

UNIVERSITY OF READING

**Mother, Home, and Mammy:
Motherhood, Race, and Power in the Antebellum South**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationality of enslaved and slaveholding women's mothering in the antebellum south. The apparent commonalities of mothering are often understood to have fostered connections and bonds between slaveholding and enslaved women: this study posits an alternative interpretation, which situates motherhood at the very centre of power relations between women. Approaching enslaved women's 'maternal exploitation' as dually structural and social, the thesis examines both the extent to which enslavement and slaveholding influenced the conditions of mothering, the treatment of mothers, and their opportunities to mother; and the role of motherhood in women's relationships.

Slaveholding women, this thesis argues, were central to enslaved women's maternal exploitation. This is established through an examination of the extensive 'interventions' that slaveholding women made into enslaved women's mothering: both on the basis of their own motherhoods and on the basis of enslaved women's motherhoods, casual and routinised, from conception long into the life of a child. In particular, critical analysis of these interventions reveals slaveholding women's labour-centred approach to enslaved women's mothering: motherhood was a site of the production of and interruption to slave labour, a commodity, and a transferrable form of mother-work. This thesis thus situates mothering in broader patterns within both enslaved and slaveholding women's relationships and the dynamics of gendered labour in slaveholding households.

A case-study into infant-feeding provides an in-depth analysis of the extent of the inequalities women faced as mothers and the interrelationships of their privileges and disadvantages. Analysing the nature, experiences, and significance of the often overlooked practice of enslaved wet-nursing through examination of the practice both within slaveholdings and through the informal and formal marketplaces, this thesis provides new insights into the nature of enslaved women's exploitation, their relationships with female slaveholders, and the roles of white women in slavery.

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abbreviations

DocSouth	Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
DU	David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University Libraries, Duke University
EANO	Early American Newspapers, Series I (1690-1876), Readex, Newsbank Inc.
FWP	Federal Writers' Project, <i>Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves</i> (Washington, DC, 1941), vols. I-XVI
LWPA	Louisiana Works Progress Administration Collection, State Library of Louisiana
SHC	Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
TAS SSI	George P. Rawick (ed.), <i>The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography. Supplement, Series 1</i> (Westport, CT, 1977), vols. 1-12
TAS SSII	George P. Rawick (ed.), <i>The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography. Supplement, Series 2</i> (Westport, CT, 1979), vols. 1-10
VHS	Virginia Historical Society

Introduction

Mother, Home and Mammy! They are three of the most beautiful words in the English language and the latter is now almost obsolete.

Gertrude Langhorne (1922)¹

Gertrude Langhorne's *Mammy's Letters* sought to eulogise 'one of that infinitely lovable and fast disappearing people': the mammy.² The sanctity of the home, the devotion of the mother, and the loyalty of the slave she lamented were aspects of antebellum life long venerated by white southerners; the white mother and black mammy's racially transcendental maternal love, and the construction of the slaveholding household as a nurturing home comprised of the 'black and white family', were essential in establishing slavery as a paternalistic social system. Yet, despite the profound transformative power of the 'mother, home, and mammy' triad, inequalities existed in no closer confines than the slaveholding households of the antebellum south. These were 'gendered' spaces in that both slaveholding and enslaved women laboured in the household, and it was their most common site of interaction. Slaveholding women, however, were in direct authority over enslaved women, and their conflictive relationships were characterised by exploitation and constant struggles for power. In slaveholding households, hierarchies were constructed and contested in the most intimate areas of life, including motherhood.

Slaveholding women routinely delegated their mother-work to enslaved women and appropriated their maternal labour, but sometimes took roles in 'raising' enslaved children themselves. Enslaved women mothered their own children in the interstices of their slave labour under the dire conditions borne of their enslavement, contended with the constant interventions of slaveholders into their parenting, and often bore the burden of caring for their owners' children too. The normalcy of these practices meant children often established emotional ties with 'surrogate' mothers, whether a 'mistress' or a 'mammy'. While mothering under slavery was bitterly complex, the racialisation of reproductive labour and practices of

¹ Gertrude Langhorne, *Mammy's Letters* (Macon, GA, 1922), VHS.

² Ibid.

maternal exploitation were defining aspects of black women's enslavement, women's relationships, the slaveholding household, and the system of slavery writ large.³

Relative racialised constructions of motherhood were foundational to North American slavery and the meanings accorded to mothering, the treatment of mothers and children, and the opportunities women had as mothers were deeply shaped by their enslavement. Enslaved women's 'maternal exploitation' was dually structural and social, and women's relative privileges and disadvantages as mothers were also borne out in their day-to-day relationships. Indeed, slaveholding women took central roles in enslaved women's maternal exploitation. Understanding their own maternal roles as socially superior and mother-work as delegable labour, slaveholding women rendered enslaved women's mothering a transferable labour, a commodity, and a site of the production of (and interruption to) labour.⁴

Slaveholding women's interventions into enslaved women's mothering were both on the basis of their own mothering and on the basis of enslaved women's. Slaveholding mothers relied upon the labour of enslaved women who were often mothers themselves as nurses to their children, used enslaved women as wet-nurses, and exploited enslaved child-labour. Whether prioritising an enslaved woman as a reproducer or a labourer, they sought for enslaved women's mothering to serve their own interests. Slaveholding women capitalised upon enslaved women's maternal bodies and their children, and their interventions into enslaved women's mothering embodied their sense of social hierarchy as well as their labour interests. From routinely superseding parental decisions to effecting permanent mother-child separations, these interventions were diverse and often devastating, and they extended from the conception of a woman's child long into a child's life.

Nowhere else were the inequalities women faced as mothers, the interrelationships of their privileges and disadvantages, or the exploitative character of their relationships more evident than in the realm of infant-feeding. The practice of enslaved wet-nursing relied upon slaveholders' racial beliefs, their ability to coerce bodily labour from enslaved women, and the dynamic relationship between the household and slave-labour markets. Enslaved women were forced to breastfeed the children of their slaveholders. Some were able to keep their infants with them, bore the burden of feeding multiple children, and the coerced prioritisation of a

³ Racialisation refers to 'the assignment of racial meaning to real, perceived, or ascribed differences among individuals or groups', 'produces hierarchies of power and privilege among races' and 'constitutes the basis for racism, discrimination, and the perpetuation of inequality'. Linda M. Burton, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Victor Ray, Rose Buckelew, and Elizabeth Hordge Freeman, 'Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade's Research on Families of Color', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 3 (2010), 445.

⁴ In this study the term 'mother-work' is used to refer to labour directly related to the care of a child that can be performed by a non-biological parent. This includes 'feeding, diapering, bathing, disciplining, putting children to bed, and playing with them [...] soothing, stimulating, and connecting' and some aspects of 'reproductive labor' more broadly. Cameron L. McDonald, 'Manufacturing Motherhood: The Shadow Work of Nannies and Au Pairs', *Qualitative Sociology*, 21, 1 (1998), 26; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor', *Signs*, 18, 1 (1992), 1.

white child. Others were separated from their children to work in this confining role, and many were mothers bereaved of their own infants with white infants forced into their care. Enslaved wet-nursing was a physically and emotionally intimate labour that was casually extracted from enslaved women as well as marketised; some women were hired out in this capacity, others performed it throughout their lives. This largely overlooked practice of intra-gendered exploitation thus provides means for exploring the uniqueness of enslaved women's exploitation as mothers and the roles of white women in these exploitations.

The interconnections between 'mother, home, and mammy', then, reveal the inextricability of mothering from the inequality, power relations, and abuse that characterised slavery. In approaching enslaved women's 'maternal exploitation' as dually structural and social, this study both examines the nature and extent of the influence of enslavement on mothering, and offers a finer analysis of the roles of slaveholding women in this maternal exploitation through their wide ranging 'interventions' into enslaved women's mothering. In doing so, this study challenges the emphasis often placed on motherhood as a site of women's commonalities that fostered connections or bonds between slaveholding and enslaved mothers, situating motherhood instead at the very centre of women's differences and the power relations between them. This study of southern motherhood thus provides new insights into both the nature of enslaved women's exploitation, and the roles of white women in maintaining, shaping, and extending systems of race and class-based exploitation.

i. Literature review

The mammy and mother of Langhorne's *Mammy's Letters* were, of course, familiar figures in early southern histories and Lost Cause literature alike; their deconstruction and revision stimulated in a large part by liberation movements and the New Social History from the 1960s onwards. Historians looked instead to 'real southern women' whose existence had been long understood as 'wholly private', and explored a distinct 'southern women's culture' that was limited by but showed the ability to transcend the 'proprietary relationships' of slavery.⁵ '[F]amily status' that 'determined relationships including female relationships', rather than slaveholding women's racism and their interests in slavery, shaped the boundaries of women's

⁵ Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila L. Skemp, 'Introduction', in Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila L. Skemp (eds), *Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South* (Jackson, MS, 1983), xi.

communities.⁶ Such oversights to the centrality of white women in black women's exploitation as well as problematic configurations of gender and race were indicative of broader patterns in revisionist scholarship understood to be deeply influenced by if not a scholarly manifestation of the second wave feminist movement. Unprecedented attention and new approaches to African American history were also simulated by movements for social justice, pursuing 'scholarly knowledge of practical use in the struggle for black civil rights'.⁷ Both movements, however, exhibited exclusionary practices and an inattention to the distinct experiences of African American women.⁸ Black women thus spoke 'simultaneously from "within and against" both women's liberation and antiracist movements' as 'subjects' located in 'multiple hierarchies'.⁹

This '[i]mplicitly intersectional' scholarship has been profoundly influential. Black feminist thought, as Patricia Hill Collins writes, 'fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about unjust power relations', 'reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance', and debates the 'power dynamics that underlie what counts as knowledge'.¹⁰ In the seventies and eighties, black feminist scholarship effected just such transformations in the history of black women in the United States. The failure to 'catalogue' black women's oppression, the Combahee River Collective stated in 1977, was 'indicative of how little value' had been placed upon black women's lives 'during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemisphere'.¹¹ Angela Y. Davis detailed the unique nature of this bondage for black women, who experienced, confronted, and resisted multiple and interacting forms of exploitation in an 'intricate and savage web of oppression'.¹² bell hooks, too, centralised enslaved black women's unique experiences as borne of the simultaneity of racism and sexism: they performed gendered labour, experienced de-humanising sexual exploitation, and sexism

⁶ Jean E. Friedman, 'Women's History and the Revision of Southern History', in Hawks and Skemp (eds), *Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South*, 4, 10, 11. For discussion of the concept and limitations of community in this early revisionist scholarship, see Nancy A. Hewitt, 'Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s', *Social History*, 10, 3 (1985), 299-321.

⁷ Elizabeth R. Cole and Nesha Z. Haniff, 'Building a Home for Black Women's Studies', *Black Women, Gender + Families*, 1, 1 (2007), 25.

⁸ For discussion of race and racism in feminist scholarship, see Cole and Haniff, 'Building a Home for Black Women's Studies', 29-34; Kelly Coogan-Gehr, 'The Politics of Race in U.S. Feminist Scholarship: An Archaeology', *Signs*, 37, 1 (2011), 83-107; Rebecca L. Clark Mane, 'Transmuting Grammars of Whiteness in Third-Wave Feminism: Interrogating Postrace Histories, Postmodern Abstraction, and the Proliferation of Difference in Third-Wave Texts', *Signs*, 38, 1 (2012), 71-96.

⁹ Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, 'Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 22, 2 (1996), 321. All emphases in quotations are in originals unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, 'Social Inequality, Power, and Politics: Intersectionality and American Pragmatism in Dialogue', *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 26, 2 (2012), 449-50; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Abingdon, 2009), 291-2. Discussions of interlocking, overlapping, or multiple oppressions precede the coining of intersectionality as a term. For genealogies of intersectionality and intersectional-like thought, see Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2016), 40-63, 79-80, 199-200; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 4-6, 16-8; Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (New York, 2010), 67-86.

¹¹ The Combahee River Collective, 'A Black Feminist Statement', in Beverly Guy-Sheftall (ed.), *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (New York, 2013), 232-5.

¹² Angela Y. Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves', *Massachusetts Review*, 13, 1/2 (1972), 98.

from within enslaved families and communities. It was ‘two forces, sexism and racism’ that ‘intensified and magnified the sufferings and oppressions of black women’.¹³

Black feminist scholars not only created new historical knowledge of black women’s oppression, but were central in the reconceptualisation of motherhood, the household, and the family. That ‘public’ and ‘private’ worlds were characterised by male authority and women’s ‘struggle for individual autonomy’ was largely predicated on white middle-class experiences.¹⁴ As Frances M. Beal expressed in her 1969 ‘Black Women’s Manifesto’, the idea of black women ‘simply caring for their homes and children’ was ‘idle dreaming’ for women who had historically worked ‘degrading and dehumanizing jobs’.¹⁵ Slavery, of course, ‘provided no social context for issues of privatized motherhood as a stay-at-home occupation’, and in evidencing the plurality in women’s experiences of motherhood and family life, scholars further challenged the predominance of this ‘white image’.¹⁶ Though the discussion of differences in women’s experiences became commonplace, this ‘difference project’ still often failed ‘to attend to the power relations that accompany difference’.¹⁷

Scholars have increasingly given attention to these ‘power relations’ and have explored the household as a site where women’s work and women’s relationships reflect, reconstruct, and revise dynamics of racial and class exploitation. Focusing on white working class women and race in the U.S. from 1865-1965, for example, Dana Frank explains that ‘white racial privilege shaped white working-class women’s domestic labors’. They ‘didn’t just passively accept racial privilege; they laboured to reproduce it’, and moments of ‘transracial connection’ between women were both tenuous and atypical.¹⁸ Indeed, Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues that in the realm of reproductive labour, the white woman ‘willingly participates in and gains advantages from the oppression of racial-ethnic women’, justified ‘only by denying the domestic worker’s womanhood’ and ignoring employees’ ‘family ties and responsibilities’.¹⁹ Thus, as Irene Browne and Joya Misra’s study of race, class, and gender in the U.S. labour market evidences: ‘The experiences of domestic workers provide stark examples of the stresses of the interrelatedness of privilege and disadvantage’.²⁰

¹³ bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London, 1982), 22. See 15-49.

¹⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, ‘Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood’, in Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey (eds), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* (New York, 1994), 46.

¹⁵ Frances Beal quoted in Sirma Bilge and Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 66-7.

¹⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 56-7; Beal quoted in Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 66-7.

¹⁷ Zinn and Dill, ‘Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism’, 322-3.

¹⁸ Dana Frank, ‘White Working-Class Women and the Race Question’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 54 (1998), 84-6.

¹⁹ Glenn, ‘From Servitude to Service Work’, 17.

²⁰ Irene Browne and Joya Misra, ‘The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29 (2003), 503. For a class-orientated analysis of domestic labour, see Laurie Ousley, ‘The Business of Housekeeping: The Mistress, the Domestic Worker, and the Construction of Class’, *Legacy*, 23, 2 (2006), 132-47.

The slaveholding household, then, has a clear place among the many contexts in which women's relationships and women's mothering were shaped by and shaped class and race-based exploitation. The household was at the very centre of revisionist approaches to white southern women's history. Historians detailed the busy work lives and familial responsibilities of women of the slaveholding class in opposition to their representations as 'ladies' and 'belles'. Anne Firor Scott, for example, proclaimed in 1970 the 'southern lady' was a 'marvelous creation'. Far from being ladies of leisure, slaveholding women lived in misery as they attempted to meet the demands of household management and their husbands' high expectations.²¹ Catherine Clinton similarly described mistresses as 'trapped within a system over which she had no control' with 'no means of escape', preoccupied with the 'constant chore' of caring for slaves.²² Despite emphasising the nature and extent of women's work, however, as 'the institutional consolidation of a distinct set of social relations of production and reproduction', the household remained characterised as a private enclave and a bulwark 'against the intrusion of the capitalist market'.²³

Nowhere else have white women's active roles both within and beyond the household been made more evident, however, than in the study of the Civil War, where historians have detailed how white women 'emerged into authority and even leadership'.²⁴ While, as W.H. Foster writes, focusing on women's lives during wartime is 'potentially useful because it sweeps away a good part of a layer of male control', Thavolia Glymph importantly establishes that slaveholding women had no 'general inexperience in managing slaves' and were instrumental to the day-to-day maintenance of slavery.²⁵ Evidently, as Stephanie McCurry has suggested, there is now 'compelling reason' to abandon the public-private analytic rubric altogether, as 'all relations of power in what we would call the "private sphere," [...] were inevitably politicized'.²⁶ The permeable boundaries between the public and private and the limitations of the notion of 'separate spheres' (whether 'an ideology imposed on women, a culture created by women' or 'a set of boundaries expected to be observed by women') have been further expounded through exploration of the sheer diversity of white southern women's

²¹ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago, IL, 1970), 4. See 25-8.

²² Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York, 1982), 6, 22, 35.

²³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), 58, 82.

²⁴ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 135. For discussion of white southern women's roles during the war, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York, 1996), 22-9; Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana, IL, 2004), 71-84; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage, The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York, 2008), 100-24; Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina 1830-1880* (Urbana, IL, 1997), 158-65.

²⁵ W.H. Foster, 'Women Slave Owners Face their Historians: Versions of Maternalism in Atlantic World Slavery', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 41, 3-4 (2007), 313; Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 122.

²⁶ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (Oxford, 1997), 236.

lives in the south, which have evidenced their extra-household activities, their fostering of social interests, and their political engagement.²⁷

While the roles of white southern women have undergone such revision, the power relations between mistresses and slaves have generally occupied a somewhat peripheral place in the historiography of slavery. Formative evaluations of black and white women's relationships tended to minimise women's differences and the nature, extent, and effects of slaveholding women's involvement in the exploitation of slaves. Catherine Clinton explains in *The Plantation Mistress* (1982), for example, that 'white women's agency has been profoundly underestimated'. While she details mistresses' instrumental roles in slave management, Clinton finds mistresses' 'expert' use of 'psychological and physical violence' ultimately 'unconnected to the culture of slavery'.²⁸ In a world where '[c]otton was king' and 'white men ruled', black and white women served 'the same master' and 'shared burdens of womanhood', despite 'the gulf' of race between them.²⁹ Similarly, Anne Firor Scott's characterisation of slaveholding women as 'private abolitionists' minimises white women's participation in slavery and the benefits they galvanised through it. Their 'constant problems' with slaves were simply owing to individuals' deficits in 'human relations'.³⁰ While, as Gerda Lerner has suggested, seeing women as victims of gendered oppression can make women appear 'largely passive' and overlooks the 'positive and essential way in which women have functioned', it also diminishes the power that certain women had over other women and how they used it.³¹

Marli Weiner's *Mistresses and Slaves* (1997) is one of few works to centre upon the nature of slaveholding and enslaved women's relationships, focusing upon South Carolina 1830-80. Weiner further establishes the demanding nature of slaveholding women's lives as well as the 'benefits' and 'comfortable style of living' that 'plenty of servants' provided.³² Yet, she maintains that mistresses denied 'the teachings of their own culture about the depravity and dehumanization of slaves' and were 'deeply influenced by the expectations that white women should treat slaves with kindness and benevolence', 'to fulfil the expectations of southern

²⁷ Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *Journal of American History*, 75, 1 (1988), 17. See, for example, Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York, 1985), 196, 215, 217, 231; Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez, 'Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in 19th Century America', *Journal of Social History*, 10, 4 (1977), 490; Eugene D. Genovese, 'Toward a Kinder and Gentler America: The Southern Lady in the Greening of the Politics of the Old South', in Carol Bleser (ed.), *In Joy and In Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900* (New York, 1991), 126-8; Joan E. Cashin, "'Decidedly Opposed to the Union": Women's Culture, Marriage, and Politics in Antebellum South Carolina', *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 78, 4 (1994), 735-59; John L. Brooke, 'Spheres, Sites, Subjectivity, History: Reframing Antebellum American Society', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 28, 1 (2008), 75-82.

²⁸ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 28, 31-3, 37, 52.

²⁹ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 35, 165.

³⁰ Scott, *Southern Lady*, 51, 37.

³¹ Gerda Lerner, 'Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges', *Feminist Studies*, 3, 1/2 (1975), 6.

³² Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 23, 28-36. For a similar line of argument, see Emily Pollnitz, 'Acquiescence or Resistance: Reconsidering Interracial Relationships Between Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1861', *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 24, 1 (2005), 125-39.

womanhood'. Accordingly, slaveholding women often 'humanized an inhuman institution'.³³ Fundamentally, Weiner's argument relies upon a gendered distinction in racism and class interests: in suggesting that '[p]lantation mistresses were inspired by the racism and paternalism of white men as well as by the ideology of domesticity in their thinking about slaves', these ideals are separable rather than mutually constitutive, 'conflicting motivations' rather than complementary ones.³⁴ Rather, as Chapter One evidences, a shift in interpretation of mistresses that accounts for their identities and everyday lives as white upper-class women and *de facto* slave owners is necessary in understanding the economic and racial bases of their relationships with enslaved women.

For Weiner, as for others, however, common gendered experiences were conducive to bonding between slaveholding and enslaved women. Alongside domestic ideologies, 'biology, home, family, children, nurturing, domestic work' 'encouraged' slaveholding women 'to identify emotionally' with female slaves.³⁵ While Brenda Stevenson recognises both that 'the privileged status of slave mistresses rested squarely on the backs of their female slaves' and enslaved women 'reacted strongly' to slaveholding women who negatively impacted their mothering, she too suggests gender was grounds for empathy. In enslaved women, 'the white woman saw the source of her own misery, but she also saw herself'.³⁶ Women were certainly able to show some compassion to one another and share a modicum of closeness, yet the nature and significance of these 'bonds' are made clear both by the prevailingly exploitative and abusive character of women's relationships and the limitations of white women's 'paternalism', as Chapter One advances.

