’s helped spawn it, but Africana scholarship has been occurring throughout history. In America, it occupies a space in a longer tradition of slave narratives, preaching, anti-lynching campaign, a “New Negro” Renaissance, protest novels, etc. Manning Marable defines the “Black intellectual tradition” as “the critical thought and perspectives of intellectuals of African descent and scholars of Black America, and Africa, and the black diaspora” (1).³³⁹ The title of Marable’s publication, Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African

³³⁹ Manning Marable, “Black Studies and the Racial Mountain,” Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience, Ed. Manning Marable (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 1.

American Experience, further illustrates the function of Africana Studies. Africana Studies readjusts the perspective of research, and it necessitates a confrontation with the experience. The intellectual must come face to face with the people and their experience. Thus, the major themes of Africana Studies are protest, social change, and racial uplift.

Furthermore, the purpose of Africana Studies as an intellectual project is to employ the tools of the academy in the struggle against racial oppression. However, the Africana Studies project does not uncritically accept the tools of the academy. While producing Africana studies scholarship, one must be judicious when choosing theories and methodologies from what are deemed as “traditional” disciplines. What has been a consistent tradition is the approximately 500-year tradition of denying the subjectivity of African descendent peoples. One of the most significant, characteristics of Africana Studies is its quest for answers and solutions to the Black community’s external and internal challenges. In sum, the project of Africana Studies is to critically research the Africana experience and develop strategies toward uplift.

Marable suggests several methods toward achieving this goal of critical analysis and problem solving. He outlines three major characteristics of Africana Studies scholarship. In “Black Studies and the Racial Mountain,” Marable labels these characteristics as “descriptive,” “corrective,” and “prescriptive.” To be descriptive is to present “the reality of black life and experiences from the point of view of black people”.³⁴⁰ This means that the intellectual must be down in the trenches with the folk. For example, a sociologist is performing a secondary analysis on statistics about deviant

³⁴⁰ Marable 1.

choices made by Black adolescence. This secondary analysis can be done in isolation, away from the people and without contextualizing the lived reality. Africana Studies is also corrective. It must challenge mainstream assumptions and racist scholarship. "It has challenged Eurocentric notions of aesthetics and beauty that, all too often, are grounded in an implied, or even explicit, contempt for the standard of blackness".³⁴¹ Lastly, Africana Studies has to prescribe practical solutions. The ultimate purpose of Africana Studies is to transform the people's "actual conditions" and "the society all around them".³⁴² In this endeavor, Africana Studies becomes the producer and distributor of useful knowledge, which functions to heal the Black community and the larger society.

At the heart of the creation of Africana Studies was the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of what had been historically White-majority campuses. Two decades later, the critical scholarship of openly Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender peoples have further diversified Africana Studies discourse. While literary works have been in production by Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people since the early 20th century, many did not express openly gay themes. Mid-century writer-activist, James Baldwin, did, but he was only one person. The 1980's witnessed the emergence of Black Queer scholars, such as Audre Lorde, Joseph Beam, and Essex Hemphill, who screamed a new, more radical articulation of Black Queer identity. As James E. Turner highlights, "The theoreticians of Blacks Studies use the basic social science concept of the sociology of knowledge to explain the legitimacy of the idea that the position of Black people in the social

³⁴¹ Marable 2.

³⁴² Marable 2.

structure not only offers peculiar insights but also represents a specific meaning about social truth."³⁴³ Lorde, Beam, Hemphill and the generation of Black gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender scholars and cultural workers to follow were insistent upon producing knowledge from their multiply marginal subject position. Their presence and work expands and reinforces Marable's descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive functions of the Africana Studies project.

As a part of this legacy, I began this project thinking that my job would be to describe and even correct the historiography of slavery. My charge would be to unveil the male-male sexual violence in the primary documents, but quite the opposite was true. It is the student of slavery, who is either veiled or unveiled. Thus, the project has been simultaneously prescriptive. The thesis concludes with the researcher realizing that the entire project has been an experiment in epistemology. How do we know what we know?

Consequently, this investigation into male-male sexual violence during the period of enslavement has been an opportunity to think through two major curricular and disciplinary implications. First, it problematizes the manner in which visual culture and slave narratives are deployed within larger scholarly projects. Second, it calls attention to the methods employed to interpret the visual culture and slave narratives.