Historians have, of course, expounded women's differences. Deborah Gray White sharply delineated the experiences of enslaved women from both enslaved men and slaveholding women as 'the only women in America who were sexually exploited with impunity, stripped and whipped with a lash, and worked like oxen' in 1985.³⁷ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's 1988 *Within the Plantation Household* offered further detail of the roles of white women in particular in enslaved women's exploitation. While establishing that white women could sometimes show 'compassion' to enslaved women and were 'bound together by their gender and the forms of labor that derived from it', Fox-Genovese finds that mistresses 'commonly resorted' to physical punishment to control enslaved women. Women were

³³ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 74, 51; Marli F. Weiner, 'The Intersection of Race and Gender: The Antebellum Mistress and Her Slaves', *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 13, ½ (1986), 384, 375.

³⁴ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 149.

³⁵ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 87.

³⁶ Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black & White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (Oxford, 1996), 181.

³⁷ Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985), 162.

ultimately 'divided by class and race'.³⁸

Causes of tension in women's relationships, however, have often been represented as the result of extrinsic factors. For example, in suggesting '[w]ealthy white women found little in city life to prevent them from feeling sympathetic toward black women and acting on their impulses', Weiner suggests white women's 'impulses' were benevolent ones and it was their environment that conditioned their relationships.³⁹ Attributing the thorniness of women's relationships to factors beyond their control relies in part upon an interpretation of mistresses as not wielding their own power.⁴⁰ Rather, much of the antagonism in the slaveholding household has been attributed to white women's resentment towards white men's sexual relationships with female slaves. Gwin Minrose characterises this as 'double-headed abuse', whereby enslaved women endured both white males' sexual abuses and the angry reactions of white women.⁴¹ While this was certainly cause of some mistresses' worst treatment of enslaved women, it must be situated among the habitual, everyday, normality of mistresses' abuse and exploitation of enslaved women, and their desires to construct social difference, which this study suggests extended through every aspect of their relationships.

The representation of white women's violence as temperamental equally diminishes its ubiquity and its utility, further suggesting white women's abuse of black women was somewhat beyond their control. Mistresses, historians have suggested, were deeply reluctant to punish slaves.⁴² They laboured to live up to ideals that Weiner sees as being fundamentally compassionate ones, but 'were not always able to transcend the strong antagonisms caused by slavery'.⁴³ Their acts of violence were 'seemingly arbitrary', or, the result of 'normal mood swings'.⁴⁴ Stephanie Camp, for example, recognises that white women engaged in violence as a means of managing and training servants, but argues their violence was fairly 'temperamental'.⁴⁵ Such interpretations of white women's violence characterise it as sporadic rather than systemic. It seems unlikely that males' violence would be characterised as the result of 'mood swings'.

A major intervention to these interpretations comes in the form of Thavolia Glymph's

³⁸ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 32, 24, 140, 144.

³⁹ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 150.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* ed. 2 (Wheeling, IL, 2002), 9; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 65.

⁴¹ Minrose C. Gwin, 'Green-Eyed Monsters of the Slaveocracy: Jealous Mistresses in Two Slave Narratives', in Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (eds), *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* (Bloomington, IN, 1985), 40. See also Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 52.

⁴² Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 37-8, 41, 86, 127; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 65.

⁴³ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 51.

⁴⁴ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 127; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 135.

⁴⁵ Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 43.

Out of the House of Bondage. Glymph argues that ‘violence on the part of white women was integral to the making of slavery’. She evidences the widespread and systematic nature of white women’s violence towards enslaved women, asserting that when historians represent white women as victims of white male power, ‘their power and violence disappear’. In fact, ‘far from being victims of the slave system, [mistresses] dominated slaves’ with violence that was ‘crucial to shaping black and white women’s understanding of what it meant to be female’.⁴⁶ This study thus builds upon Glymph’s work by giving close attention to those areas where mistresses were commonly understood to have ‘positive’ influence, in particular, by centralising motherhood in women’s relationships. Gendered roles, responsibilities, and experiences were not just deeply differentiated by one’s enslaved or slaveholding status: white women actively sought to articulate these differences and what was ‘common’ between women was at the very centre of women’s power struggles.

Motherhood is thus an especially important line of inquiry in understanding women’s relationships under slavery. In a historiography that has been inclined to interpret gender as an ameliorating force in women’s relationships, and as the most apparently essential female experience, motherhood remains often understood as grounds for female bonding under slavery. Motherhood is – in and of itself – a problematic site of historical inquiry. The way in which ‘the historical specificity of [women’s] lives and of our own becomes obscured’ is most potent in the realm of motherhood because of the tendency to accord biological experiences a degree of transhistoricity.⁴⁷ Motherhood can also be interpreted somewhat deterministically if ‘[b]iological and maternal functions determined daily existence’.⁴⁸ Rather, motherhood is better understood as Evelyn Nakano Glenn describes: a ‘historically and culturally variable relationship “in which one individual nurtures and cares for another”’.⁴⁹ She speaks to a social constructivism that affords procreative needs and procreative practices historical contingency and change.⁵⁰

The extent to which enslaved women’s mothering was shaped by their unique place in southern society is clear. The scholarly emphasis on enslaved family structure, as Leslie Schwalm writes, means that ‘slave women appear in much of the historical literature largely in

⁴⁶ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 3-5.

⁴⁷ Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, ‘The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding’, *Signs*, 5, 3 (1980), 392.

⁴⁸ Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990), 3.

⁴⁹ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, ‘Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview’, in in Glenn, Chang, and Forcey (eds), *Mothering*, 3.

⁵⁰ Alison M. Jaggard, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Maryland, 1988), 129. Despite this approach to motherhood, however, Amber Kinser suggests ‘the relationship of feminism to motherhood has clearly been a complex one, even an ambivalent one’, and Samira Kawash finds motherhood marginalised ‘from the center of academic feminism’. Amber E. Kinser, *Motherhood and Feminism* (Berkeley, CA, 2010), 2; Samira Kawash, ‘New Directions in Motherhood Studies’, *Signs*, 36, 4 (2011), 970-2.

the setting of nuclear families'.⁵¹ This has been an especially important focus of historians who, partly responding to the 1965 Moynihan Report, have evidenced the strength and durability of the family: Herbert Gutman detailed the ways in which 'the bonds of love and affection [...] survived the devastating onslaught of slavery' and John Blassingame emphasised that slave families performed 'many of the traditional functions of the family - the rearing of children being one of the most important of these functions'.⁵² Motherhood in particular was imbued with significance for enslaved women. Wilma King identifies that in traditional West African society motherhood was both 'the most important rite of passage for women and the mother-child nexus superseded the husband-wife relationship'.⁵³ Thus, as Deborah Gray White suggests, motherhood was afforded 'almost sacred importance'.⁵⁴ Domestic work did not bear the 'fatal mark of inferiority' for enslaved women, and the labours associated with family life took a markedly different meaning from that 'carried out in the home of a white family'.⁵⁵ Communal and shared mothering was a site of individual and community-based identity and power.⁵⁶

Scholars have, of course, emphasised the inherent difficulties of mothering under slavery though. As Deborah Gray White explains, 'the responsibilities of childbearing and childcare seriously circumscribed the female slave's life'.⁵⁷ Regional studies of enslaved families and women have highlighted the ways in which enslaved women's mothering was shaped by the nature and organisation of women's work, their family structure and social lives, and their relationships with slaveholders. The nature and size of a slaveholding, then, could have decisive impact on one's mothering.⁵⁸ Despite differences across the south in the treatment of enslaved mothers' pregnancies, childbirth and recovery, their childcare arrangements, and even the likelihood they would remain with their children, scholars concur

⁵¹ Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women's Transition From Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana, IL, 1997), 48.

⁵² Herbert Gutman quoted in Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (London, 1982), 15; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1979), 151.

⁵³ Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington, IN, 1995), 111.

⁵⁴ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 106. See also Darlene Clark Hine, "'Ar'n't I a Woman?': Female Slaves in the Plantation South": Twenty Years After', *Journal of African American History*, 92, 1 (2007), 18; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 219, 181.

⁵⁵ Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, 12; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985), 4.

⁵⁶ Collins, 'Shifting the Center', 55-6. See Brenda E. Stevenson, 'Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity among Antebellum Virginia Slave Women', in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds), *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), 174; Brenda E. Stevenson, "'Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca Down": Enslaved Women, Religion, and Social Power in the Antebellum South', *Journal of African American History*, 90, 4 (2005), 346, 349; Wilma King, "'Rais' Your Children Up Rite": Parental Guidance and Child-Rearing Practices Among Slaves in the Nineteenth-Century South', in Larry E. Hudson (ed.), *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester, NY, 1994), 145-6.

⁵⁷ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 69-70.

⁵⁸ For regionally-focused studies of enslaved women and families, see Larry E. Hudson, *To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens, GA, 2016); Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*; Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); Daina Ramey Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana, IL, 2007); Schwalm, *Hard Fight For We*; Wilma Dunaway, *The African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (Cambridge, 2003); Wilma Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South* (Cambridge, 2008); Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens, GA, 1995).

that slavery systematically impeded a woman's control over and opportunity for mothering.

Accordingly, motherhood was often at the centre of enslaved women's resistance to their slaveholders and the slaveholding regime. For Jacqueline Jones, 'black women's attention to the duties of motherhood deprived whites full control over them', and 'amounted to a political act of protest'.⁵⁹ While enslaved women themselves were at the core of slaves' political networks and their strategies for resistance, their reproductive capacities were also means of resisting slavery.⁶⁰ Abortion, contraception, and infanticide could be used to challenge 'one of the bases of the system's life itself – reproduction'.⁶¹ Contemporary scholarship builds upon this focus on the distinctiveness of enslaved women's experiences of slavery by focusing upon motherhood and mothering more specifically, rather than necessarily through the context of the family.⁶² This study thus develops this approach by emphasising the uniqueness of enslaved women's experiences as mothers both through comparison with slaveholding women and in exploring exclusively female forms of exploitation such as breastfeeding and enslaved wet-nursing.

Yet, while motherhood was a site of struggle between enslaved women and their slaveholders, seldom have white women been centralised in enslaved mothers' exploitation. When placing slaveholding and enslaved women's motherhood in relation to one another, historians have tended to similarise women's experiences. Sally McMillen, for example, writes that women 'whatever their status or color, endured difficult and exhausting lives' and that childbearing and its attendant duties were 'unceasing and demanding activities for black and white women' alike.⁶³ Motherhood, that is, remains often characterised as a site of women's commonalities, which are in turn suggested to have fostered bonds between women. As Vera Lynn Kennedy argues in *Born Southern* (2010), the 'biological mandate' of womanhood is understood to have 'had the effect of linking women, black and white, together'.⁶⁴ Kennedy suggests that:

⁵⁹ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 13.

⁶⁰ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 246; Stephanie M.H. Camp, 'The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861', *Journal of Southern History*, 68, 3 (2002), 541-2.

⁶¹ Stephanie Shaw, 'Mothering Under Slavery in the Antebellum South', in Glenn, Chang, and Forcey (eds), *Mothering*, 253. For further discussion of motherhood/reproduction as means of resistance see Stephanie Li, 'Motherhood as Resistance in Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl', *Legacy*, 23, 1 (2006), 14-29; Liese M. Perrin, 'Resisting Reproduction: Reconsidering Slave Contraception in the Old South', *Journal of American Studies*, 35, 2 (2001), 255-74; Shaw, 'Mothering Under Slavery in the Antebellum South', 237; Cheryl Ann Cody, 'Sale and Separation: Four Crises for Enslaved Women on the Ball Plantations, 1764-1854', in Larry E. Hudson (ed.), *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester, NY, 1994), 139.

⁶² In particular, see the Arts and Humanities Research Council network 'Mothering Slaves: Comparative Perspectives on Motherhood, Childlessness and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies' (Newcastle University, University of Reading, University of São Paulo, 2014-2015) special issues of *Slavery and Abolition*, 'Mothering Slaves: Motherhood, Childlessness and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies', 38, 2 (2017) and *Women's History Review*, 'Mothering Slaves: Motherhood, Childlessness and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies', forthcoming, 2017.

⁶³ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 2, 57.

⁶⁴ Vera Lynn Kennedy, *Born Southern: Childbirth, Motherhood, and Social Networks in the Old South* (Baltimore, MD, 2010), 6.

The commonalities of birth and motherhood, in particular, brought them together as much as it divided them [...] created bonds that seemed to defy the power relationships of slavery.⁶⁵

Motherhood, according to Kennedy, was a ‘shared female experience’ and thus a ‘point of commonality’ for enslaved and slaveholding women.⁶⁶ Yet, Kennedy also argues that after childbirth, there were ‘marked contrasts’ and ‘stark differences’ in mothering, and ‘social divisions were often firmly reasserted’.⁶⁷ Therefore, the focus upon childbirth as a unifying experience and one of women’s bonding is overstated. Establishing the broader pattern of slaveholding women’s extensive interventions into enslaved women’s mothering, the nature of women’s conflictive relationships, and the structural inequalities that shaped motherhood is thus fundamentally important to avoid giving such interactions undue significance. Indeed, in placing so much emphasis on these fleeting moments, rather than patterns of exploitation, historians ‘impose a silence upon the events that they ignore, and they fill that silence with narratives of power about the event they celebrate’.⁶⁸

Katy Simpson Smith similarly emphasises women’s similarities in her exploration of southern motherhood: defining a ‘maternal power’ that was shared ‘across cultural lines’ in *We Have Raised All of You* (2013).⁶⁹ Certainly, women established meaningful and socially important roles as mothers that bore some likeness. However, Smith overlooks that women’s ‘maternal power’ that crossed ‘cultural lines’ encompassed the manipulation, coercion, exploitation, and abuse of other mothers. White women’s ‘maternal power’ was reliant upon their compromising black women’s ‘maternal power’. While Smith acknowledges white women often displayed ‘indifference toward young slaves’ and that ‘[n]on-white mothers earned the harshest words from maternal critics’, she too gives little attention to either the context of women’s relationships or the extent of white women’s interventions into enslaved women’s mothering.⁷⁰

The relationalities of women’s mothering and the inextricability of their privileges and disadvantages have thus not been fully realised. Some have understated the reliance, for

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 61-2.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 57.

⁶⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA, 2015), 118. Trouillot refers here to commemoration, but it has applicability to historical narratives in other forms.

⁶⁹ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 3.

⁷⁰ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 99.

example, of slaveholding mothers on enslaved women. For Jane Turner Censer, slaveholding women's commitment to their children meant 'probably few allowed nurses to assume major importance'.⁷¹ While Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, on the other hand, emphasises slaveholding mothers 'delegated the most tiresome and routine tasks to slave women', she suggests nurses were part of a mistress's 'extended personal circle', characterising slaveholding women as the 'feminine face of paternalism'.⁷² Despite recognising the deep divisions of race and class, then, 'sometimes shared' tasks of infant care could create 'tenuous bonds', or, women's 'shared values that placed concern for children and family at the center of their lives' meant '[m]any were able to extend a degree of that concern to one another's children'.⁷³

This interpretation of white women's paternalism especially centres around their involvement with enslaved children. Marli Weiner, for instance, argues that white women's relations with and interests in enslaved women's children were representative of their 'emotional identification with black women'.⁷⁴ Such claims, however, overlook that white women habitually exploited enslaved children as labourers, abused enslaved children, separated enslaved mothers and children, and sought to supersede their parental authority. Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this study thus address these issues in exploring the many forms of white women's interventions into female slaves' mothering upon both the basis of slaveholding women's mothering and on the basis of enslaved women's motherhoods. Chapter Two in particular explores slaveholding women's relationships with enslaved children and suggests they reflected neither mistresses' paternalism nor their bonds with enslaved women.

While the 'power relations' in women's relationships remain a developing part of the historiography of slavery, then, attention to 'power relations' in the realm of women's mothering have been even more marginal. The apparent 'near universality' of motherhood may be an inviting prospect for drawing similarities between women, but it is also one that encourages oversights to the extent of difference, the interrelationships of women's experiences, and the very nature of power. Katy Simpson Smith explains that hers is not 'is not a book about structures of racial or class-based dominance', yet she states that this 'near universality' in motherhood:

⁷¹ Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1984), 34.

⁷² Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 137, 131-2.

⁷³ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 92; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 148.

⁷⁴ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 82.

provides a testing ground for the “sisterhood” model of women’s history, which has posited that certain historical experiences have created a bond among women that can trump differences in race or class.⁷⁵

‘[T]he “sisterhood” model of women’s history’, however, cannot be examined without addressing ‘racial or class-based dominance’. Both enslaved and slaveholding women’s day-to-day experiences as mothers were shaped by this ‘dominance’, as this study shows, and in overlooking this an important aspect of black women’s experiences of enslavement and the centrality of mistresses to their exploitation has not been fully realised.

Mothering under slavery was not influenced by the interventions of slaveholders alone. Structural inequality stratified motherhood in terms of the conditions women bore and raised their children, their health-care, their labour, material resources, and opportunities for childcare. The extent of these differences has also been understated in emphasising commonalities between women. Vera Lynn Kennedy, for example, outlines that enslaved women shared the inattention of white doctors in their pregnancies, failing to address the harsh differentiation in medical practices and intense physical exploitation enslaved women endured during pregnancy.⁷⁶ Tanfer Emin Tunc also suggests that enslaved women and mistresses ‘suffered from the same reproductive dilemmas’ and does not acknowledge that the many illnesses and complications of pregnancy and childbirth were rendered much more dangerous for enslaved women and children because of the conditions of slavery.⁷⁷ The importance of these differences should not be understated: enslaved women’s children were more than twice as likely to die in infancy than free white children.⁷⁸

Of course, the distinction between the structural and the social is a conceptual one: interpersonal interactions constituted the system of slavery and the structure of this social system conditioned (to a greater or lesser extent) interpersonal interactions. Moreover, for enslaved mothers, their experiences of motherhood were not discretely organised. Yet, this approach offers means of considering the depth and breadth of the ways in which enslavement effected enslaved mothers and placing female slaveholders’ interventions in context.

A case-study into infant-feeding practice constitutes Chapter Four and Chapter Five and provides analysis of enslaved women’s maternal exploitation across these levels. Infant-

⁷⁵ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 6.

⁷⁶ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 53.

⁷⁷ Tanfer Emin Tunc, ‘The Mistress, the Midwife, and the Medical Doctor: Pregnancy and Childbirth on the Plantations of the Antebellum American South, 1800–1860’, *Women’s History Review*, 19, 3 (2010), 397.

⁷⁸ Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 141.

feeding, even more so than motherhood more generally, is a realm in which ‘the socially constructed and the biological are inextricably intertwined’ and thus ‘presentist’ interpretations of breastfeeding are easily ‘retransmitted’ onto different socio-historical and cultural contexts.⁷⁹ Contemporary constructions of breastfeeding as physically and emotionally important for mother and child, as well as the ‘instinctive’ and ‘natural’ means of infant-feeding across time and space, inevitably influence historical approaches to infant-feeding practice (though infants ‘rarely are exclusively breast-fed and rarely have been throughout recorded human history’).⁸⁰ Yet, breastfeeding also belonged to a pervasive ‘sentimental maternal ideal’ in the antebellum era.⁸¹ Thus, infant-feeding practices further emphasise the historical and social contingencies of motherhood: white women exercised agency within these cultural ideals, infant-feeding opportunities and practices were deeply influenced by women’s slaveholding or enslaved status, and the choices and privileges of one group of women were dependent upon the exploitation of another group of women.

While early scholarship that touched upon this practice dismissed it as a postbellum fantasy and emphasised white women’s acceptance of the ‘sacred duty’ of breastfeeding, contemporary scholars have begun to articulate the exploitative nature of wet-nursing and the centrality of white women to this intimate practice.⁸² This study furthers this approach by examining enslaved wet-nursing in the context of the structural inequalities that shaped infant-feeding practice and the range of slaveholding women’s interventions into enslaved women’s mothering. It establishes the nature of enslaved wet-nursing, its implications for enslaved mothers and children, and the insights it gives into women’s relationships in new depth by examining wet-nursing both within slaveholdings and through the informal and formal marketplaces. In doing so, it evidences the exploitative nature of enslaved wet-nursing that characterised its multitudinous forms, and emphasises the patterns of commodification and redirection that were common across gendered labour and women’s relationships. By situating enslaved wet-nursing and infant-feeding practices within enslaved women’s maternal

⁷⁹ Linda M. Blum, ‘Mothers, Babies, and Breastfeeding in Late Capitalist America: The Shifting Contexts of Feminist Theory’, *Feminist Studies*, 19, 2 (1993), 291; Jules Law, ‘The Politics of Breastfeeding: Assessing Risk, Dividing Labor’, *Signs*, 25, 2 (2000), 432, 408.

⁸⁰ Law, ‘The Politics of Breastfeeding’, 434. For an influential example of this interpretation of breastfeeding, see Derrick Brian Jelliffe and E.F. Patrice Jelliffe, *Human Milk in the Modern World: Psychosocial, Nutritional, and Economic Significance* (Oxford, 1978), 2, 115, 144, 163, 156. For an overview of contemporary breastfeeding discourses, see Law, ‘The Politics of Breastfeeding: Assessing Risk, Dividing Labor’, 407-50; Rebecca Kukla, ‘Ethics and Ideology in Breastfeeding Advocacy Campaigns’, *Hypatia*, 21, 1 (2006), 157-80.

⁸¹ Nora Doyle, ‘“The Highest Pleasure of Which Woman’s Nature Is Capable”: Breast-Feeding and the Sentimental Maternal Ideal in America, 1750-1860’, *Journal of American History*, 97, 4 (2011), 972.

⁸² See Sally G. McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty: Breast-Feeding Patterns Among Middle and Upper Class Women in the Antebellum South’, *Journal of Southern History*, 51, 3 (1985), 333-56; Emily West with R.J. Knight, ‘Mother’s Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South’, *Journal of Southern History*, 83, 1 (2017), 37-68; Stephanie Jones-Rogers, ‘[S]he Could... Spare One Ample Breast for the Profit of her Owner’: White Mothers and Enslaved Wet Nurses’ Invisible Labor in American Slave Markets’, *Slavery & Abolition* (2017), 337-55. The historiography of enslaved wet-nursing is discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

exploitation more broadly, this study illuminates the extent to which even the most ‘biological’ acts were characterised by inequality, power, and intra-gendered exploitation.

ii. Theoretical approach

The issue at the centre of this study is, essentially, power. Theories of power have been used largely from the sixties onwards to understand slavery as a social system reliant upon coercion and consent, negotiation and knowledge-construction, rather than brute force alone.⁸³ Eugene Genovese conceptualised slaveholder-slave relationships and slavery as a social system as paternalistic: while the ‘plantation system was a capitalistic enterprise’ its ‘primary characteristics’ were its paternalism.⁸⁴ For Genovese, the ‘commercial exploitation and profit maximization’ of slavery was a tendency antithetical to the ‘relationship of master and slave’ that was shaped by a ‘special psychology’, and ‘planters do not appear to have exploited their economic opportunities with anything like ruthlessness but to have considered them part of a wider social responsibility’.⁸⁵ In the household, these issues were magnified by ‘the full force of lordship and bondage’ and ‘house slaves [...] exhibited the most direct adherence to certain white cultural standards’.⁸⁶ While slaveholders’ paternalism was certainly a ‘self-serving rhetoric’, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argue that ‘southern slaveholders said what they meant and meant what they said’.⁸⁷

Genovese’s conceptualisation raises several important considerations in interpreting women’s relationships. An expansive literature on the slave-trade underscores the limitations of paternalism as characterising slavery as a system: slaveholder-slave relationships did not either centre upon (or originate from) ‘mutual obligations’.⁸⁸ Michael Tadman suggests these types of relationships were only reserved for key slaves, so while treating the majority of slaves indifferently, slaveholders maintained their own sense of paternalism.⁸⁹ As Thavolia Glymph argues, then, acts of ‘paternalism’ reflected ‘[t]he psychological and political needs of masters

⁸³ This largely relates to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of ‘hegemony’, in which the ruling class ‘must also seek to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order’. T.J. Jackson Lears, ‘The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities’, *American Historical Review*, 90, 3 (1985), 569.

⁸⁴ Eugene D. Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York, 1971), 270.

⁸⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969), 1; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York, 1974), 86; Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969), 14-5.

⁸⁶ Genovese, *Red and Black*, 122.

⁸⁷ Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge, 2011), 1.

⁸⁸ For discussion of how scholarship on the slave trade has influenced the conceptualisation of paternalism, see Lacy Ford, ‘Reconsidering the Internal Slave Trade: Paternalism, Markets, and the Character of the Old South’, in Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 143-64.

⁸⁹ See Michael Tadman, ‘The Persistent Myth of Paternalism: Historians and the Nature of Master-Slave Relations in the American South’, *Sage Race Relations Abstracts*, 23, 1 (1998), 7-23.

and mistresses to see themselves as honourable, just, and loved by their slaves'.⁹⁰ This sense of paternalism, however, as William Dusinger suggests, could be somewhat superficial: slaveholders could go 'through the motions of paternalism' and their 'motives were sometimes calculating, not benevolent' and 'a capitalist profit seeker might also be a "paternalist," in the strict sense of acting benevolently toward his workforce'.⁹¹

Genovese's conceptualisation, for Walter Johnson, is also predicated on the assumption that slaves did not have 'a revolutionary aspiration' or that there was 'a continuum between individual and collective acts of resistance'.⁹² While 'agency' is not an unproblematic concept, as a defining theme of the New Social History, it has been indispensable in understanding the power, dissemblance, and resistance that individuals exercised during their enslavement.⁹³ Thus, while the relationships between slaveholding and enslaved women might have exhibited 'paternalistic' aspects, these should be understood as largely limited to favourite slaves and complex in their motivations as self-serving and often superficial. Importantly, these relationships were characterised both by exploitation and dynamic power relations. The labour-centred nature of slaveholder-slave relationships in particular must be centralised. As Martin Kilian and E. Lynn Tatom argue, '[s]ocial relations do not exist in a vacuum', and 'the manner in which labor is organized within a mode of production is essential in analyzing that social formation'.⁹⁴

Commentators on women's relationships, even more so than in master-slave relations, have 'tried to divorce human relations from the economic reality of a social formation', depriving the 'economic base' of its due significance.⁹⁵ This is likely related to the enduring characterisation of women's worlds as orientated around familial and social responsibilities, rather than profit-orientated labour. White women are considered mistresses, rather than slaveholders.⁹⁶ They are defined in relation to men, not in relation to slaves. However, mistresses were vehicles of power rather than simply subject to it. Slavery was reliant upon the construction of racial-social hierarchies in every aspect of life and this encompassed women's

⁹⁰ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 29.

⁹¹ William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York, 1996), 204, 369.

⁹² Walter Johnson, 'A Nettlesome Classic Turns Twenty-Five: Re-reading *Roll, Jordan, Roll* by Eugene D. Genovese', *Common-place*, 1, 4 (2001). <<http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-01/no-04/reviews/johnson.shtml>>

⁹³ For discussion of the concept of agency, see Walter Johnson, 'On Agency', *Journal of Social History*, 37, 1 (2003), 113-24.

⁹⁴ Martin A. Kilian and E. Lynn Tatom, 'Marx, Hegel, and the Marxian of the Master Class: Eugene D. Genovese on Slavery', *Journal of Negro History*, 66, 3 (1981), 190.

⁹⁵ Kilian and Tatom, 'Marx, Hegel, and the Marxian of the Master Class', 190-1.

⁹⁶ In this study, the terms 'female slaveholders' and 'mistress' are used to refer to women of the slaveholding class (if legally dispossessed of property in marriage). As 'co-masters' of the slaveholding regime, mistresses were *de facto* slaveholders. Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 123. The roles of slaveholding women are discussed at length in Chapter One.

relationships, motherhood, and work. 'Times have changed' from the conclusion that power is something that women simply do not 'have'.⁹⁷

Intersectional feminist theory, or intersectionality, provides means for new approaches to women's history that allows for the complexity of power both within and between social groups, emphasising the 'interlocking' nature of oppressions and the mutually constitutive nature of social categories or identities.⁹⁸ The term itself was coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who explains that reducing women of colour to an 'either/or proposition' relegates 'the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling', but intersectionality has deep roots in black feminist scholarship.⁹⁹ Patricia Hill Collins explains that intersectionality can be used as an 'analytic tool' and that:

When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.¹⁰⁰

Intersectionality has been most commonly used to analyse the 'simultaneity of race and gender as social processes' in creating 'multi-dimensional social identities' and oppressions.¹⁰¹ It is reliant on a social constructivist theory of race, much as '[c]oncrete historical settings generate the meanings of gender'.¹⁰² Critical race theorists define 'race' as a socially constructed and thus historically variable social categorisation that manifests itself institutionally and interpersonally. The 'human constructs' of 'races' 'constitute an integral part' of the social fabric.¹⁰³ Inherently hierarchical and deeply political, racial categories are constructed relationally and have salient effect over individuals' opportunities and experiences.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Kathy Davis, 'Critical Sociology and Gender Relations', in Kathy Davis, Monique Leijenaar, and Jantine Oldersma (eds), *The Gender of Power* (London, 1991), 66.

⁹⁸ Browne and Misra, 'The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market', 487-8, 493; Rita Kaur Dhamoon, 'A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-Racism: Rethinking Transnationalism, Intersectionality, and Settler Colonialism', *Feral Feminisms*, 4, (2015), 32-3; Ange-Marie Hancock, 'When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5, 1 (2007), 65.

⁹⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 6 (1991), 1242. See Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 81, 65, 71-6.

¹⁰⁰ Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 1.

¹⁰¹ Jennifer C. Nash, 'Re-thinking Intersectionality', *Feminist Review*, 89 (2008), 1-3.

¹⁰² Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge, 1994), 5.

¹⁰³ Ian F. Haney Lopez, 'The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice', *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 29 (1994), 28.

¹⁰⁴ For key ideas in socially constructivist theories of race, see Edouard Machery and Luc Faucher, 'Social Construction and the Concept of Race', *Philosophy of Science*, 72 (2005), 1208-19; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 'Once More, with Feeling: Reflections on Racial Formation', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 123, 5 (2008), 1565-72; Howard Winant, 'Race and Race Theory', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26 (2000), 169-85; Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), 6-9; Barbara J. Fields, 'Whiteness, Racism, and Identity', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001), 48-56; Michael O. Hardimon, 'The Ordinary Concept of Race', *Journal of Philosophy*, 100, 9 (2003), 437-55.

Intersectional theorists have established a variety of methodological frameworks for critical inquiries, and owing to the different focuses of intersectional research and its use across a variety of disciplines, there is no prescriptive method or theory. Recently, scholars have conceptualised intersectionality as ‘a field of intersectionality studies’, which maintains the key tenets of intersectionality while allowing for creative and adaptive methodological frameworks and usage. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Leslie McCall suggest this field consists of three ‘loosely defined sets of engagements’, including ‘applications of an intersectional framework or investigations of intersectional dynamics’ to critical and context-specific inquiries that ‘build on or adapt intersectionality’.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Kathy Davis argues the very strength of intersectionality’s contribution to feminist theory is that ‘[i]ts lack of clear-cut definition or even specific parameters has enabled it to be drawn upon in nearly any context of inquiry’.¹⁰⁶

Accordingly, this study does not purport to give a comprehensive overview of intersectional scholarship, nor apply an intersectional methodology, and tools of critical inquiry in one area do not always transfer to another. However, the insights intersectional feminist theory provides into several key dynamics of social identities and oppressions have been instrumental in developing the research questions that underlie this project. As Vivian May writes, rather than using intersectionality descriptively, it can be used ‘to develop research questions or to inform theoretical or empirical analyses’ and to develop a research paradigm for critical inquiry.¹⁰⁷ In turn, such ‘historical specificity’ as this study provides can help to develop critical theory from ‘abstract notions of differences’ to ‘material, historical, and relational analyses’ and thus avoid a ‘syntax of equivalences’ whereby a ‘deprivation of history’ means ‘all differences and marginalizations become theoretically equivalent’.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, despite the transhistoricism with which the triumvirate of ‘race, class, and gender’ are used, intersectional theorists emphasise that these forms of social categorisation are ‘contingent on the particular dynamics under study or of political interest’, or, ‘situationally contingent’.¹⁰⁹ In considering gender/race/class ‘identity categories’, they are deprived of the

¹⁰⁵ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, ‘Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis’, *Signs*, 38, 4 (2013), 785-7.

¹⁰⁶ Kathy Davis, ‘Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful’, *Feminist Theory*, 9, 1 (2008), 77.

¹⁰⁷ Vivian M. May, ‘Historicizing Intersectionality as a Critical Lens: Returning to the Work of Anna Julia Cooper’, in Carol Faulkner and Alison M. Parker (eds.), *Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History* (Rochester, NY, 2012), 17. See also Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 3; Rita Kaur Dhamoon, ‘Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality’, *Political Research Quarterly*, 64, 1 (2011), 230; Hancock, ‘When Multiplication Doesn’t Equal Quick Addition’, 64.

¹⁰⁸ Mane, ‘Transmuting Grammars of Whiteness in Third-Wave Feminism’, 81, 86, 89; Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 199.

¹⁰⁹ Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, ‘Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies’, 807; Browne and Misra, ‘The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market’, 489.

‘ism’ that makes them ‘makes them recognizable as unjust systems of power’.¹¹⁰ Rather, by conceptualising gender/race/class as mutually-constitutive social processes, intersectionality effects a shift in approach whereby the construction and contestation of power is centralised. These interacting processes of social categorisation, as Leslie McCall writes, ‘determine the complex texture of day-to-day life for individual members of the social group under study’.¹¹¹

Intersectional scholars thus emphasise the dynamic relationships between individuals’ interactions and social structure: analysis should be across ‘individual’ and ‘institutional’ levels.¹¹² Sirma Bilge and Patricia Hill Collins propose four interconnected ‘domains of power’: the interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural.¹¹³ For Bilge and Collins, ‘the domains overlap, and no one domain is any more important than another’.¹¹⁴ This emphasis on multi-level analyses is similarly found in critical race theory. As Linda Burton et al have identified, some of the key principles of critical race theories include the analysis of ‘institutionalized’ and ‘racialized’ ‘social system’ as well as the individuals who ‘may contribute to the reproduction of these systems through social practices’.¹¹⁵

Adopting slaveholding and enslaved women as social categories for the purposes of this study, the interactions of gender/race/class in constituting women’s social identities and inequalities are plainly evident. In the antebellum south, the very meanings of womanhood and motherhood were reliant upon a woman’s social identity or categorisation.¹¹⁶ Moreover, these relational categorisations shaped the treatment, opportunities, and experiences of women and mothers in day-to-day life. It is the ways in which these context-specific constructions of race, gender, and class together rendered motherhood deeply different for different women is at the basis of this study. While this study is inhibited by its length in giving a comprehensive analysis across multiple domains of power, it seeks to situate its focus upon women’s interpersonal relationships in consideration of social structure more broadly.

These processes of categorisation were as important in shaping slaveholding women’s mothering as enslaved women’s, if in entirely different ways. Whites’ racial identities are often overlooked, giving a misleading representation of their experiences and privileges as ‘unracialized’ or ‘universal’.¹¹⁷ As Irene Browne and Joya Misra identify: ‘The construction of race and gender is often obscured, but no less potent, for members of the dominant social

¹¹⁰ Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 201.

¹¹¹ Leslie McCall, ‘The Complexity of Intersectionality’, *Signs*, 30, 3 (2005), 1782, 1787.

¹¹² Hancock, ‘When Multiplication Doesn’t Equal Quick Addition’, 64, 74; Nira Yuval-Davis, ‘Intersectionality and Feminist Politics’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13, 3 (2006), 198.

¹¹³ Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 7. See also Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 295-307.

¹¹⁴ Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 27.

¹¹⁵ Burton et al, ‘Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade’s Research on Families of Color’, 442.

¹¹⁶ This is discussed in further detail in the introductory sections of Chapter One, Chapter Two, and Chapter Three.

¹¹⁷ Robin DiAngelo, ‘White Fragility’, *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3, 3 (2011), 68, 59, 54.

categories'.¹¹⁸ Scholars of 'whiteness' have demonstrated that '[w]hiteness, like any other "race," is a historically constructed social category', though women have generally not been central in this scholarship.¹¹⁹ This further underscores the need to consider mistresses not as gendered subjects alone but as women whose identities were mutually constituted by their race and class, and to ask how this manifested in their day-to-day lives and relationships.

The simultaneity of privilege and penalty created through complex processes of social categorisation, however, mean there are 'few pure victims or oppressors', and 'an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed'.¹²⁰ This is fundamental to understanding white women's roles in the system of slavery. The slaveholding south was a racist socio-economic system but it was also a patriarchal one. Examination of white women's positions in this system must take account of both their limitations within it, the power they established, and how it was used. This is somewhat peripheral in focusing upon the relationships between women, but it is an important consideration nevertheless.

These complexities also underscore the importance of avoiding deterministic interpretations of women's relationships. To present enslaved women as 'pure victims' would overlook many aspects of their everyday lives and their relationships with slaveholding women, which were constant negotiations of and struggles for authority and autonomy. It is attention to 'power' and 'techniques of power' that 'gives an intersectional research paradigm its critical edge', and 'power differences are infused into every aspect of social life'.¹²¹ In focusing upon the interpersonal domain, or 'how people relate to one another, and who is disadvantaged or advantaged within social interactions', the extent to which enslaved women were disadvantaged in their relations with female slaveholders is all too clear, but enslaved women exercised power, control, and resistance.¹²² It is an aspect of women's relationships that requires close reading of limited source material.

In regards to enslaved women, the interlocking nature of race, class, and gender has been a defining approach in understanding the uniqueness of black women's experiences of slavery, as evident in the pioneering work of Angela Y. Davis, bell hooks, and Deborah Gray

¹¹⁸ Misra and Browne, 'The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market', 490.

¹¹⁹ Burton et. al, 'Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade's Research on Families of Color', 446. For discussion of the contributions and limitations of scholarship on whiteness, see Peter Kolchin, 'Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America', *Journal of American History*, 89, 1 (2002), 154-73; Eric Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001), 3-32. Both Dana Frank and David Roediger identify that whiteness studies have also focused less on the racial identities of women. See Frank, 'White Working-Class Women and the Race Question'; David R. Roediger, 'The Pursuit of Whiteness: Property, Terror, and Expansion, 1790-1860', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 19, 4 (1999), 588-9.

¹²⁰ Patricia Hill Collins quoted in Nash, 'Re-thinking Intersectionality', 235.

¹²¹ Dhamoon, 'A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-Racism', 234; Browne and Misra, 'The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market', 490-1.

¹²² Bilge and Collins, *Intersectionality*, 7.

White.¹²³ Enslaved women's mothering and their relationships with slaveholding women cannot be reduced to being 'racial', 'gendered', or 'class-based' alone. However, the emphasis on the mutual constitution of race, gender, and class in one's social identity leads the historian to consider how these dynamics interacted. In particular, it is necessary to consider that labour and labour relations shaped motherhood and women's relationships as well as racism in varying degrees of salience, though their ultimate inseparability is no clearer than in the context of slavery.

These complexly-constituted social categories can thus be used strategically to 'document relationships of inequality among social groups [...]'.¹²⁴ Leslie McCall defines an intercategorical approach, primarily used within social and political sciences, which suggests that rather than focusing upon 'the definition or representation' of social groups, scholars can centralise 'the nature of the relationships among social groups'. Accepting that there are, of course, 'relationships of inequalities among already constituted social groups', this type of approach takes the relationships between social groups 'as the center of analysis' and 'analyze[s] the intersection of the full set of dimensions of multiple categories'.¹²⁵ In adopting slaveholding and enslaved women as social groups, then, rather than exploring the configuration of these groups, they can be adopted in their totality for the purposes of examining the relationships between these groups.

There is a risk in this approach, however, of eliding important intra-group differences that could render individuals' experiences very different. Sheila Hancock, for example, emphasises that group 'members often differ in politically significant ways' and 'categories themselves elide important differences within groups-leaving groups with an ongoing hierarchy within'.¹²⁶ Scholars have identified such problems in historians' treatment of enslaved women as a social group. Rashauna Johnson, for instance, suggests that scholars of American slavery give little attention to women 'of African descent', let alone 'the diverse, multidimensional modes of hierarchy that subdivided them'.¹²⁷ Wilma Dunaway highlights the fact that many enslaved women in the Appalachian region – one in every 7.5 – were 'either a Native American or descended from a native American'.¹²⁸ Women's mothering, and their relationships, were certainly shaped by differences within the respective groups of slaveholding

¹²³ Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*; hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*.

¹²⁴ McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', 1773-4.

¹²⁵ McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', 1787.

¹²⁶ Hancock, 'When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition', 68.

¹²⁷ Rashauna Johnson, "'Laissez Les Bons Temps Rouler!'" and Other Concealments: Households, Taverns, and Irregular Intimacies in Antebellum New Orleans', in Faulkner and Parker (eds), *Interconnections*, 51.

¹²⁸ Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 241.

and enslaved.

In many ways, then, adopting these social categories seems to give a false uniformity to women's experiences within social groups. Yet, as McCall explains, this approach offers the opportunity to explore the relationships among social groups more broadly, though it certainly relies in this inquiry at least upon making some generalisations. Furthermore, in researching enslaved and slaveholding women, it is not always possible to consider intragroup differences and how they may have effected either motherhood or women's relationships: information pertaining to women's racial/ethnic background, age, class distinctions, religion, and so forth are often elusive owing to the paucity of this information in primary source material. Where possible, this study has sought to consider intragroup distinctions that may have influenced either motherhood or women's relationships, such as the parentage of an enslaved woman's child.

However, this study maintains focus on the relationship between enslaved and slaveholding women as social groups. As McCall explains, intercategorical approaches can thus 'examine both advantage and disadvantage explicitly and simultaneously'.¹²⁹ Indeed, intersectional scholars emphasise that the simultaneous 'privilege' and 'disadvantage' individuals experience are interrelated.¹³⁰ Under slavery, the explicit and inextricable nature of these interdependencies are marked. Slaveholding women's 'privilege' as mothers was reliant upon the use and abuse of enslaved nurses, enslaved child-labour, and often enslaved wet-nurses: all of which could be forms of enslaved women's maternal exploitation, or 'disadvantage'. Equally, enslaved mothers' 'disadvantages' as mothers in the form of slaveholders' constant interventions were often white women's 'privileges': both in that enslaved women's motherhood produced labourers and maternal bodies, and also enabled white women to establish their respective social roles and sense of superiority. Inquiring of the interrelatedness of women's advantages and disadvantages, then, emphasises both the dynamism of enslaved women's maternal exploitation and the interconnections between women's mothering practices not attended to in current histories of southern motherhood.¹³¹

The consequences of such processes of categorisation, however, are not simply social, but result in the 'allocation of power and resources along race/gender lines'.¹³² Kimberlé

¹²⁹ McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', 1787.

¹³⁰ Collins, 'Social Inequality, Power, and Politics', 453-4; Browne and Misra, 'The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market', 489.