There is a tendency to employ art and photography as a visual appendage instead of evidence in some publications. Visual culture, outside of visual studies and art history, are rarely given primacy as primary documents. While visual culture is not a window to reality, but rather an interpretation of it, this critique can extend to written records, like slaveholder

³⁴³ Turner xii.

diaries and travelogues. However, the right contextualization and critical reading of images also provide a wealth of evidence. In Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865, Marcus Wood also probes the scholarly life of images of slavery. Wood doubtfully indicates that “It may not be possible to find solutions to the questions of how to read, or how to see, visual representations developed out of the Western myths devoted to the memory of slavery”.³⁴⁴ “Looking, as opposed to reading,” he reasons, “has not, in the context of slavery, been described as an exceptionally problematic activity”.³⁴⁵ These paintings, illustrations, and daguerreotypes of abused Black bodies are left to speak for themselves. It is assumed that the visual is tangible and obvious. Wood indicts, “Rarely, even in serious scholarly studies of the slave trade, abolition, slave narrative or plantation life, does the writer subject quoted imagery (that is to say, reproduced imagery) to the sorts of close reading or technical and theoretical analysis which are applied to quotations from written sources”.³⁴⁶ There is a working assumption that images “speak a thousand words”, without realizing that these thousands of words must be put together in some logical order. This type of treatment of visual culture entrusts the audience and their cultural baggage (i.e. racial chauvinism, heterosexism) with interpreting un-contextualized primary documents.

Additionally, my work refines a theoretical tool and extends its applicability. Quare re-reading Laurent’s Marché d’esclaves, Biard’s The Slave Trade, Slave Market by the unknown American artist, Incidents in the

³⁴⁴ Marcus Wood, Introduction, Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865, (New York: Routledge, Inc., 2000) 6.

³⁴⁵ Wood, Introduction 6.

³⁴⁶ Wood, Introduction 6.

Life of a Slave Girl by Jacobs, and Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass and My Bondage and My Freedom constructs a theoretical and methodological model for investigating same-sex sexual violence in Trans-Atlantic slave societies. My intention was to put into conversation the visual and written narratives of slavery and Black Queer theory in an attempt to correct, expand, and shift the gaze on slavery. Dwight McBride alludes to the need of a prescriptive shift. He argues, "Instead, if we began with the assumption that Black gays and lesbians are a part of the Black community—which is, in fact, the simple truth—we might ask different and, ultimately, broader and more probing questions, which might yield a more truthful view of the complexities of the 'black community'".³⁴⁷ New questions are in order. The questions asked influence and determine the reading of the evidence.

Accordingly, an Africana Studies populated by an increasingly diverse Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and straight population revises the discipline's discursive possibilities and potentials. The result is a new way to read—a Quare reading. "Reading" evokes the literal act of ocular recognition and mental comprehension of written and visual symbols, and yet it alludes to the campier, gay colloquialism. In many Black gay circles, "to read" is to tell someone off, to get them together, and to critique. Quare reading becomes a methodological tool of criticism. This critically reading and critically needed re-reading of slavery and the larger history of the Black experience treads on new discursive terrain and enables fresh prescriptive opportunities.

E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson in the introduction to their trailblazing anthology, Black Queer Studies, is reminiscent of Marable's

³⁴⁷ Dwight McBride, Introduction, Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 18.

position on the role of the Africana Studies scholar and scholarship.

“Therefore, as we see it, our project here is fundamentally a libratory one—in the sense that it is grounded in the assertion of individual rights balanced by communal accountability in the interest of ensuring social justice” (Johnson and Henderson 6).³⁴⁸ Johnson and Henderson strategically situates Black Queer Studies, and by extension Quare methodologies, within the resistance of the Black intellectual tradition. In this light, there are two natural developmental steps of this research endeavor. One step would be an investigation of consensual same-sex sexual relations within the slave community/quarters. Another would continue re-reading the sexualized racial violence against the Black male body during Reconstruction and Jim Crow segregation. Charles I. Nero, James H. Sweet, and Robert R. Ellis have executed preliminary inquiries into this idea, but more extensive ‘reading’ is necessary in an effort to correct heterosexist mythologies of the plantation.

³⁴⁸ Johnson, E. Patrick and Mae G. Henderson. Introduction, Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology, Ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) 6.

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