¹³¹ This thesis thus advances a line of argument pursued in R.J. Knight, 'Mistresses, Motherhood, and Maternal Exploitation in the Antebellum South', *Women's History Review* (2017) <DOI: 10.1080/09612025.2017.133684>, which primarily explores slaveholding women's interventions into enslaved women's mothering.

¹³² Evelyn Nakano Glenn quoted in Nicola Beisel and Tamara Kay, 'Abortion, Race, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century America', *American Sociological Review*, 69, 4 (2004), 503.

Crenshaw further explains that while power is exercised ‘through the process of categorization’, it also causes ‘that categorization to have social and material consequences’.¹³³ The social and material consequences of slaveholding and enslavement are predictably vast, and while focusing upon women’s relationships attends to the ‘social’, in light of the tendency for similarisation in histories of southern motherhood, the importance of considering some of the material consequences of enslavement and slaveholding alongside these ‘social consequences’ is especially clear. This includes aspects such as housing, healthcare, work, material resources and mobility, all of which had great consequence on women’s mothering.

A loosely comparative approach is especially important, then, in establishing the extent of women’s differences. A systematic comparison is elusive owing in a large part to the limitations of source material. Sound statistics for the purpose of comparing maternal and infant health, for example, are elusive. Furthermore, mistresses’ extensive reflections upon pregnancy and motherhood and their records of their everyday lives have no comparable source material for enslaved women. Yet, inattention to the extent of women’s differences has been borne, in part at least, of insufficient comparison, and this study thus compares women’s mothering through ‘approaching motherhood’, ‘pregnancy and health’, ‘childbirth and recovery’, ‘childcare, labour, and mother-work’.

Finally, intersectional theory emphasises the epistemic implications of differences in power. The dominance of essentialist narratives of women’s history has been challenged largely by the interventions of critical (typically black feminist) scholarship. Intersectionality is itself one of those critical interventions. As Victoria Hattam has emphasised in reflecting upon the inherently theoretical underpinnings of history, it is imperative that we do not ‘simply return to history as usual’ and dismiss ‘new historical work [...] as if it offered nothing new for us to reflect upon’.¹³⁴ Intersectional theory certainly provides historians of race and gender with ample ‘to reflect upon’, and in the realm of motherhood, raises essential issues for consideration in terms of ‘difference’ and ‘power’.

It is important, however, to recognise that while some scholars have emphasised the potential to develop intersectionality in new areas, other scholars identify the ‘erasure of Black women as quintessential subjects of intersectionality’ and ‘the whitening of intersectionality’.¹³⁵ These changes threaten both to overlook the ‘historical trajectory’ and ‘set

¹³³ Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins’, 1297.

¹³⁴ Victoria C. Hattam, ‘Whiteness: Theorizing Race, Eliding Ethnicity’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001), 66-7.

¹³⁵ Hancock, *Intersectionality*, 3, 7, 18.

of commitments' of intersectionality.¹³⁶ In attempting to better understand motherhood and its relationality, white women form a central part of this analysis. However, giving attention to the mechanisms of white women's power and relying upon their experiences for the basis of comparison is strategic. It draws attention to women's differences, their interrelatedness, and the exercise of power, in order to better understand the depth and breadth of enslaved women's exploitation as mothers. Detailing often-overlooked aspects of this exploitation - such as enslaved wet-nursing - is thus a crucial part of this study.

Focusing upon whites' interventions into black women's mothering, or 'talking directly about white power and privilege', can also be 'in itself a powerful interruption of common (and oppressive) discursive patterns around race'.¹³⁷ While the 'view from the margins' produces valuable knowledge, Nira Yuval-Davis argues, it is also 'crucial' to 'understand the hegemonic center and the ways people situated there think and feel'.¹³⁸ This means reading whites' testimony, however, closely and critically: whiteness is often 'hidden' in whites' own testimony and 'deters from acknowledging the larger issue of how the everyday organization of social and cultural relations function to confer benefits and systemic advantages to whites'.¹³⁹ This too foregrounds the necessity of a multi-level analysis.

Intersectionality provides a basis from which to explore motherhood under slavery across multiple-levels, asking how situationally-contingent and mutually-constitutive processes of social categorisation took effect in women's day-to-day lives. Intersectional scholars emphasise the dually social and material consequences of these processes, but emphasise that power was in constant articulation. The aims of this critical inquiry thus are three-fold. Firstly, it seeks to interrogate the influence of enslavement and slaveholding and motherhood by adopting a broadly comparative approach that considers structural differences and interpersonal interactions. Secondly, it seeks to analyse the relationality of slaveholding and enslaved women's mothering, asking of the interrelatedness of privilege and disadvantage. Finally, it seeks to better understand how power was expressed and experienced between women through the site of motherhood.

¹³⁶ Vivian May quoted in Hancock, *Intersectionality*, 11. For further discussion on mainstreaming intersectionality or expanding its remit, see Dhamoon, 'Considerations on Mainstreaming Intersectionality', 230-43; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 'Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies', 792-3; Devon W. Carbado, 'Colorblind Intersectionality', *Signs*, 38, 4 (2013), 811-45.

¹³⁷ DiAngelo, 'White Fragility', 68, 59, 54.

¹³⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Dialogical Epistemology - An Intersectional Resistance to the "Oppression Olympics"', *Gender and Society*, 26, 1 (2012), 48.

¹³⁹ Raka Shome quoted in Clark Mane, 'Transmuting Grammars of Whiteness in Third-Wave Feminism', 74.

iii. Sources and methodology

Contemporary scholars are indebted to social historians' focuses on '[t]he structure of everyday lives and the textures of the social institutions that regulate it', which have revised understandings of the lives of underrepresented peoples.¹⁴⁰ In the rejection of the grand narratives and generalisations of earlier generations of historians, social and cultural histories of the United States have increasingly focused upon specific regions, states, single families and individuals. Narrowly-focused studies, however, risk 'fragmentation of the past', or, as David Oshinky posed: 'How do they fit together? [...] Where is the framework that connects the parts to the whole?'.¹⁴¹

The absence of 'coherent overall frameworks', historians suggest, may be remedied through synthesis, interdisciplinarity, engagement with theory, or simply by embracing openness and experimentation.¹⁴² This study seeks to provide a broader analysis not only by using critical theory to inform its approach, but in moving away from regionally-focused study and instead exploring motherhood and women's relationships across the slave states in the antebellum period. In doing so, it seeks to provide insights into commonalities across the system of slavery while centralising individuals' experiences. It draws upon source material largely pertaining to the years 1800-61, but includes some testimony from the period of the Civil War owing to the disproportionate quantities of archival material and former slaves' testimony representing this period. As Thomas E. Rodgers writes, sources from the Civil War era offer not only the opportunity to explore experiences of war, but 'to reconstruct much of the content and dynamics of life in the rural communities and small towns'.¹⁴³

The extended slaveholding household was unavoidably the centre of most slaveholding women's lives, though less-privileged slaveholders such as the yeomanry undoubtedly engaged in more varied forms of labour.¹⁴⁴ Enslaved women predominantly laboured in agricultural capacities during their enslavement in the United States and this study thus considers the nature of both 'field' and 'house' slaves' mothering. The household, however, was the clearest site of site of mistresses' interactions with female slaves, who were more likely to work in the house

¹⁴⁰ Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Social History', in Eric Foner (ed.), *The New American History* (Philadelphia, PA, 1997), 242.

¹⁴¹ David Oshinky, 'Humpty Dumpty of Scholarship Has Broken into Pieces', *New York Times*, Aug. 26 2000.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/082600history.html>>

¹⁴² Kessler-Harris, 'Social History', 248-9; Peter N. Stearns, 'Social History Present and Future', *Journal of Social History*, 37, 1, (2003), 9-19; Peter N. Stearns, 'Part V: Opportunities for the Future', *Journal of Social History*, 39, 3 (2006), 865; Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, 'Social History as "Sites of Memory"? The Institutionalization of History: Microhistory and the Grand Narrative', *Journal of Social History*, 39, 3 (2006), 891-913.

¹⁴³ Thomas E. Rodgers, 'Civil War Letters as Historical Sources', *Indiana Magazine of History*, 93, 2 (1997), 107.

¹⁴⁴ The term planters refers to slaveholders of twenty or more slaves, small planters ten to nineteen slaves, and yeomen slaveholders nine or less. 12% of slaveholders qualified as planters, and across the south, one white family in four were slaveholders. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 86; Bruce Collins, *White Society in the Antebellum South* (London, 1985), 15-6.

than enslaved men.¹⁴⁵ Thus in exploring relationality, the household forms the basis of this study, but it is not a restrictive analytic rubric: women's lives, their mothering, and their relationships were not confined to this site. Nevertheless, the household as a unit of historical analysis 'embraces regional and local variations'.¹⁴⁶ Across the south, the slaveholding household was a 'synecdoche' for the extended household of production, a 'centralized home space' entirely reliant 'financially and logistically' on the 'forced productive and reproductive labor of captive Africans'.¹⁴⁷

The south, however, was not a homogenous entity by any stretch of the imagination. In North Carolina, for example, slaveholdings varied from the larger plantations of the tobacco belt (eventually giving preeminence to cotton production) to subsistence farming characteristic of the yeomanry.¹⁴⁸ South Carolina encompassed the coastal plains of the Low Country known for its formidably large plantations, the piedmont Upcountry (that 'long evinced a separate identity'), and the encroaching mountains of the Blue Ridge chain.¹⁴⁹ Most states shared this kind of variation, but slaveholdings were typically rural: by 1860, the urban population in the lower south remained less than 10%, though '[u]rban-rural differences do not fall into a tidy pattern', especially as slaveholders often moved between residencies.¹⁵⁰

Enslaved people in urban areas may have had easier interaction with their wider social groups. However, for domestic slaves at least, their work was marked by similarity. The demands of domestic labour were largely similar, wealthier slaveholders' households remained 'extended' ones and maintained various productive functions.¹⁵¹ For agricultural slaves, however, variations in labour organisation across the south could be highly influential on women's motherhood and this study has sought to take account of this.

Variations in slaveholding size often take regional patterns as the south's combination of small subsistence farms and large plantations fell quite generally into an upper-south lower-south divide in reflection of the different forms of production and the distribution of population in these regions.¹⁵² Slaveholdings were also typically smaller on the western frontier. On the prairies and plains of the West, Glenda Riley suggests 'frontierswomen's responsibilities,

¹⁴⁵ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 97.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher Clark, 'The View from the Farmhouse: Rural Lives in the Early Republic', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 24, 2 (2004), 202-3.

¹⁴⁷ Sara Clarke Kaplan, 'Love and Violence/Maternity and Death', *Black Women, Gender + Families*, 1, 1 (2007), 107.

¹⁴⁸ Rebecca J. Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina* (Jackson, MS, 2007), 9-10.

¹⁴⁹ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 30-1.

¹⁵⁰ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 75, 106-7; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 5; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 68.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Caroline Elizabeth Thomas Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land. A Southern Matron's Memories* (New York, 1901), 25, DocSouth; Eliza Frances Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865* (New York, 1908), 180, DocSouth; Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 149-57; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 80.

¹⁵² Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, 25, 32, 254.

styles, and sensibilities were shaped more by gender considerations than by region', though, and in the prairie areas 'numerous white women relied upon black women for help in raising their families, doing domestic chores, and running inns and other family businesses'.¹⁵³ The frontier was – by its very definition – shifting. Even Mississippi, the soon-to-be confederate stronghold, remained a frontier economy in the early nineteenth century. By 1835, the closure of the African slave-trade and the decline of tobacco cultivation in eastern seaboard states meant that - despite Jefferson's 1807 embargo and the effects of the War of 1812 - slavery had expanded at such a pace that the black population was higher than the white population.¹⁵⁴

Thus, as much as region shaped the lives of the enslaved and slaveholding, the size of a slaveholding was equally, if not more, influential. Those enslaved in smaller slaveholdings were often relied upon much more heavily for field labour, so household positions might be less permanent, sales and hires more frequent, and – as Wilma Dunaway argues – slaves subjected to 'greater brutality'.¹⁵⁵ That instabilities and economic uncertainties for small slaveholders took greatest detriment on enslaved people is clear.¹⁵⁶ As Leslie Schwalm identifies, while the lives of 'skilled' domestic slaves 'were similar' across the South, though those on large (and typically deep-south) slaveholdings were likely to be more numerous and thus more specialised.¹⁵⁷ While Elizabeth Fox-Genovese similarly recognises household size and region 'could have a decisive impact on the work assignments and living conditions of slave women', she emphasises that 'notwithstanding differences in degree, all southern households from yeoman farms to large plantation operated under similar structural constraints'.¹⁵⁸ Across the slaveholding states, about three quarters of all slaves lived on plantations with at least ten slaves by 1850.¹⁵⁹

While slaveholding women's domestic-centred lives were also marked by broad similarities, their lives and labour were shaped by distinctions within their class. The 'grand plantation mistress represented only a small proportion of southern women' and slaveholdings were typically more measured than their representations in popular culture.¹⁶⁰ Like mistresses of small slaveholdings across the south, frontierswomen often assumed greater and more varied labour roles, and domestic ideals were likely less influential. One of the key differences for

¹⁵³ Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence, KS, 1988), 2, 25.

¹⁵⁴ David J. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835* (Jackson, MS, 2004), 61, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 9, 11.

¹⁵⁶ Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi*, 53.

¹⁵⁷ Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*, 34.

¹⁵⁸ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 68.

¹⁵⁹ Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 80.

¹⁶⁰ Nancy Wolooh, *Women and the American Experience: A Concise History* (New York, 2002), 143.

women on the frontier was their relative isolation from other women and kin in particular.¹⁶¹ On smaller slaveholdings, white women are also understood to have had their work less confined to the extended household, but endeavoured to restrict their field labour as much as possible, which was something slaveholding facilitated to a greater or lesser extent.¹⁶² Stephanie McCurry explains that ‘the point is not that the ownership of slaves relieved yeoman women of domestic drudgery but that it relieved wives of the necessity of combining it with regular field labor’.¹⁶³

These household dynamics may have had some influence on women’s relationships. Childcare, for example, was sometimes a more ‘shared’ responsibility when there were not dedicated enslaved nurses in this role for both white and black children. In his study of Madison County, Tennessee, Gary Edwards finds that slaveholding yeomen (unlike planters) were ‘rarely relieved [...] from the most of the mundane chores around the farm’ and white ‘family members’ working ‘alongside’ enslaved people.¹⁶⁴ Carl R. Osthaus, however, maintains that even ‘yeoman families with a small number of slaves assigned a slave or two to the most onerous household tasks’. Though ‘working side by side’, whites assumed supervisory roles.¹⁶⁵

Both interviews with former slaves and the diaries and correspondence of slaveholding women often give very limited information about that nature of the household, including the amount of slaves in a household (which fluctuated with seasonal demands), or children, or other important contextual information about the slaveholding’s productive functions. Were such information consistently available, it would be possible to make analysis of the ways in which certain variable factors may have affected the interrelationships of women’s mothering. Despite undoubtable differences among slaveholding households, both enslaved and slaveholding women’s testimony surveyed evidences that the majority of households had several enslaved women (and/or children) working in domestic capacities, though. In smaller and larger slaveholdings, white women unquestionably assumed authority as managers of the labour of enslaved people, and held power and control over enslaved people working in the extended household on a day-to-day basis.

The source material this study draws upon is varied, and centres upon the testimony of

¹⁶¹ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 46-7, 132-5; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 161-9; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 26; Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women* (Lexington, KY, 1995), 65-73.

¹⁶² Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 47, 153; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 165-6; Stephanie McCurry, ‘Producing Dependence: Women, Work, and Yeoman Households in Low-Country South Carolina’, in Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (eds), *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 55-6; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 7, 16, 22, 213.

¹⁶³ McCurry, ‘Producing Dependence’, 64.

¹⁶⁴ Gary T. Edwards, ‘Men of Subsistence and Men of Substance: Agricultural Lifestyles in Antebellum Madison County, Tennessee’, *Agricultural History*, 73, 3 (1999), 310.

¹⁶⁵ Carl R. Osthaus, ‘The Work Ethic of the Plain Folk: Labor and Religion in the Old South’, *Journal of Southern History*, 70, 4 (2004), 763.

formerly enslaved women and slaveholding women from across the south and from various sizes of slaveholding. Slaveholding women's testimony predominantly in the form of diaries and letters were consulted from the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; the Rubenstein Library, Duke University Special Collections; and the archives of the Virginia Historical Society; and collections for examination were selected using archival descriptions that pertained to women, family or domestic life, and/or slavery.¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, though a broad range of states are represented in this study, more sources pertain to women in the regions of Virginia and North Carolina, though this imbalance is also off-set by the range within the testimony of formerly enslaved African Americans' testimony.

White women's testimony, however, often fails to give adequate context to its subject matter, and the relationships between authors and recipients, inconsistencies in spelling and nomenclature, chronological gaps in testimony, and a lack of information about individuals mentioned all problematise the building of holistic pictures of households and women's relationships. White women's testimony does, however, provide means for exploring their relations with slaves, their everyday lives, and their experiences and practices of mothering. Slaveholding women were four times more likely to be illiterate than their male counterparts and, moreover, one fifth of female slaveholders could not read or write.¹⁶⁷ Written sources thus suggest authors were among the more educated and socially privileged of slaveholders. However, mistresses of smallholdings that appeared only to have hired several slaves down to some of the wealthiest slaveholding women in the United States are represented in this study.

Diaries and correspondence are often privileged as 'unwitting' testimony, but is also necessary to consider that neither are entirely unmediated.¹⁶⁸ Diaries in particular take a variety of forms, which can include 'crafted text' as well as records of the everyday, the financial, and the religious.¹⁶⁹ Slaveholding women's records could take all these forms but this study largely relies upon 'private diaries': 'relatively brief dated entries that include similar information day after day', 'chronological, with no foreshadowing, little retrospection, and no international integration of theme, subject, or character'. That private diaries do 'not analyse or describe in any depth the character of others' and 'often lack enough detail to make them understandable to a reader unfamiliar with their context' furthers the likelihood that they are unwitting forms

¹⁶⁶ All primary sources discussed are listed in the Bibliography.

¹⁶⁷ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York, 1982), 50.

¹⁶⁸ Irina Paperno, 'What Can Be Done with Diaries?', *Russian Review*, 63, 4 (2004), 565; Heather Beattie, 'Where Narratives Meet: Archival Description, Provenance, and Women's Diaries', *Libraries & the Cultural Record*, 44, 1 (2009), 82. For discussion of the nature of slaveholding women's diaries specifically, see Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 242-53, 263-9, 348-9, 352-5, 362; Dusiinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 226-8.

¹⁶⁹ Paperno, 'What Can Be Done with Diaries?', 562-3; Rachael Langford and Russell West, 'Diaries and Margins', in Rachael Langford and Russell West (eds), *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History* (Amsterdam, 1999), 8.

of testimony.¹⁷⁰

This cannot be said of postbellum sources. Published diaries and reflections upon slavery are used cautiously for their heavy editing. Nevertheless, they give some important insights into white women's perspectives of slavery. White southern women's memoirs and published diaries were obtained through the Documenting the American South digitisation initiative of the University of North Carolina. The rare books holdings of the Virginia Historical Society were also indispensable in developing an understanding of white women's constructions of slavery as considered in this study's Conclusions. In exploring motherhood beyond women's own testimony, rare book collections at Duke University Special Collections provided nineteenth century prescriptive and medical literature that was especially useful in analysing infant-feeding ideologies that forms the basis of Chapter Four. This was supplemented by several digitally available texts.

In seeking to understand enslaved women's mothering, and their relationships with white women, all of the aforementioned sources have been essential. Record books and manuals kept by overseers and male slaveholders archived in the Southern Historical Collection at Duke's Rubenstein Library have also yielded important insights into the nature of mothering under slavery. In exploring the practice of enslaved wet-nursing, newspapers catalogued in the Readex Early American Newspapers online archive have been crucial in establishing the nature of the markets for wet-nurses, providing means for analysing their implications for enslaved women and slaveholder-slave relationships. The digitisation of these newspapers facilitated term-specific searching of selected antebellum advert-carrying newspapers from the District of Columbia, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia, covering different time-frames within the antebellum period.¹⁷¹ The quantification of the practice, however, is ultimately illusory owing to the limited amounts of newspapers, their restricted coverage, and high-levels of repeated adverts.

Whites' testimony in its many various forms of course gives little insight into the experiences of enslaved women and often gives little attention to subjects of great importance

¹⁷⁰ Beattie, 'Where Narratives Meet', 91-2.

¹⁷¹ The Early American Newspapers, Series I (1690-1876) collection, digitised by Readex, Newsbank Inc. and accessed via the British Library, was searched for the term (including word variants) 'wet nurse' (in slave states between 1800-1865), and thus retrieved advertisements that were explicitly selling, hiring, proffering, or procuring women in these roles. The following states returned results: Maryland (379 adverts, 1800-34), District of Columbia (123 adverts, 1809-21), Virginia (170 adverts, 1801-35), South Carolina (628 adverts, 1800-21). Those newspapers that returned results are listed by state in the Bibliography. Results from the state of Louisiana are not included in this study, which returned 50 adverts (1837-9), most of which appear to be several adverts repeated. Sometimes adverts are clearly repeated as indicated by the date the advert was originally placed and the repetition of the advert verbatim in successive issues, though often dates are not detailed. How many adverts are repeated is difficult to ascertain but all states seem to have large amounts of adverts repeated. Comparisons between states are also complicated by these selected newspapers covering different date-ranges in different areas, and missing issues within these years. Thus, this study relies upon these advertisements to give further insight into wet-nursing as analysed primarily through the testimony of former slaves and slaveholding women. See Chapter Five, especially section iv.

to slaves. The published narratives of fugitive and formerly enslaved women thus provide crucial insights into contemporaneous discussions of motherhood, if they too cannot be considered unmediated forms of testimony. They have been supplemented with several such ‘slave narratives’ authored by men who discussed motherhood, parenthood, and women’s relationships.

The interviews conducted with former slaves and their descendants across seventeen states under the auspices of the the Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration (1936-1941), however, forms the central part of this study.¹⁷² The digitisation of these interviews has facilitated a systematic analysis of the interviews based on term-specific searches, both for former slaves’ discussion of their mistresses and for discussion of infant-feeding. Search terms were used to derive information around the topic of women’s relationships, in particular orientated around ‘mistresses’ to garner formerly enslaved women’s (and men’s) perspectives upon white women. Similarly, in searching for wet-nursing testimony, search terms centred upon infant-feeding have been useful in finding relevant discussion.¹⁷³ Information pertaining to motherhood more generally was gathered by a broader reading of the Federal Writers’ Project narratives, including the twenty-two volumes published in 1977 and 1979 that constitute two supplementary series to those narratives held by the Library of Congress and thirty-eight interviews held by the Louisiana Works Progress Administration, State Library of Louisiana.

Despite using search terms to retrieve relevant qualitative material, this study does not attempt to quantify either the nature of women’s relationships (as ‘good’ or ‘bad’) or the scale of wet-nursing practice. Terms for describing women’s relationships are often open to interpretation, ambiguous, and show variation within interviews. With regards to wet-nursing testimony, quantification is complicated by the low amount of sources which make any discussion of infant-feeding at all, as well as the ambiguity of terms such as ‘nursing’.¹⁷⁴ The young age of informants during their time in slavery is especially influential to a study of motherhood: many former slaves were not mothers themselves under slavery and as a result there is a relative paucity of material about childbearing and infant-feeding in comparison to

¹⁷² For an introduction to the Federal Writers’ Project interviews, or ‘WPA narratives’, see Norman R. Yetman, ‘The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection’, *American Quarterly*, 19, 3 (1967), 534-53; Norman R. Yetman, ‘Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery’, *American Quarterly*, 36, 2 (1984), 181-210.

¹⁷³ Search terms (including word variants) for sources on women’s relationships included: mistress, mistus, mistuss, mistis, mistiss, mistess, missus, ole miss, ol miss, old miss, missie, missy. Search terms (including word variants) for sources on infant-feeding included: wet nurse, wet-nurse, wetnurse, suckled, suckler, sucked, suck, teat, breast milk, breastmilk, breast, bottle. The Federal Writers’ Project, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves* (Washington, DC, 1941), vols. I-XVI were accessed through ‘Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938’, United States Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. See Bibliography.

¹⁷⁴ This is discussed further in the introductory section of Chapter Four.

other subjects. Where interviewees were mothers under slavery, their testimonies often provide great insights into the nature and experiences of enslaved women's maternal exploitation.

Yet, commentators upon the Federal Writers' Project narratives have at times approached their reliability with undue scepticism. Donna Spindel, for example, draws upon the contested psychological theory of 'context dependency' - the idea that 'retrieval of encoded information is most reliable when events are recalled in their original context' - to argue that Federal Writers' Project informants' memories of enslavement lack reliability because they were 'taken out of context'.¹⁷⁵ She suggests context dependency gives 'more insight' into the reliability of the narratives than the 'untutored historian', and provides a 'weak empirical basis for trusting the interviews'.¹⁷⁶ Yet in relying upon this contemporary theory to diminish the reliability of this resource, Spindel entirely overlooks the social, cultural, and historical context of the information relayed during the interviews. The oral tradition in African American communities was incredibly strong during slavery and remained so in the postbellum years. As S. Anandhi and Meera Velayudhan explain:

Where the focus of research is on those who live on the margins and are peripheral to the dominant discourse, oral testimonies also open up a window into the experiences of people lacking a written history or sense of rootedness. This has also redefined conventional understandings of what particular historical processes have entailed [...]¹⁷⁷

Of course, the meaning of experiences changed over time both for individuals and more broadly. Undoubtedly, as John Blassingame argued, the interviewees' inclusion of lengthy conversations is unlikely verbatim. But, time and again, African Americans' memories and testimonies of slavery that are timelessly and tirelessly discredited have proven to be reliable in the general.¹⁷⁸ Memory cannot be reduced to a 'scientific' judgement of veracity and this has an unwarranted silencing effect.

Spindel believes, however, that many 'critical assessments' of the WPA narratives are 'striking' in 'how much more effectively they state the problems than solve them'.¹⁷⁹ The

¹⁷⁵ Donna J. Spindel, 'Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27, 2 (1996), 255.

¹⁷⁶ Spindel, 'Assessing Memory', 253, 260.

¹⁷⁷ S. Anandhi and Meera Velayudhan, 'Rethinking Feminist Methodologies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45, 44/45 (2010), 39.

¹⁷⁸ Two striking examples of this are Jane Beck's work on Daisy Turner's inter-generational oral testimony, and Jean Fagan Yellin's work on Harriet Jacobs's narrative. See Jane C. Beck, *Daisy Turner's Kin: An African American Family Saga* (Urbana, IL, 2015); Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York, 2004).

¹⁷⁹ Spindel, 'Assessing Memory', 249.

‘problems’ with the Federal Writers’ Project narratives cannot be ‘solved’. The prevailing issue here is not that elderly African Americans were unreliable informants, but rather that because of the lapse of time, the change in social context, interview processes, and interviewee-interviewer relations, the narratives are actually likely to understate the brutality of enslavement.

While the age of formerly enslaved informants alone certainly does not give cause to diminish people’s memories of slavery, John Blassingame, through comparison with testimony given before and immediately after the Civil War, suggests Federal Writers’ Project informants relayed less detail and less of the ill treatment under slavery.¹⁸⁰ Enslaved children also typically worked in different capacities to adults, they were not subject to maternal exploitation, and they were less frequently subject to sexual forms of exploitation. The social context of the late 1930s certainly shaped the testimony of formerly enslaved African Americans, too. The abject poverty of the depression led some interviewees to look more kindly on the past, and individuals sometimes felt that as government representatives their interviewers might be able to facilitate financial support, which was also likely to influence interviewees’ responses to questions.¹⁸¹

Furthermore, the staunch racial segregation of the south and the predominantly white identity of interviewers influenced African Americans’ disclosure of abuse, trauma, and negative experiences.¹⁸² Interviewers frequently referred to interviewees in racially derogatory terms and while directives emphasised that Federal Writers’ Project employees ‘should not censor any materials collected regardless of its nature’, George Rawick found some records were ‘deliberately held back’ and heavily edited, ‘systematically and heavily biased in the direction of grossly exaggerating the humaneness of the institution’.¹⁸³ Most state records omitted from the national collection, Rawick found, were owing to ‘administration difficulties’ or their seeming ‘too vague’, though.¹⁸⁴

The influence of race and racism on the interviews, nevertheless, cannot be overlooked. John Blassingame found ‘former slaves who talked to black interviewers presented an entirely different portrait of their treatment from what they told white interviewers’.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, ‘the

¹⁸⁰ John W. Blassingame, ‘Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems’, *Journal of Southern History*, 41, 4 (1975), 486.

¹⁸¹ Yetman, ‘Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery’, 187; David Thomas Bailey, ‘A Divided Prism: Two Sources of Black Testimony on Slavery’, *Journal of Southern History*, 46, 3 (1980), 403.

¹⁸² Yetman, ‘Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery’, 187-8; Lynda M. Hill, ‘Ex-Slave Narratives: The WPA Federal Writers’ Project Reappraised’, *Oral History*, 26, 1 (1998), 64; Blassingame, ‘Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves’, 481.

¹⁸³ John Lomax, ‘Supplementary Instructions #9E to the “American Guide Manual”, in Yetman, ‘The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection’, 550; Hill, ‘Ex-Slave Narratives’, 64; George P. Rawick, *TAS SSI*, Alabama Narratives, 1, xvi, xxxii; George P. Rawick, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, lvii.

¹⁸⁴ George P. Rawick, *TAS SSI*, Alabama Narratives, 1, lvii.

¹⁸⁵ Blassingame, ‘Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves’, 489. See also Andrea Livesey, ‘Sexual Violence in the Slaveholding Regimes of Louisiana and Texas: Patterns of Abuse in Black Testimony’, PhD thesis, University of Liverpool (July, 2015), 96-103.

stories are most revealing when the informant and the interviewer were of the same sex'. The 'majority of the former slaves in most states were interviewed by white women'.¹⁸⁶ However, this did not appear to give rise to more 'gendered' themes of discussion. In fact, in exploring the roles of mistresses and the nature of women's relationships, the disproportionate number of female interviewers may have reduced the likelihood of former slaves' disclosure of white women's abuses under slavery.

Furthermore, interviewers were often 'closely identified' with the former owners and their descendants and asked leading questions.¹⁸⁷ Relativity may have been used as a strategy to mitigate this situation, and former slaves often made references to other enslaved people who had worse experiences, or more violent owners.¹⁸⁸ Formerly enslaved people who described their treatment under slavery as 'good' also described the terrible conditions, exploitation, and abuse enslaved people endured.¹⁸⁹ In many interviewees' descriptions of their 'good' treatment, upon elaboration, this meant being adequately fed, clothed, and housed.

The Federal Writers' Project interviews thus provide insights into the nature of African Americans' experiences of enslavement that do not disclose the full range, nature, and extent of its cruelties. This, rather than the reliability of elderly peoples' memories, must be the central consideration of historians. The narratives, despite their problems, are a unique body of testimonies of African Americans' experiences of enslavement. They represent an extraordinary diversity in former slaves' experiences in terms of their occupation, treatment, and the size and type of slaveholding they were enslaved upon.¹⁹⁰ Though in terms of sampling the interviews are not representative of the distribution of enslaved people during slavery, this diversity remedies the concentration of slaveholders' testimony among the elite as well as reflecting more variety in formerly enslaved people's age, gender, occupation, and place of residence than the nineteenth century 'slave narratives'.¹⁹¹ The narratives comprise 'a more heterogeneous and diverse pool of informants than any other set of slave testimonies' and this is especially important for the historian of enslaved women: most former slaves' autobiographies were authored by men, but around half of the Federal Writers' Project interviewees were women.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Women performed 60% of interviews in North Carolina; 80% in Arkansas; and 90% in Georgia. The reverse, however, was true in South Carolina, where 78% of the former slaves were interviewed by white men. Blassingame, 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves', 488.

¹⁸⁷ Blassingame, 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves', 482-4.

¹⁸⁸ George P. Rawick, *TAS SSI*, Alabama Narratives, 1, xxxviii.

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, Emma Knight, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 218-9. These type of issues make it difficult to make quantitative analysis of former slaves' relationships with mistresses. Catherine Clinton, however, cites Elizabeth Craven's unpublished study of the Federal Writers' Project narratives that found '65 percent of references to the mistress were positive and 35 percent were negative'. Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 187-8.

¹⁹⁰ Yetman, 'The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection', 535.

¹⁹¹ Bailey, 'A Divided Prism', 389.

¹⁹² Bailey, 'A Divided Prism', 386. See Yetman, 'Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery', 182.

iv. Chapter outline

This study begins by exploring women's work and women's relationships in the slaveholding household. White women were *de facto* slaveholders both in their identities and their day-to-day responsibilities. Their management of households was central to the maintenance of slavery and they were reliant upon the labour of enslaved women both in fulfilling expectations of their roles and in facilitating their lifestyles. Labour was a key site of conflict within women's relationships, but it was one among many. Mistresses sought to assert their social superiority, enslaved women constantly resisted female slaveholders' authority, and their relationships were highly conflictive. Hierarchies of power were constructed and contested on a daily basis among the women of the slaveholding household. Even areas of mistresses' 'paternalism' show the interactions of white women's labour interests and their mechanisms of control as slaveholders. The dynamics of gendered labour, the roles of slaveholding women, and the exploitative nature of their relationships with enslaved women provide essential context in understanding the relationalities of their mothering.

Chapter Two explores slaveholding women's mothering from their approaches to motherhood through to their care for their children. It emphasises the many limitations and challenges slaveholding women faced in mothering their children, yet their relative privileges as female slaveholders. These privileges included improved conditions, access to healthcare, and choice in their parental decisions. Others were more directly related to the exploitation of enslaved women: slaveholding women habitually used slave labour to manage the demands of motherhood and to maintain a modicum of independence, leisure time, and mobility. In understanding their own roles as distinctly different from enslaved women's mother-work, slaveholding women stratified motherhood along the lines of enslavement and rendered enslaved women's mother-work a commodity and a transferable labour that they could capitalise upon. Slaveholding women were not reliant on enslaved mothers' labour alone, and this chapter examines mistresses' removal of enslaved children from their mothers to be 'raised' in slaveholding households, illuminating slaveholding women's centrality in enslaved women's maternal exploitation.

Chapter Three focuses upon enslaved mothers, examining the effects of enslavement on parenthood, and emphasising the stark differences between enslaved and slaveholding women's experiences as mothers. In particular, the roles of slave labour, racialised healthcare, sales and separations, and high levels of social violence evidence the extent to which slavery

influenced every aspect of bearing and raising a child. Enslaved mothers also endured the constant interventions of female slaveholders, ranging from daily interventions in parental decisions to the most callous acts of cruelty. These interventions were means of constructing social difference but also further establish the labour-centred approach slaveholding women took to enslaved women's mothering. Motherhood, in the eyes of slaveholding women, was both a site of the production of labour and an interruption to labour. Slaveholding women understood enslaved motherhood primarily as it pertained to their own lives and sought to manipulate it to their own ends, and this chapter thus emphasises the limitations of motherhood as a point of commonality. Enslaved children were a site of constant contestation between slaveholding and enslaved women.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five act as a case-study into infant-feeding in the antebellum south, situating the practice of enslaved wet-nursing within the structural inequality that deeply shaped infant-feeding practices. Chapter Four explores infant-feeding practices under slavery, which exemplify the way in which black women's enslavement both systematically impeded women's opportunity, conditions, and treatment as mothers and rendered their mothering a site of slaveholders' constant intervention. Enslaved women sought to exercise choice and control over their infant-feeding practices, but their alternatives to breastfeeding were limited, their breastmilk often low in nutritional value, and supplementary foods dangerous. Slaveholders structured separations between enslaved mothers and their nursing infants in a wide variety of ways, and interventions included entirely prohibiting working-day nursing and making an enslaved woman relinquish her infant to her mistress. White women's infant-feeding practices, on the other hand, were shaped by their privileges as slaveholders. Though the veneration of maternal breastfeeding was part of a forceful rhetoric of women's maternal duty, and slaveholding women often struggled with breastfeeding, both their agency within cultural ideals of their infant-feeding practices as well as their practical challenges with raising children relied upon exploiting enslaved mothers. Breastfeeding, like other aspects of mother-work, could be forcefully re-directed from some children to others.

Chapter Five explores the practice of enslaved wet-nursing as a practice of maternal exploitation. Enslaved wet-nursing entailed forced co-nursing, the separation of a mother and child, or the use of a bereaved mother. It could be long-term or short-term, but it was usually demanded alongside other forms of labour, and provided little benefits for enslaved mothers and their families. Whether contained within the slaveholding, traded among women's informal markets for slave labour, or proffered in the formal marketplace, enslaved wet-nursing was a deeply exploitative practice, and this chapter explores the nature of wet-nursing through

these three sites. Overturning images of enslaved wet-nursing as an act of interracial intimacy by analysing the role of this labour in women's relationships, this chapter positions enslaved wet-nursing among the spectrum of forced re-directions and appropriations of black women's mother-work that took place in a context where enslaved women's mothering was systematically impeded by slavery.

Chapter One

Home: Labour, Race, and Relationships in the Slaveholding Household

From whence comes the indifference manifested to the cause of
the female slave?

The Liberator (1832)¹

The apparent apathy American women showed toward the suffering of female slaves earned them opprobrium in the pages of *The Liberator*'s 'Ladies' Department'. The author urged women to 'lift up their voices against [slavery]', not only in 'benevolence' to 'all those guilty of a "skin not colored like their own"', but as 'sufferers in a common calamity'.² The appeal to the shared plight of black and white women had powerful rhetorical value in the abolitionist and women's rights movements; the equivalency of 'women and slaves' perhaps employed even more potently in popular discourses of proslavery republicanism, evoking the dependency of wives and chattel upon white male patriarchs.³ Neither use captivated the prevailing roles of white women in slavery: 'co-masters' of the slaveholding household and, by extension, enslaved women's exploitation.⁴ Indeed, while *The Liberator* in appealing to its primarily northern readership suggested women's 'apathy' surely 'proceeds from want of information', for white southern women, this was certainly not the case.⁵

The tendency to emphasise women's similarities has evidently been an enduring one in histories of slavery in the antebellum south. Returning to Marli Weiner's *Mistresses and Slaves*, for example, Weiner affords mistresses' ability to find 'common ground' with female slaves 'the possibility of transcending slavery' with 'subversive, even radical implications'.⁶ For Weiner, '[j]oint work and the ideology of domesticity' encouraged white women to emphasise 'what they shared with black women' and 'to identify emotionally with them'.⁷ The limitations of this interpretation are made most apparent by the striking evidence of white women's violence towards enslaved women as depicted in Thavolia Glymph's *Out of the*

¹ L.H., 'The Duty of Females', *The Liberator*, May 5 1832, 70. This chapter extends research and arguments first explored in R.J. Knight, 'Precarious Bonds: Relationships between Mistress and Slaves in the Antebellum South', Masters dissertation, University of Reading (2014), which focuses upon women's relationships through childhood into old age.

² L.H., 'The Duty of Females', *The Liberator*, May 5 1832, 70.

³ See McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 214-23; Stephanie McCurry, 'The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina', *Journal of American History*, 78, 4 (1992), 1245-64; Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London, 2015), 61, 108-9; Helene Quanquin, "'There Are Two Great Oceans': The Slavery Metaphor in the Antebellum Women's Rights Discourse as a Redescription of Race and Gender", in Faulkner and Parker (eds), *Interconnections*, 75-104; White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?*, 13-5; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 15-6; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 53-79.

⁴ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 123.

⁵ L.H., 'The Duty of Females', *The Liberator*, May 5 1832, 70.

⁶ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 2, 51, 74, 82.

⁷ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 87.

House of Bondage. For Glymph, the construction of domesticity concealed mistresses' roles as 'central partners in slavery's maintenance and management' and in the 'maiming and destruction of black life'.⁸ However, Weiner's attention to mistresses' interventions into some of slavery's inherent cruelties (for example, in punishments or sales) and the 'gendered' roles of mistresses in the realms of religion and healthcare warrant attention.⁹ These aspects of slaveholding women's roles were crucial both in reconciling notions of 'femininity' and the 'family, black and white' with the realities and brutalities of slaveholding both for individuals and in the ideological construction of the system of slavery writ large. Interpretations of mistresses' 'concern for the plight of slaves' or 'general ambivalence about slavery' have also often centred upon this type of 'paternalism', thus analysing its nature and limitations further challenges that mistresses' gendered roles can be characterised as nurturing ones, and suggests at further mechanisms of their control.¹⁰

This chapter thus explores the nature of women's work, roles and responsibilities, and relationships in the slaveholding household. Mistresses took the central part in household management and productive labour, and fostered informal networks of slave-trading. Their beliefs in their proprietary rights over enslaved women (their labour, and their children) were unflinching. Neither women's 'joint work' nor 'the ideology of domesticity' fostered emotional bonds between women. Rather, slaveholding women sought to differentiate themselves from enslaved women, and their efforts centred around those very aspects of life that were 'shared' with enslaved women. Work was a site through which slaveholding women constructed hierarchies and expressed power. It was, of course, one of many. Slaveholding women demanded enslaved women's acquiescence, subservience, and deference to their superiority and authority and in doing so they (re)constructed the southern social order in their homes. While gendered roles and responsibilities certainly shaped white women's interactions with enslaved people, they supplanted neither their interests in slavery nor their racism. Their mechanisms for expressing their power were diverse, and extended from physical violence to material deprivation to the use of hire and sale. Enslaved women's resistance towards mistresses' authority, their abuses, and the conditions of their enslavement, were just as wide-ranging. The power slaveholding women established in their roles, the conflictive nature of women's relationships, and the appropriation and commodification of enslaved women's work, also encompassed motherhood and mother-work.

⁸ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 31, 28.

⁹ See Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 79-84.

¹⁰ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 28.

The differences between ‘women and slaves’ were, of course, entrenched in the system of slavery and the social fabric of the south. What it meant to be a woman and a mother, a worker and a citizen, relied upon racialised and classed constructions of gender. Upper-class white women were represented as sensitive and frail, under-developed yet over-civilised, domestic and nurturing; these were the natural reasons for her proper place in the home, her dependency, and subordinate status.¹¹ Yet, slaveholding women were systemically privileged by the racial-class system which afforded them rights, opportunities, and socio-economic privileges, though within the confines of a staunchly patriarchal society. The ‘institutionalization of white male privilege’ throughout the course of the colonial era also cultivated distinct and enduring differences between women.¹²

While in the early colonial period slaveholding women performed labour less insulated by ideals of ‘separate spheres’, and this certainly remained the case for small-scale and subsistence farmers, upper-class white women’s importance as wives, mothers, and domestic labourers was increasingly emphasised. In the republic, these familial roles were newly afforded civic importance.¹³ Beliefs in the unsuitability of privileged white women for hard labour, the definition of manual work as lower-class and defeminising, and ideals of domesticity together foregrounded female slaveholders’ roles in the household. Their position was facilitated by the movement of female slave labourers into the ‘big house’ across the course of the eighteenth century. By the antebellum period, slaveholding women had well-established positions of authority in the household. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explains: ‘What, from one perspective, looks like women’s confinement to the home, from another looks like women’s acquisition of their own dominion’.¹⁴

White women’s positions as slaveholders, however, were often invisible in legal terms. Women experienced ‘civil death’ in marriage and any *personalty* (including humans) accrued as *feme soles* was legally relinquished to husbands under laws of *coverture*.¹⁵ Marriage contracts, separate estates, and the Married Women’s Property Acts went some way to extend

¹¹ Simon Strick, *American Dolorologies: Pain, Sentimentalism, Biopolitics* (Albany, NY, 2014), 76-7; Joanne Meyerowitz, ‘A History of “Gender”’, *American Historical Review*, 113, 5 (2008), 1347-51; Rose Weitz, *The Politics of Women’s Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior* (New York, 1998), 7.

¹² Cynthia A. Kierner, ‘Women, Gender, Families, and Households in the Southern Colonies’, *Journal of Southern History*, 73, 3 (2007), 652-3. Inge Dornan, for example, finds that slaveholding widows were ‘directly contributing to the continuation of slavery by managing buying, and hiring slaves’ in the colonial era. See Inge Dornan, ‘Masterful Women: Colonial Women Slaveholders in the Urban Low Country’, *Journal of American Studies*, 39, 3 (2005), 402, 386-7.

¹³ See Linda K. Kerber, ‘The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective’, *American Quarterly*, 28, 2 (1976), 187-205; Rosemarie Zagari, ‘Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother’, *American Quarterly*, 44, 2 (1992), 192-215; Jan Lewis, ‘The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 44, 4 (1987), 689-721.

¹⁴ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 61.

¹⁵ Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 23; Linda K. Kerber, ‘A Constitutional Right to be Treated Like American Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship’, in Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds), *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), 22.

women's property rights in the antebellum period, if intended primarily 'to protect their families' property from creditors' not least because of the Panic of 1837.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the seeds of social change always flowered first for privileged white women, who also benefitted from the liberalisation of divorce laws and increased educational opportunities throughout the antebellum period.¹⁷

Constructions of black womanhood in North America were starkly different to those that venerated (if restricting) white women in their feminine roles. Whites understood African and African Americans as belonging to an inferior race who were physically robust yet emotionally, intellectually, and culturally underdeveloped; ideas that developed in mutual interaction with the growth of slavery 'legitimated only through the granting power of a class that had already turned many of these persons into property'.¹⁸ By the nineteenth century, racial differences, specificities, and their immutability constituted a common language.¹⁹ Race is a relational construction and black women's apparent suitability for hard labour and robust reproductive capacities were central in establishing their differences from white women. Descriptions of 'African women in the Americas', as Jennifer Morgan writes, 'almost always highlighted their fecundity along with their capacity for manual labor'.²⁰

Early in America's colonial history, these differences were codified in slavery, as exemplified by two laws invoked in seventeenth-century Virginia. By 1643, African women were categorised as tithable labourers whose productive capacity equalled men's (unlike working white women); by 1662, *Partus Sequitur Ventrem* established the hereditary matrilineality of slavery, departing from the patrilineal system of primogeniture of English common law.²¹ Race, class, and gender thus intersected distinctly differently for slaveholding and enslaved women, and while these differences undergirded slavery both ideologically and practically, they also formed the basis for one group of women's exploitation of the other.

¹⁶ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 28-9. The first Married Women's Property Act was introduced in the state of Mississippi in 1839, and twenty-nine states had passed this type of legislation by the end of the Civil War. While there were regional variations in such legislation, 'overall the South made major adjustments to protect married women and their property during the antebellum period'. McMillen, *Southern Women*, 50-2. For discussion of these changes, see Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 23-5, 36, 39, 44, 55, 58, 67, 72, 76; Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place', 21-2; Carole Shammas, 'Re-Assessing the Married Women's Property Acts', *Journal of Women's History*, 6, 4 (1994), 9-30; Angela Boswell, 'Married Women's Property Rights and the Challenge to the Patriarchal Order', in Janet L. Coryell, Thomas H. Appleton, Anastasia Sims, Sandra Gioia Treadway (eds), *Negotiating the Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing with the Powers That Be* (Columbia, MO, 2000), 89-109.

¹⁷ Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 9; Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 46-8; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 69.

¹⁸ Nihad M. Farooq, *Undisciplined: Science, Ethnography, and Personhood in the Americas, 1830-1940* (New York, 2016), 10. For discussion of the development of 'race' in the colonial era, see Jennifer M. Spear, 'Race Matters in the Colonial South', *Journal of Southern History*, 73, 3 (2007), 579-88.

¹⁹ Milford Wolpoff and Rachel Caspari, *Race and Human Evolution* (New York, 1997), 61, 67; Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC, 1996), 187-8, 203; Chris Smaje, *Natural Hierarchies: The Historical Sociology of Race and Caste* (Malden, MA, 2000), 5-6, 8-9, 134, 136-48.

²⁰ Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004), 36.

²¹ Anita L. Allen, 'Surrogacy, Slavery, and the Ownership of Life', *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy*, 13, 1 (1990), 40; Jonathan A. Bush, 'The British Constitution and the Creation of American Slavery' in Thomas D. Morris (ed.), *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 385; Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 72.

i. Reared rulers

Mistresses may have complained much of the day-to-day demands of slaveholding and the ills of the system, but they took central roles in it. Their preparation began young. While Elizabeth-Fox Genovese suggests that '[y]oung women of the slaveholding class do not appear to have been taught much about slave management', they were accustomed to overseeing slaves, especially those they accrued as *feme soles*.²² Though their *de jure* ownership of slaves was erased in marriage, planters routinely passed on human property to white women and girls. They were surprisingly egalitarian in the division of estates between male and female offspring, and domestic slaves in particular were common gifts to girls and newly married mistresses.²³ These ubiquitous if often unrecorded practices of 'willing' and 'gifting' slaves were, of course, a notorious cause of enslaved families' separations.²⁴

Slaveholding women were thus often 'reared rulers'.²⁵ Betty Cofer, for example, was enslaved in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. She was 'claimed' by her mistress, a little girl, when Betty was born. The children 'played together an' grew up together'. Betty 'waited on her an most times slept on the floor in her room'.²⁶ While slaveholding girls often saw their slaves as 'pets' or 'playmates', though, their interest in and control over their 'property' was marked. A teenaged Mary Polk wrote, for example, of the 'great *mishap*' she had met in the death of 'my waiter man *Salvester*'. He was, she noted, 'one third of my estate'.²⁷ Even for those who were not the benefactors of gifts of slaves as children, the social hierarchies of the south were instilled no more plainly than by forcing enslaved people to address white infants by the titular 'young miss' or 'young master'.²⁸

The practice of willing and gifting slaves to girls and newly married women reflected the value of domestic slaves to white women. A woman's 'civil death' in marriage certainly did not mitigate her interests in slavery. An efficient domestic 'servant' was an indispensable

²² Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 112.

²³ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 105, 110.

²⁴ For examples of the 'willing' of slaves, see Molly Finley, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 293; Rosie Johnson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 126; Minerva Davis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 127; John Eubanks, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 68; Alice Davis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 97; William Gant, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 12. For examples of the 'gifting' of slaves, see Ellen Claibourn, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 185; Jane Oliver, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 228; Fannie Jones, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, II, 2, 352; Bill Homer, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 2, 154; Adeline Blakely, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 182; Delia Thompson, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 160; America Morgan, *WPA*, Indiana Narratives, V, 141-2.

²⁵ The term 'reared rulers' derives from Grace Litner, *Bond and Free: A Tale of the South* (Indianapolis, IN, 1882), iii, DocSouth.

²⁶ Betty Cofer, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 168.

²⁷ Mary Polk quoted in Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 148.

²⁸ Savilla Burrell, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 149; Harriet Robinson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XII, 271; Unnamed informant, 'Compilation Richmond County Ex-Slave Narratives: Mistreatment of Slaves', *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 293; Rebecca Jane Grant, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 178.

aid for a female slaveholder when she commenced housekeeping; an enslaved child was a desirable nurse or body-servant and offered the potential for training a skilled ‘servant’. Margaret Nickens’s experience was quite common. Enslaved near Paris, Missouri, Margaret was taken at the age of eight by her slaveholders’ daughter from the farm upon which she lived with her parents to work as a nurse to her new mistresses’ two children. ‘I didn’t like her’, she informed her interviewer, ‘cause she wasn’t very good to me’.²⁹ For white women, though, ‘carefully trained’ ‘good domestics’ were a symbol of class and essential for a ‘respectable size household’.³⁰ Slaveholding women well-understood the utility of slaves and their representative value.

The ‘property’ white women contributed to their new marital homes was not limited to human chattel. Near Beaumont, Texas, for example, Lou Turner explained that her mistress was ‘real rich’ and ‘[d]ey used to call her the “Cattle King”’.³¹ While white women generally married with dowries of some form, others had accrued property from previous marriages. They continued to receive gifts of property from family members throughout their married lives, and showed concern over family and personal finances.³² Mistresses’ worries were heightened before and throughout the Civil War, reflecting both the economic uncertainties created by the conflict, and their extended responsibilities. The ‘constant agitation of the slavery question’, as Mississippian Anne Elizabeth Poindexter wrote in 1850, created a ‘great crisis in our business’.³³

Their concerns, however, were far from confined to wartime anxieties, and mistresses commonly and consistently expressed interest in their family businesses and the successes of their families’ agricultural enterprises upon which they and their children’s security, comfort, and status rested.³⁴ Their personal financial responsibilities tended to centre around the household, and while women who belonged to the upper echelons of the slaveholding class were somewhat removed from responsibilities in administration, most mistresses took central roles in the management of household finances. They were often responsible for the purchase of personal effects, household and plantation provisions, supplies for the maintenance of

²⁹ Margaret Nickens, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 263-4.

³⁰ Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 241; Benjamin Harrison to sister [Anna Mercer Harrison], Feb. 1845, Byrd Family Papers, VHS.

³¹ Lou Turner, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 118.

³² See, for example, Frederick [Fraser] to Mary F. Fraser, Nov. 29 1832, Fraser Family Papers, DU; ‘August 1838, An Inventory of Property &c Given My Wife by her Beloved Father’, Elcan Family Papers, VHS; Eliza Hooker to [John Haywood], Dec. 11 1803, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC; Lucy Jane Cushing to Mary Dame, Jan. 22 1851, Dame Family Papers, VHS; Maria Dyer Davies Wightman, Diary, May 24 1853, 268, DU.

³³ Anne Elizabeth Poindexter to Eliza Holladay, Dec. 28 1850, Holladay Family Papers, VHS.

³⁴ See, for example, Mary May Page to Mary Dame, April 4 1855, Dame Family Papers, VHS; Lucy D. Gatewood to Ellen Spencer Gatewood, Sep. 22 1854, Gatewood Family Papers, VHS; Elizabeth Baldwin Wiley Harris, Diary, June 25 1862, Elizabeth Baldwin Wiley Harris Papers, DU; S.L.L. [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Rufus J. Lenoir, Aug. 9 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

slaves, and paying bills, and it was not '[o]nly white men' who 'dealt with the outside world [...]'.³⁵

It was the slaves derived from mistresses' families and personal estates, however, that generally produced their greatest interest and sense of ownership, reflected in the testimony of former slaves who often distinguished between belonging to a mistress or a master. On a plantation near Greenville, North Carolina, for example, Anthony Dawson's mistress had 'brought 40 niggers from her pappy' to her marriage, and her husband 'had the land'. So, the mistress 'never let him punish one of her niggers and he never asked her about buying and selling land'.³⁶ Formerly enslaved in South Carolina, Hester Hunter similarly recalled how her mistress 'had her niggers' 'from whe' she was raise in de country', and John Rudd's mistress in Springfield, Kentucky, 'had learn the slave drivin' business from her daddy'.³⁷ Thus, while Elizabeth Fox-Genovese is certainly correct that slaveholding women 'relied upon family membership to define their identities', the extent to which slaveholding was a central part of these identities should not be understated.³⁸ Indeed, while mistresses may have behaved 'in the manner prescribed by their culture', the ownership of slaves was a defining feature of 'their culture'.³⁹

White women's identities as slaveholders shaped their everyday interactions with slaves. Some former slaves, as Anthony Dawson explained, recalled that belonging to their mistress meant her husband and other family members were prevented from selling or exerting control over them.⁴⁰ Such distinctions were not, however, necessarily positive. For others, a mistress's interests in slavery and her ill-treatment exceeded a master's. John Rudd's mistress, for example, was 'always rilin'' their master 'up'. John felt his master otherwise 'would have been better to all of us'.⁴¹ Jane Thompson, formerly enslaved in Zuca, Mississippi, similarly believed her 'second boss did not believe in slavery but his wife did'.⁴² While familiarity with slaveholding strengthened a mistress's authority, the opposite could certainly problematise

³⁵ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 31. See, for example, Lucy Temple, Account Books, Temple Family Papers, VHS; Gustavia Butler Adie, Account Books, Adie Family Papers, VHS; Martha Jackson, Plantation Day Book, Jackson and Prince Family Papers, SHC; A.M. [Anna Matilda] King to husband [Thomas Butler King], Aug. 16 1848, T. Butler King Papers, SHC; Lucy Olivia Grimes, Account Books, Moore, Blount, and Cowper Family Papers, SHC.

³⁶ Anthony Dawson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 68.

³⁷ Hester Hunter, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 342; John Rudd, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 170.

³⁸ Fox-Genovese, 'Family and Female Identity in the Antebellum South', 19.

³⁹ Weiner, 'The Intersection of Race and Gender', 383.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Morris Sheppard, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 285; Mary Overton, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 163; Ivory Osborne, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 230; George Conrad, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 41.

⁴¹ John Rudd, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 170.

⁴² Jane Thompson, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 353. See also George King, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 165; Adeline Johnson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 54.

household management. If a mistress was ‘jest a second wife’ or was believed to have ‘married for money and social condition’, this could provide new opportunities for power struggles.⁴³

Wherever her slaves derived from, slaveholding women took central roles in slave-management. Their day-to-day responsibilities centred around the slaveholding household for those wealthy enough to remove themselves from heavy agricultural labour. Women of the slaveholding class spoke of ‘going to’ housekeeping as an occupation.⁴⁴ This transition from a childhood home to a marital one was often accompanied with feelings of isolation as well as presenting new and challenging responsibilities.⁴⁵ However, domestic ideals for southerners ‘rarely excluded the importance of female productivity’: familiarity with slaveholding meant new wives were aware of the responsibilities they were expected to undertake (if unprepared or unwilling to undertake them).⁴⁶ Efficient management, rather than refinement, was demanded of most women. As B.F. Moore wrote in 1857 to his daughter Lucy at St. Mary’s school in Raleigh, North Carolina: ‘I wish to educate you well, not to make a fine lady out of you, but a useful woman’.⁴⁷ It was an expectation well-understood by slaveholding women who knew that good wives were ‘first rate “key carrier[s]”’ who managed households as industrious and economic women.⁴⁸ Some women were keen to ‘commence housekeeping’; others found their roles ‘exceedingly disagreeable’. Most eventually found themselves ‘beginning to be accustomed to it’.⁴⁹

The necessity for mistresses to do so was accentuated by the frequent absences of their husbands. In Gloucester County, Virginia, Sally Lyons Taliaferro closely recorded the patterns of her attorney husband’s absence from their plantation, Dunham Massie, in 1859:

⁴³ Savilla Burrell, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 149; Annie Young Henson, *FWP*, Maryland Narratives, VIII, 27.

⁴⁴ Lucy Cushing Irving to Mary Dame, Feb. 2 1851, Mary May Irving to Mary Dame, April 26 1859, Dame Family Papers, VHS; Betty Burnet Ambler to Mary Anna Claiborne, Jan. 18 1853, Claiborne Family Papers, VHS; Harriet A. Hamner to Gustavia Adie, July 21 1847, Adie Family Papers, VHS; Elizabeth Hill Boyd to Mary Faulkner, March 6 1836, Faulkner Family Papers, VHS.

⁴⁵ For white women’s complaints on their relative isolation and loneliness, see Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], 6, SHC; Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall to Louisa Elizabeth Carrington, Oct. 8 1826, July 16 1827, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall Papers, VHS; [Beckie Warren] to sister [Sallie Spears], Dec. 22 1860, Spears and Hicks Family Papers, SHC; A.M. [Agatha Marshall] to husband [Louis Marshall], Nov. 10 1833, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC; Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, Feb. 8 1838, March 28 1838, SHC; Helen M. [Manly] Grimes to [Sophie Manly], March 1 1856, Manly Family Papers, SHC.

⁴⁶ Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 41. See also Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 48, 64, 89; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, ‘Family and Female Identity in the Antebellum South: Sarah Gayle and Her Family’, in Bleser (ed.), *In Joy and in Sorrow*, 125, 127. As D. Harland Hager finds, the lady ideal better resembled a farmwife ideal in the south: slaveholding shaped gendered ideals and expectations. See D. Harland Hager, ‘The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South: Lady or Farmwife?’, *Journal of Southern History*, 46, 3 (1980), 405-18.

⁴⁷ B.F. Moore, Letterbook, Oct. 20 1857, 7, Moore, Blount, and Cowper Family Papers, SHC. Women were often castigated for extravagance. See C. Watson to Katie, Jan. 24 1858, Moore, Blount, and Cowper Family Papers, SHC; Martha May Clarke to Phebe Howson Bailey, Dec. 12 1865, Bailey Family Papers, VHS; Georgia Page King to Thomas Butler King, March 11 1848, T. Butler King Papers, SHC.

⁴⁸ Fannie [Green] to Sophie [Manly], March 12 1856, Manly Family Papers, SHC. See also Betsey W. Graves to Sarah Jones Lenoir, March 1 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; Beckie [Warren] to Sallie [Spears], April 6 [1861], Spears and Hicks Family Papers, SHC.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 28 1838, SHC; Eliza Mira Lenoir to Louisa Lenoir, Feb. 12 1828, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

April 4 - Mr Taliaferro at Court House all day
 April 6 - Mr Taliaferro gone to Mathews.
 April 8 - Mr Taliaferro at home
 April 9 - Mr Taliaferro gone to Guinea
 April 10 - Alone all day. Mr Taliaferro in the evening.
 April 12 - Mr Taliaferro at home at night
 April 13 - Mr Taliaferro brought three gentlemen home with him from the Court House⁵⁰

Husband absenteeism varied in extent but was common across the slaveholding class. Despite the different nature of Mary M. Carr's husband's business in Bastrop, Louisiana, for example, the cotton planter was also often absent 'shipping his cotton', in 'the city' or 'the Islands'. Mary remained at the plantation, where among other activities she recorded in the early 1860s the slaves 'cleaning', 'ploughing' 'burning logs' and 'sewing'.⁵¹ Other male slaveholders were absent for weeks attending to land and slave speculation, other slaveholdings, preaching tours, court sessions, and acting as physicians.⁵² Lengthier absences of months upon months led slaveholding women to conclude that their husbands had either 'forgotten that he has left a wife at home' or was 'a non-such in the way of a husband'.⁵³ This was simply the logistics of slaveholding marriages and family businesses. As Virginian Lazarus Moore Gray described to his sister in 1861, a married man could 'leave home when he pleases [...] and have some one at home to attend his business'.⁵⁴ Separations were commonplace and amplified mistresses' positions and their power. While overseers and other male kin generally took control of field operations where possible, the household was certainly her 'own dominion'.

Some husbands believed their absences might have some influence on the management of slaves. In 1851, for example, Gaston Meares wrote to his new wife Kate in Smithville, North Carolina, that though he never felt 'disposed to take part in the management', he felt his 'presence might have some effect'.⁵⁵ Others, like Episcopal minister George Dame in Danville, Virginia, found their frequent absences meant slaves had begun to obey their mistress over their master. An enslaved man named Stephen, George wrote to his wife Mary in 1855, had

⁵⁰ Sally Lyons Taliaferro, Diary, April 4-13 1859, William Booth Taliaferro Papers, SHC.

⁵¹ Mary M. Carr, Diary, Jan. 30 1860, 17-18, Feb. 15 1860, 22, Feb. 1 1861, 60, Feb. 9 1862, 63-4, undated, 72, DU.

⁵² Frances Moore Webb Bumpas, Diary, Dec. 28 1844, 28, Bumpas Family Papers, SHC; Lucy Cushing Irving to Mary Dame, Nov. 15 1850, Mary May Irving to Mary Dame, April 7 1858, Nov. 18 1857, Dame Family Papers, VHS; Lucila Agnes McCorkle, Diary, vol. 2, Aug. 1 1858, 5, William P. McCorkle Papers, SHC; Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], Jan. 5 1855, 21, VHS.

⁵³ Wife [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset] to A.J. DeRosset, Sep. 17 1842, Wife [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares] to Gaston [Meares], April 13 1851, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

⁵⁴ L.M. [Lazarus Moore] Gray to Sallie [Spears], April 7 1861, Spears and Hicks Family Papers, SHC.

⁵⁵ Gaston Meares to Kate [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares], April 20 1851, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

‘contended when I attacked him that you were obliged to be obeyed’.⁵⁶ Most husbands thus attempted to maintain their roles by exerting their influence from afar, and letters ‘home’ included advice and instructions on subjects ranging from healthcare to dealing with recalcitrant slaves.⁵⁷ Mistresses certainly expressed their own opinions around household affairs, whether towards their husbands’ property-purchasing plans or the buying and selling of slaves.⁵⁸ Their advice often fell on deaf ears, though. As Hillsborough, North Carolina slaveholder Laura Norwood complained to her mother in 1842: ‘If husbands would only mind what their wives say to them, what a deal of trouble and vexation we should escape!’ She concluded that ‘it is no use talking to the animals for they will go their own way’.⁵⁹

Despite the frequent absences of men, husbands held ultimate authority, and ‘[p]atriarchy, in short, is at home at home’.⁶⁰ Male power had violent manifestations, too. One former slave remembered her master beat her mistress ‘like he beat a nigger woman’ and another gestured towards domestic violence in describing her mistress as subject to the ‘ill treatment’ of her husband.⁶¹ Former Georgian slaveholder Rebecca Felton also noted the ‘prevalence’ of ‘wife beating’, evoking the similarities between mistresses and slaves.⁶² Such practices surely furthered mistresses’ deference to their husbands. On the other hand, performance pressure may have increased mistresses’ use of violence and other mechanisms of control over the slaves so essential to her success as a housekeeper and a wife. Ann Rosalie Nelson, for example, remarked to her cousin Anna in Charles City County, Virginia, of a friend who was ‘afraid to tell Mr C when any thing goes wrong’. The ‘servants’, Ann wrote in 1842, ‘quarrel so amongst themselves & want keeping in order’.⁶³ Violence was, of course, most frequently resorted to in keeping ‘order’. Thus, the simultaneity of white women’s position of oppressed and oppressor characterised their roles in the system of slavery.

Slaveholding women were certainly under considerable pressure to succeed and the household was both vital to family business and an important status-symbol. Mistresses were

⁵⁶ George Dame to Mary Maria Dame, Sep. 10 1855, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

⁵⁷ See, for example, R.E. Lee to M.A.R. Lee, undated [1846], March 24 1846, Lee Family Papers, VHS; Samuel Fisher Adie to Gustavia Butler Adie, May 22 1850, July 10 1850, July 27 1850, Adie Family Papers, VHS; Robert Bagby to Betty Pollard Bagby, July 4 1863, Bagby Family Papers, VHS; E.V. Lane to Jane Lane, Aug. 28 1864, Sep. 28 1864, Jane Collins Lane Papers, VHS.

⁵⁸ [Carolina Mallet Hooper] to George D. Hooper, April 1 1858, Caroline Mallett Hooper Papers, SHC; Ann Raney Thomas, ‘The History of Her Life’, 14, Ann Raney Thomas Coleman Papers, DU.

⁵⁹ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], May 20 1842, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁶⁰ Joan Kelly-Gadol, ‘The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women’s History’, *Signs*, 1, 4 (1976), 821.

⁶¹ Malindy Maxwell, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 57; Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself. With a Supplement by the Editor. To Which Is Added, The Narrative of Asa-Asa, A Captured African* (London, 1831), 1, DocSouth.

⁶² Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta, GA, 1919), 248, DocSouth. For discussion of domestic violence, see Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 58-61; Nell Irvin Painter, ‘Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting’, in Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds), *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), 144-6.

⁶³ Ann Rosalie Nelson to Anna Mercer Harrison, Jan. 6 1842, Byrd Family Papers, VHS.

constantly hosting visitors, an ‘engagement’ that often made housekeeping ‘troublesome’.⁶⁴ Business associates of male slaveholders and boarders were often found among the temporary residents of southern slaveholdings, and could also be a significant responsibility in some households.⁶⁵ While family and friends were the most common household guests and often visited and stayed for entire seasons, in villages, towns, and cities, visiting networks were much more casual. In Louisville, Kentucky, one woman described in 1852 how ‘in town you are liable to be intruded upon at all hours, and a housekeeper has to make a great effort to get the house in order as early as possible’.⁶⁶ Mistresses themselves were quick to comment on one another’s successes, struggles, and failures in housekeeping, and through accomplishment in these areas, women could win the acclaim of husbands, family, and their wider social circles.⁶⁷ While expectations of mistresses were high, and the authority of husbands keenly-felt, the power that mistresses held and exercised over slaves on a day-to-day basis was unmistakable, though. It was through enslaved women’s exploitation that slaveholding women would establish and fulfil their own stations in southern society.

ii. Women and work

The outward-facing nature of the slaveholding household rendered its successful maintenance essential. Yet, the representative value of the household did not overshadow that the day-to-day operations of the ‘big house’ were centred around mother-work, domestic labour, productive labour, and, therefore, slave labour. Indeed, because ‘finance, housework, and commodity production were at the centre of the southern social system’, the absence of women’s household labours in capitalism-focused scholarship on American slavery is ‘perplexing’.⁶⁸ Mistresses made an essential contribution to the family business in managing productive labour and the maintenance of slaves. Though their work often closely resembled sustenance activities and both slaves and produce were often traded through barter economies, mistresses were also profit-orientated in their work.

Their remit far exceeded the house itself and included gardens, smokehouses, dairies,

⁶⁴ Isaac Avery to Julia Lenoir, March 15 1832, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; Caroline Adams to Elizabeth J. Blanks, Jan. 29 1839, Elizabeth J. Blanks Papers, DU.

⁶⁵ See, for example, M.A. [Mary] Bain to Mollie [Bain Bitting], Dec. 12 1861, William T. Bain Papers, DU; Eliza Mira Lenoir to Louisa Lenoir, Feb. 12 1828, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; Lucy Jane Cushing to Mary Dame, Nov. 9 1860, Dame Family Papers, VHS; Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, Feb. 10 1838, March 28 1838, SHC.

⁶⁶ L.R. Rogers to Fanny [Frances E. Lawrence], [April] 13 [1852], Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Margaretta Sergeant to Sarah Sergeant Wise, Jan. 27 1848, Wise Family Papers, VHS; M.L. Fontaine to Kate Meade, May 30 1860, Meade Family Papers, VHS; Mother [Ann Willis Lane Mordecai] to Margaret [Devereux], Feb. 8 1852, Devereux Family Papers, DU; Harriet A. Hamner to Gustavia Adie, undated, Adie Family Papers, VHS.

⁶⁸ Amy Dru Stanley, ‘Histories of Capitalism and Sex Difference’, *Journal of the Early Republic*, 36, 2 (2016), 343.

and the like. Slaveholding women's roles included managing garden-work, which included the cultivation of flowers but more significantly the production of fruit and vegetables.⁶⁹ They were also commonly responsible for managing poultry and egg production, and often raised animals for slaughter.⁷⁰ The significance of such responsibilities is clear: the food produced under the management of female slaveholders was typically used to feed both the white family and also provide food for enslaved people on smaller plantations. Surplus food was sold into local markets. The household, then, had a basic yet essential economic function managed by mistresses.

Slaveholding women also procured and preserved provisions, and manufactured goods for household use such as candles and soap. They played instrumental roles in managing and often participating with the production of clothing. This varied from 'sewing' and lighter work for themselves and their families to the larger-scale production of clothes for enslaved people.⁷¹ Mistresses' roles across the extended household were clearly considerable. As Annie J. Hobson explained to Virginian slaveholder Mary Lyons Wise in 1859: 'One can never stand still in a country life'. With two children, a husband who 'must be comforted', and a yard, dairy, kitchen and garden to be 'inspected', Annie found each day brought its 'lessons of patience and self denial, & innumerable mercies and blessings'. Yet, her daily routine also included time to 'attend to various matters, & take a ride, drive or a walk as I feel like it'.⁷²

Annie's negotiation of her supervisory role on the slaveholding with family life and leisure time was fairly typical of female slaveholders; as was her sense of burden under the responsibilities of slaveholding, wifedom, and motherhood. Mistresses were inclined to characterise their labours as 'bondage' or themselves as 'never to be free' of their various employments.⁷³ The supervisory nature of their roles was of course most obvious to the enslaved people who performed the bulk of the work their mistresses' were responsible for.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Margaret Davidson Gwyn, *Diary and Daybook*, March 20 [undated], 41, DU; Robert Young Conrad to Elizabeth Whiting Conrad, Oct. 9 1830, Holmes Conrad Papers, VHS; S.C. [Susanna] Clay to mother, March 26 1834, C.C. Clay Papers, DU; A.M.K. [Anna Matilda King] to husband [Thomas Butler King], April 7 1848, T. Butler King Papers, SHC; Emily Howe Dupuy to nephew, May 19 1864, Emily (Howe) Dupuy, Letter, 1864, VHS; Ellen [Mordecai] to John Devereux, Feb. 15 1844, Devereux Family Papers, DU; Wallace Davis, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 306.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Francis West to George W. West, April 27 1836, George W. West, DU; A.M. [Anna Matilda] King to Mallory [King], June 23 1851, T. Butler King Papers, SHC; Mother [Ann Willis Lane Mordecai] to Mag [Margaret] Devereux, March 2 [1852], Devereux Family Papers, DU; Ellen Louise Power, *Diary*, Feb. 17 1862, 16, SHC.

⁷¹ See, for example, Lizzie [Spears Glasgow] to Sally Spears, March 23 1861, Beckie [Spears Warren] to Sallie Spears, April 6 1861, Spears and Hicks Family Papers, SHC; Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson, *Diary* [typed transcription], Jan. 2 1850, 17, Jan. 10 1850, 20, Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson Papers, SHC; Octavia Wyche Otey, *Diary*, vol. 2, March 4 1852, 12, March 15 1852, 17, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC; Unsigned to Ann Lovell, Nov. 28 1833, Ann Heatly Reid Lovell Papers, DU; Anne Elizabeth Poindexter to Eliza Holladay, Dec. 28 1850, Holladay Family Papers, SHC; Rebecca S. C. Pilsbury, *Diary*, Nov. 22 1848, March 22 1849, SHC; Kate S. Carney, *Diary*, May 7 1861, May 8 1861, May 25 1861, SHC; A.E. [Anne Elizabeth] Poindexter to Eliza Holladay, Dec. 18 1851, Holladay Family Papers, VHS.

⁷² Annie J. Hobson to Mary Elizabeth Wise, June 4 1859, Wise Family Papers, VHS. For descriptions of slaveholding women's routines across the south, see Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson Papers, SHC [Iberia Parish, LA]; Mary E. Bateman, *Diary*, SHC [Argyle, MS]; Carrie Fries, *Diary*, Fries and Shaffner Family Papers, SHC [Salem, NC].

⁷³ Penelope Eliza Wilson to Gustavia Adie, Dec. 2 [undated], Adie Family Papers, VHS; Mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Laura [Norwood], Oct. 19 1860, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

Peter Clifton exemplified this in recalling the poignant scene of his mistress sipping grape wine and eating poundcake ‘while she watch my mammy and old Aunt Tilda run de spinnin’ wheels’ in South Carolina.⁷⁴ The amount of physical work undertaken by white women varied depending on the size of a slaveholding. Even on smallholdings, though, enslaved labour alleviated white women of the heaviest and dirtiest kinds of work. ‘Except under the most unusual circumstances’, as Stephanie McCurry emphasises, ‘slave-holding white women were protected from field labor’.⁷⁵

Accordingly, labour demands upon enslaved women were often intensified on smallholdings. Joanna Draper, for example, was hired to a family where she was ‘the only nigger they got’ in Hazlehurst, Mississippi. She ‘had a hard row at that house’, performing domestic labour for a mistress and two children. Slavery, Joanna explained, ‘never did mean nothing to me but misery, from the time I was eight years old’.⁷⁶ John McCarthy of Richmond, Virginia, epitomised the arduous nature of the duties placed upon enslaved women when he described a woman owned by their family as ‘horse & cow’. In the event of the death of one slave and the confinement of another, Phillis had ‘washed & cooked and been house svt. all at one time, for a short period’ in 1858.⁷⁷ Though domestic slaves sometimes had discrete roles such as cook or nurse on larger plantations, most performed a range of duties. On smaller slaveholdings, it was not unusual for enslaved women to work between the house and field.

For many slaveholders, distinguishing between the work of ‘ladies’ and ‘slaves’ was also a matter of class, and there was work that ‘[l]adies don’t nuvver do’ and work that ‘ladies *does* do’, as an enslaved woman named Milly allegedly informed her young mistress Sara Pryor.⁷⁸ Having enslaved women to care for children and perform a wide range of domestic tasks allowed a mistress ‘to show that I could be a lady & cook at the same time’.⁷⁹ So, when slaveholding women considered themselves ‘busier than a bee’, it was typically a ‘force’ of enslaved people performing the heavy manual labour.⁸⁰ While this work was often more broadly related to productive and manual labour, in centering around the household, much of this labour was gendered. Uniformly, in the areas of clothes production, house-work, and mother-work, mistresses delegated the bulk of work to enslaved women.⁸¹ The appropriation and re-direction of gendered labour characterised mistresses’ day-to-day relationships with

⁷⁴ Peter Clifton, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 206. See also Robert Falls, *FWP*, Tennessee Narratives, XV, 14; Tempie Cummins, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 264; Hannah Hancock, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 142.

⁷⁵ McCurry, ‘Producing Dependence’, 64.

⁷⁶ Joanna Draper, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 87.

⁷⁷ John McCarthy to Florence McCarthy, Dec. 4 1858, McCarthy Family Papers, VHS.

⁷⁸ Sara Agnes Rice Pryor, *My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life* (New York, 1909), 15-6, DocSouth.

⁷⁹ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, Sep. 27 1857, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

⁸⁰ Ellen [Mordecai] to John Devereux, Feb. 15 1844, Devereux Family Papers, DU.

⁸¹ Enslaved women’s roles in work associated with children is discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

enslaved women. Thus, the notion of women's 'joint' work is predicated on a notion of equality that simply did not exist, and fails to reflect the economic basis of women's relationships. Female slaveholders managed enslaved women labourers on a day-to-day basis: allocating work tasks, monitoring and ensuring productivity or performance, and determining and executing discipline and punishments.

Not only were slaveholding women reliant upon slave labour in fulfilling their own responsibilities as managers of productive slaveholding households, this also facilitated white women's mobility and leisure, as Annie Hobson's comments indicated. For some mistresses, their ability to remove themselves from household work was considerable. Shortly after Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall's marriage in 1827, she and her husband moved from Richmond, Virginia, to Jefferson County, Florida. Laura was 'disappointed' to find she was 'very fond of lying in bed'. She felt irked 'to be asked what I am to have for dinner', and found she would 'much rather stray off' than oversee the 'morning ceremony' of household chores. Because Laura had slaves to do the work for her, however, she was still able to avoid having a 'slavenly or disorderly menage'.⁸² Several years later, with three children, 'the toil of nursing' had undoubtedly impinged upon Laura's earlier frivolity.⁸³ Others began with high ambitions that were quickly diminished. In 1848, Rebecca Pilsbury's husband left their family farm in Brazoria, Texas, to attend his duties as a congressman. Within one week of his departure, having attempted ploughing, Rebecca found herself 'inclined to think that I was not designed for a worker'.⁸⁴

The labour of enslaved people thus formed a central part of female slaveholders' lives, whether to alleviate some of the heaviest work from farm wives or to remove a disinclined mistress from household duties. The centrality of mistresses to the running of the slaveholding household, and their roles as labour-managers, cannot be emphasised enough. In analysing women's relationships without the proper context of white women's power in the household, their identities as slaveholders, and their interests in slave labour, they are rendered more personable and intimate. Mistresses and slaves, however, first and foremost recognised one another as slave and slaveholder.

Nowhere else was the character of women's relationships clearer than in mistresses' slave-trading. Mistresses were keenly aware of the market value of their female slaves' labour. In 1823, for example, Mary Eliza Brashear remarked to her sister Caroline in Lexington,

⁸² Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall to Louisa Elizabeth Carrington, March 6 1828, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall Papers, VHS.

⁸³ Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall to Louisa Elizabeth Carrington, May 23 1831, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall Papers, VHS.

⁸⁴ Rebecca S.C. Pilsbury, Diary, Nov. 20 1848, SHC.

Kentucky, that if she chose to hire out an enslaved woman named Harriet she ‘could get 140 dollars a year for her in this Country’.⁸⁵ Similarly, Selina Lenoir of Wake County, North Carolina, advised her daughter in 1846 that ‘[Emily’s] work ought to be worth 75 cents a week’, though ‘you may hire her for less if you think it would do’.⁸⁶ Slaveholding women routinely traded and hired enslaved women among themselves to their eventual satisfaction with their household of slave labourers. When Virginian slaveholder Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher’s hired nurse was ill, for example, ‘her mistress has sent, first one & then another of her servants to supply her place’ in 1857. Lucy had already procured another ‘maid’ from another slaveholder, but felt Rilla ‘was the most useless piece of baggage’.⁸⁷ Agatha Marshall Logan, of Louisville, Kentucky, similarly felt she ‘had nothing but trouble in my domestic arrangements’. In her efforts to replace a slave named Ann, Agatha had ‘six servants in Ann’s place beside 2 or three different seamstresses’, she informed her cousin in the summer of 1856.⁸⁸ Mistresses thus made commodities of enslaved women and their labour without ever needing to enter the formal marketplace.

While the authority men took in household decision-making should not be overlooked, slaveholding women developed informal markets of slave labour that were remarkably female-centred. Selina Lenoir, for example, discussed with her daughter, Laura Norwood of Hillsborough, North Carolina, whether it would ‘incommode’ her ‘to do without Lucy’ in 1860. A man had appealed to buy Lucy from Selina’s husband. However, Selina explained that if Laura still required Lucy: ‘I will just tell them no’.⁸⁹ Gustavia Adie of Leesburg, Virginia, was also able to determine their household labour arrangements. She had evidently sought to hire a slave, and E.F. Gilliam was pleased to offer her ‘Catherine’s services [...] if you still wish to have her’ for ‘the next six weeks or even two months if necessary’, capitalising upon Catherine’s labour while Gilliam temporarily ‘broke up’ her household.⁹⁰ Such negotiations were common among slaveholding women’s correspondence, and the arrangements made between family members, friends, acquaintances and neighbours bound together slaveholding households. The exception, of course, proves the rule: one woman was aghast that a friend’s ‘contrary miser’ of a husband had the tendency to ‘take a servant out of the house or kitchen

⁸⁵ Mary Eliza Brashear to Caroline Brashear, Feb. 19 [1823], Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

⁸⁶ Mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Annie [Mary Ann Gwyn] [in letter addressed to Thomas L. Lenoir], Feb. 5 1846, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁸⁷ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, Dec. 24 1857, Sep. 27 1857, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

⁸⁸ A.M.L. [Agatha Marshall Logan] to Apo [Appoline Alexander Blair], June 12 [1856], Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

⁸⁹ Mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Laura [Norwood], Oct. 19 1860, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁹⁰ E.F. Gilliam to Gustavia Adie, undated, Adie Family Papers, VHS.

[...] without letting her know what hes done with her'. Her remark emphasises the norms of mistresses' control over their domestic arrangements.⁹¹

While their capabilities for control were strongest within their own informal networks, slaveholding women were also able to influence and sometimes determine more formal arrangements. Faced with various management problems with the family's slaves, for example, Lizzie Bain of Petersburg, North Carolina, informed her sister that she intended to 'hire them all out' in 1859.⁹² In Salisbury, North Carolina, Mary Ferrand Henderson also determined to hire the family's slaves in 1858. She noted that: 'We are overrun with servants not hired I must send them all to the New ground tomorrow'.⁹³ Some of these slaves entered local markets for slave labour. Others, subject to sale rather than hire, were absorbed into the interregional slave trade.

The nature of female slaveholders' slave-trading thus further problematises the contention that only men dealt with 'the outside world', and emphasises the extent to which slaveholding women's power transcended their own households. These inter-household interactions also had a permeable relationship with the broader, more formal markets for slave labour, and women sought prospective buyers and sellers of slaves as well as arranging trades and hires. Between 1790 and 1860 over one million African Americans were sold to the lower-south, but 'twice as many individuals were sold locally'.⁹⁴ Thus, the ways in which mistresses' demands for domestic labourers (and nurses) influenced local and national patterns of slave-trading, even if men played parts in its formalities, may have been understated. Certainly, in exceptionalising women's labour in the household, one risks replicating slaveholders' idealised vision of slavery and their counter-posing of 'the duties and responsibilities of slaveholding to the irresponsibility and callousness of the marketplace'.⁹⁵

Rather, the economic and racist dynamics of slavery encompassed the household and the informal market for slave labour, too. While family slave-trading might have often sought to keep favoured or skilled slaves within the extended kinship network, and slaveholding women's proffering and procuring of enslaved women's labour through their informal networks relied upon some modicum of social relationship between slaveholders, their interactions were generally no less business-minded than other transactions for slave labour.

⁹¹ Unsigned to Sally, June 18 1855, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. In this case, their relationship had evidently broken down.

⁹² Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Mollie Bain Bitting], Feb. 3 1859, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

⁹³ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 10, Jan. 2 1858, 2, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

⁹⁴ Steven Deyle, 'The Domestic Slave Trade in America: The Lifeblood of the Southern Slave System', in Johnson (ed.), *Chattel Principle*, 93.

⁹⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, "'Our Family, White and Black': Family and Household in the Southern Slaveholders' World View", in Carol Bleser (ed.), *In Joy and in Sorrow*, 78.

While female slaveholders certainly saw slave labour in terms of its pecuniary value, however, they also operated from a highly personal frame of reference, and thus the use-value of slave labour often guided their slave-trading.

Whether hired locally, lent to slaveholders' family or friends, or sold 'down the river', only occasionally did mistresses' slave-trading take slave families into consideration. More commonly, the selling and hiring of slaves was avoided because it presented white women with a labour problem. In 1840 in New Haven, North Carolina, for example, Sarah Devereux explained to her brother John that in some altercation with an enslaved woman named Sally she had threatened to sell her. However, Sarah found herself torn as not only was it 'very hard to sell her, and those children', but 'without them, I am much perplexed'. Sarah was concerned not simply by the potential absence of Sally and her children's labour, but by the implications of keeping a recalcitrant slave on her management of other slave labourers. She thus considered whether it was simply 'best to make [Sally] an example, sell her', despite Sarah's clear reliance upon Sally's labour.⁹⁶ Slaveholding women yielded incredible power over the lives of their domestic servants and approached these decisions as a matter of management that would afford them with the best labour arrangement to suit their own needs. Of course, the cost of white women's domestic rearrangements was to the enslaved women who were removed from their family, friends, and homes, at the will of their mistresses.

Slaveholding women routinely balanced their desires to alleviate themselves from troublesome slaves with their reliance upon their labour, as Sarah did. Some, however, found their intentions further problematised by financial issues. In Hillsborough, North Carolina, Laura Norwood was desperate to hire away Dinah, a woman she constantly suspected was feigning illness. In 1839, Laura had tried to 'get rid of Dinah' but found 'it is difficult to hire them at this season'. Laura felt so strongly she resolved to hire Dinah out 'for her victuals & clothes' rather than keep her.⁹⁷ Laura's husband, Joseph, evidently felt differently. The following year Laura informed her mother their hiring of Dinah was unsuccessful and 'Joseph has concluded to keep her till after crop time'.⁹⁸ While Laura belonged to the relatively wealthy Lenoir family, she and her husband's means were perhaps more limited. Joseph Caldwell Norwood was a teacher in Hillsborough and seems to have engaged in some land-speculation.

Family finances certainly seemed to continue to complicate Laura's determination to 'get rid' of Dinah. Four years later, Laura again complained that Dinah had 'caused me trouble

⁹⁶ S.E. [Sarah E.] Devereux to Thomas P. Devereux, Dec. 4 [1840], Devereux Family Papers, DU.

⁹⁷ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], [Aug. 8 1839], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁹⁸ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], Feb. 11 1840, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

and vexation that I would undergo again for twice her value'. Joseph, however, was reluctant 'because the price of them is so very low'.⁹⁹ Those dependent upon local markets for hiring slave labour were especially likely find their plans undone by issues of availability, seasonality, and fluctuations in cost. Julia Bowie, for example, 'resigned myself to my fate' after hiring out her cook and finding she had 'no one with me now and it is too hot to look out for any one', as she informed Virginian slaveholder Gustavia Adie in 1854.¹⁰⁰

Enslaved women sought to determine their own movements and of course resisted mistresses' use of them as commodities and transferrable labour. Laura Norwood, for example, suggested in 1840 that Dinah may have been seeking to control her own mobility through her labour performance, and then by a marriage that Laura believed 'was to endeavour to strengthen the ties to home – but she will be mistaken [...]'.¹⁰¹ Certainly, working poorly for a hire-mistress or master might ensure a quick return home (or the reverse), and a marriage that simultaneously appealed to slaveholders' interests in enslaved children and their vague sense of paternalism or propriety might also make one's position a little less precarious. Dinah was still 'creeping about' five years later, whether through luck or sheer determination, then both a mother and a wife.¹⁰²

In Greenville, South Carolina, an enslaved mother-of-two named Eliza appeared to have adopted similar strategies to control her movement. Her mistress, mother-of-three Elizabeth Perry, described in 1844 how:

When she belonged to Mamma she was unhappy & wished she belonged to me. She was always pretending to be sick, did nothing, & wasted away her life. Now she belongs to me, she wishes she was back again at Mammas, & though she does more work now than formerly.¹⁰³

Eliza, in Elizabeth's mind at least, was both feigning illness and using her work performance to influence her movement. Her reasons for doing so are unclear. She had, according to Perry at least, a difficult relationship with another enslaved woman named Minerva. Perhaps her desires were related to her eight-year-old and six-year-old children, who would not be 'too young to be of service' for long.¹⁰⁴ Whatever her reasons, labour arrangements could include a

⁹⁹ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to S.L. [Selina Louisa] Lenoir, May 24 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁰ Julia Bowie to Gustavia Adie, Aug. 1 1854, Adie Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁰¹ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], Feb. 11 1840, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰² L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother/ Mrs Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Aug. 27 1845, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 11 1844, SHC.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

degree of negotiation. Of course, these mistresses' comments also reveal their sensitivity to the prospect that they might be being manipulated.

Some enslaved women left no room for doubt. While Dinah and Eliza's strategies were certainly common, other enslaved women simply outright refused to adhere to their mistresses' demands. At the Buckpond estate in Kentucky, Agatha Marshall's mother complained to her in 1836 that she had 'try'd to send Susan home [...] but the creature managed so as not to go'. Because the mistress was visiting her sister, she was 'not able to force her', and Susan appeared to have arranged her own hire instead. Susan, rather, had decided it was Agatha who she 'hoped yet to call you mistress'.¹⁰⁵ Enslaved women were generally less successful in thwarting their slaveholders' designs. One woman remarked in 1855 that her brother planned to sell an enslaved woman 'just about to be confined the second time [...] to raise money for the firm'. Every time 'she is sent to a place', however, the unnamed enslaved woman told 'the people she is unsound & cuts such capers that she can't be disposed off'. Ultimately, however, the mother-of-two was sold for \$1200.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, the imbalance of power between mistresses and slaves was quite clear in mistresses' slave-trading. Slaveholding women not only hired and sold slaves for profit and in the spirit of efficient labour arrangements in their households, but also used the hire and sale of slaves as punishment. This could reflect a mistress's belief that a slave was 'a hopeless case' or 'a bad example', but sales were manifestations of a personal grudge and acts of revenge.¹⁰⁷ James V. Deane, for example, formerly enslaved in Charles County, Maryland, remembered his aunt being 'sold and taken south' for returning a blow to her mistress.¹⁰⁸ The threat of sale alone was also a 'powerful check on the behavior' of slaves who had an 'immense fear of being sold' and 'sale as punishment [...] was the cornerstone of the domestication of slavery'.¹⁰⁹

Evidently, in their positions as household-managers slaveholding women exercised a great deal of authority over enslaved women. Yet, for Drew Gilpin Faust, slaveholding women were 'reluctant agents of power they could not embrace as rightfully their own' and for Katy Simpson Smith, white mothers 'viewed expressions of power through the lens of slavery, for that was the power they saw most clearly wielded around them, and which they too sometimes wielded'. Sally McMillen suggests if mistresses possessed power it 'was confined to the

¹⁰⁵ Mother to [Agatha Marshall], Aug. 5 1836, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁶ Unsigned to Sally, June 18 1855, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁷ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to mother, Jan. 6 1857, William T. Bain Papers, DU; Julia Bowie to Gustavia Adie, Aug. 1 1854, Adie Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁰⁸ James V. Deane, *FWP*, Maryland Narratives, VIII, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 33; Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 89.

domestic arena and to the extent a woman could influence her husband's public views'.¹¹⁰

Mistresses' power was limited by their husbands and it was limited by a social system that did not franchise them in the roles they took in its maintenance. They were always quick to complain of their burdens in this position. Yet, they identified as slaveholders, recognised their interests in slavery, played central roles in its day-to-day operations, managed the labour of enslaved women, and constructed informal networks whereby enslaved women were routinely circulated among mistresses. They assumed positions of authority in the household that were entirely in keeping with social expectations of southern women and their authority was amplified by the frequency of their husbands' absences. The power they cultivated in these positions was exercised over slaves on a daily basis. Enslaved women certainly felt the power white women possessed, embraced, and exerted over themselves and their families, for it was not wielded lightly or compassionately.

iii. Conflict

The enslaved female 'domestics' who mistresses relied upon so heavily lived and worked in variety of arrangements. Slaveholders typically gave little indication of where domestic slaves lived. Across Federal Writers' Project testimony, however, former slaves often mentioned that nurses, house-servants, and cooks were expected to sleep in the slaveholding household on trundle beds or on the floor. Others were installed in housing close to the slaveholding to facilitate their quick summoning. Many lived among the broader enslaved community in the general 'quarters'. Their work, however, seldom adhered to the routinised labour patterns of agricultural labourers, meaning slaveholder-sanctioned 'free' time could be elusive and claiming time for oneself even more difficult. As Mary Gaffney recalled, 'free' time where slaves could 'get together, dance, talk and have our fun' were 'the happiest time of the slaves because the rest of the time it was just about like being a convict'.¹¹¹ This was precious time for family, friends, social activities, self-directed labour, and rest. The confinement of domestic slaves to the household, and the close proximity to one's slaveholders, could make this labour some of the most restrictive and abusive.

Yet, domestic service has often been interpreted as a privileged form of slave labour because this work was less physically taxing, and food, clothing, and medical care was

¹¹⁰ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 65; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 85-6; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 9.

¹¹¹ Mary Gaffney, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 5, 4, 1448.

sometimes improved for house slaves.¹¹² However, as William Dusingberre notes, ‘the privilege of holding a relatively good job could easily be lost’ and there was ‘a high turnover among the holders of these apparently favored women’s jobs’.¹¹³ The trading of female slaves further confirms this. ‘Privileges’ were precarious and never guaranteed, and the ‘legend of the house-slave elite’ was largely created by whites.¹¹⁴ Rather, many of the ‘benefits’ of domestic servitude were simply owing to the visibility and representative value of domestic slaves, which reconciles the notion of ‘privileges’ in house-service with the lack of affection clearly typical between mistresses and ‘domestics’. Mistresses, for example, sometimes gave domestic slaves ‘pretty clothes to wear’, ear rings, or, as Tempie Cummins, formerly enslaved in Brookeland, Texas, recalled, a dress to wear rather than the usual hand-me-downs pinned with ‘red horse thorns to hide [her] nakedness’.¹¹⁵ Domestic ‘servants’ were expected to ‘keep clean and expectable’.¹¹⁶ The superficiality of household slaves’ treatment, however, was clear to women like Tempie, whose mistress ‘didn’t treat us good’.¹¹⁷ Indeed, as Sallie Crane explained, slaveholders ‘would whip you for anything and wouldn’t give you a bit of meat to eat to save you life, but they’d grease your mouth when company come’.¹¹⁸

Slaveholding women’s reliance on enslaved women, then, did not necessarily yield any benefits for female slaves. Mistresses were routinely abusive, and conflict over labour duties and performance was routine. Mistresses found enslaved women endlessly frustrating, and were most likely to discuss a female slave in relation to a labour problem. Minister’s daughter and minister’s wife Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, of Rockingham County, Virginia, made a comment typical of mistresses when she wrote in 1851 that after three years of housekeeping she was ‘so disgusted’ with ‘treacherous & unmanageable’ servants that she ‘often longed to be where I should never see one’.¹¹⁹ Inexperience was seen to be a particular cause of trouble. Lucy Cushing Irving, for example, felt ‘all young housekeepers’ were apt to have a ‘great deal of trouble’ (‘particularly if they have old servants’), she wrote to her aunt Mary Dame in Danville, Virginia, in February 1850.¹²⁰

Yet, time did not change Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher’s sentiment, at least. In 1864 she remarked how she was ‘finding out, by experience, how utterly inefficient & worthless, most

¹¹² See, for example, White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 50; C.W. Harper, ‘Black Aristocrats: Domestic Servants on the Antebellum Plantation’, *Phylon*, 46, 2 (1985), 123-35.

¹¹³ Dusingberre, *Them Dark Days*, 179, 198-9.

¹¹⁴ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 328.

¹¹⁵ Caroline Farrow, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 40; Tempie Cummins, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 4, 3, 1007.

¹¹⁶ Daphne Williams, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 161.

¹¹⁷ Tempie Cummins, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 4, 3, 1007.

¹¹⁸ Sallie Crane, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 53.

¹¹⁹ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, *Diary*, undated [1851], 104-5, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

¹²⁰ Lucy Cushing Irving to Mary Dame, Feb. 27 1850, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

of our servants are'. '[T]he whole race', she concluded, 'are so insufferably lazy & puffed up with their own importance'.¹²¹ Fletcher's diary was littered with complaints about hired 'servants', understood to be an infinitely more troublesome than owned slaves. Indeed, Mary Dame's sister Frances expressed a similar sentiment in informing Mary that she must 'get on a great deal better than I do as you dont hire and know how to manage them so much better than I do'.¹²²

Regardless of their labour arrangements, though, slaveholding women saw themselves as sufferers of such 'great trials' to 'manage', and their 'cross humor' with 'trying' female slaves was constant.¹²³ Throughout their married lives, mistresses discussed their problems with slaves who (in their opinions) were 'inefficient' 'useless' 'lazy' 'slow' and 'ignorant' as labourers, and dishonest, disobedient, drunk, incompetent and indolent women.¹²⁴ Mistresses felt entirely entitled to the dedicated labour of domestic slaves and systematically used physical abuse as a management tool to attempt to maximise their performance and productivity. Punishment, as female slaveholders understood, was necessary in imparting good habits and training skilled domestic servants. Mistresses spoke of washing, cooking, waiting, and nursing as roles that could be 'taught' or 'learnt'.¹²⁵ And, of course, the whip was understood to instil important lessons. With 'proper management', a slave could make 'a pretty good servant'. Without, a mistress could be subjected 'to a great variety of trials' and a slave could 'never be any comfort', as Laura Norwood complained of Adeline in 1843.¹²⁶

Accordingly, those perceived unruly or careless, sleepy or slovenly, were physically punished. In Henry County, Georgia, for example, Emmaline Heard's mistress would 'sometimes' strike the cook with a slipper if meals 'were not cooked to her satisfaction'.¹²⁷ Formerly enslaved near Gordonsville, Kentucky, Annie B. Boyd remembered her mistress jabbing pins in her to keep her awake when knitting at night.¹²⁸ Similarly, Isabella Jackson recalled how her mistress would 'rap her [sister] on the head with almost anything handy' if

¹²¹ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, May 22 1864, 6, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

¹²² Frances P. Page to Mary Dame, March 24 1858, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

¹²³ Belle Edmonson, 'Diary of Belle Edmondson: January – November, 1864', 7, 11, DocSouth; Keziah G. Hopkins Brevard, in John Hammond Moore (ed.), *A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of Civil War: The Diary of Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard, 1860-1861* (Columbia, SC, 1996), 41, 71; Andrews, *War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 292.

¹²⁴ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, Sep. 27 1857, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU; Julia Bowie to Gustavia Adie, undated, Adie Family Papers, VHS; S.C. [Susanna] Clay to Mary, June 14 1832, C.C. Clay Papers, DU; Octavia Wyche Otey, Diary, vol. 3, April 21 1853, 149, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC; Mira M. Alexander to Agatha [Marshall Logan], May 29 1849, M.A. [Mira M. Alexander] to Agatha [Marshall Logan], March 12 [1850], Louis Marshall Papers, SHC; Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 2, July 8 1855, 16, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC; Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 1 1838, SHC; [Laura Norwood] to mother/Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], June 17 [1843], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; Ann Raney Thomas, 'The History of Her Life', 17, Ann Raney Thomas Coleman Papers, DU.

¹²⁵ Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall to Louisa Elizabeth Carrington, May 23 1831, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall Papers, VHS; Nellie Wells to Mary [Susan Ker], Aug. 5 1853, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC; Lizzie to Sarah Jones Lenoir, Dec. 8 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹²⁶ [Laura Norwood] to mother/Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], June 17 [1843], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹²⁷ Emmaline Heard, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 50. See also William Pratt, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 3, 277.

¹²⁸ Annie B. Boyd, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, II, 58. Similarly, see Elisabeth Sparks, *FWP*, Virginia Narratives, XVII, 51.

she fell asleep whilst weaving near Bunker, Louisiana.¹²⁹ As Katie Darling's Texan mistress so believed, slaves were 'made to work for white folks'.¹³⁰

Yet, slaveholding women were quick to suggest their violence was in the interest of enslaved women. As Selina Lenoir concluded of a 'slovenly' enslaved woman named Emily in 1846: 'there must be some authority exercised for her benefit'.¹³¹ Mistresses were not inclined to discuss their abuse of enslaved women and children with the same openness as former slaves. On the Green Lawn plantation near Meridianville, Alabama, for example, Octavia Wyche Otey remarked in ambiguous terms that she '[f]elt very unpleasant to day about a difficulty with negroes' in her diary in 1852.¹³² More often than not, physical violence is implied. Mistresses' descriptions of their 'authority exercised', their use of 'force and that of the strictest kind', or an enslaved woman being 'pretty hard to break in', are clearly synonymous with violence.¹³³

Furthermore, while mistresses seldom expressed that they punished without cause, they confessed their tendencies for 'temper' and 'cross humour'.¹³⁴ Widowed slaveholder Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard near Columbia, South Carolina, for example, found that 'sometimes my anger rises in spite of all I can do'. She prayed for 'the fortitude to do what is right to these then give me firmness to go no farther'.¹³⁵ In 1845, North Carolinian slaveholder and Methodist minister's wife Frances Moore Webb Bumpas similarly prayed to be kept from sin and for the ability to manage 'properly' after an incident with a 'wilful' and 'obstinate' servant.¹³⁶ As Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese write, mistresses 'asked a great deal of God'.¹³⁷ Rather than confirming Drew Faust's conclusion that white female violence was 'frenzied rather than instrumental violence' as Kirsten Wood suggests, however, such comments give some insight into the regularity with which mistresses recognised their excessive use of violence, and their attempts to perhaps reconcile this with their self-image.¹³⁸ Abuse that was sometimes accompanied with gestures of atonement did not mitigate that white

¹²⁹ Isabella Jackson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 152. '[A]nything handy' included hairbrushes and broomsticks. See also Celestia Avery, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 25; Josie Jordan, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 161.

¹³⁰ Katie Darling, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 279-80.

¹³¹ Mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Annie [Mary Ann Gwyn] [in letter addressed to Thomas L. Lenoir], Feb. 5 1846, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹³² Octavia Wyche Otey, *Diary*, vol. 3, Nov. 27 1852, 6, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC.

¹³³ Mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Annie [Mary Ann Gwyn] [in letter addressed to Thomas L. Lenoir], Feb. 5 1846; Annie [Mary Anne Gwyn] to S.J. [Sarah Jones] Lenoir, March 14 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC; Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], Feb. 24 1858, William T. Bain Papers, DU; Sallie Bell to Soph [Sophie Manly], March 20 1856, Manly Family Papers, SHC.

¹³⁴ Edmonson, 'Diary of Belle Edmondson', 11; Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, 99, DocSouth.

¹³⁵ Brevard in Moore (ed.), *Plantation Mistress on the Eve of Civil War*, Sep. 1860, 33, March 28 1861, 105.

¹³⁶ Frances Moore Webb Bumpas, *Diary*, April 24 1845, Bumpas Family Papers, SHC.

¹³⁷ Genovese and Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception*, 78.

¹³⁸ Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005), 52.

women used violence quite methodically and this abuse was a shaping feature of enslaved women's day-to-day lives in the 'big house'.

White women's erratic violence was also an emotional form of abuse as much as a physical one. Formerly enslaved in Wake County, North Carolina, and under the command of a violent mistress, Rena Raines's '[m]other said you jist couldn't tell when you would git whupped'.¹³⁹ One former slave remembered how, as a girl, she 'was scared all de time, all de time'.¹⁴⁰ Even observing acts of violence could be a deeply distressing experience, especially for those children who saw their mothers beaten 'most to death'.¹⁴¹ Mistresses relied upon the threat of violence to both punish and to coerce. In 1855, for example, one slaveholding woman gave an enslaved girl, Bet, 'a lashing this evening for tearing her coat-tail off'. She also 'threatened to kill [Bet] with the hogs', but found 'it don't do any good'.¹⁴² Violence was a tool of mistresses' control, regardless of the fluctuations in its severity or the frequency of its use.

While mistresses' self-remonstrations recognised only what they considered excess, they were also generally forthright about precisely who was responsible for their violence and frustrations. They routinely characterised their abuses of slaves as provoked and deserved. Virginian Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, for example, complained of Mary's 'very insolent provoking manner', and in Shelby County, Tennessee, Belle Edmondson felt 'real cross' having been 'provoked' by Laura.¹⁴³ In Baltimore, Maryland, Grace Winchester was so annoyed by hireling Delia's 'provoking manner' and 'high temper' that she resolved 'never to take another we are still living' in 1850.¹⁴⁴ By placing blame on enslaved women, mistresses established that they 'only reprove [slaves] when absolutely necessary'.¹⁴⁵

Elizabeth Perry, the Greenville, South Carolina slaveholder and mother-of-three so troubled by Eliza's misbehaviour, exemplified this attitude. 'Servants', Perry wrote in 1844, 'have given me great trouble, & have been my only trials in my married life'. She reasoned that she and her husband were 'entitled to good, faithful, contented, grateful servants'. They were 'kind to them' and 'give them little to do' and did not make a practice of 'inflicting corporal punishment on them'. 'Strict' owners, she concluded, were clearly more effective than

¹³⁹ Rena Raines, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 194.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in John W. Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1977), 540.

¹⁴¹ Odel Jackson, 'Interview with Ex-Slave Odel Jackson in 1940', 1, LWPA. See also George G. King, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 165-6; Silas Spotfire, 'Interview with Ex-Slave Silas Spotfire in 1940', 2, LWPA; William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (London, 1849), 15-6, DocSouth; Elsie Ross, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 438-9; Hattie Jefferson, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 1131.

¹⁴² Mother to sister, Nov. 19 1855, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁴³ Edmonson, 'Diary of Belle Edmondson', 11.

¹⁴⁴ Grace Winchester to Mrs Dr Ker [Mary Susan Ker], Jan. 17 1850, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 11 1844, SHC. This is in fitting with slaveholders more broadly. James Oakes notes that management 'experts' increasingly denied slaves of 'small privileges' and that '[m]any began to justify increased repression on paternalistic grounds'. Oakes, *Ruling Race*, 163.

‘indulgent ones’.¹⁴⁶ Thus, Elizabeth characterised the violence she and her husband used against slaves as both restrained and necessary, and she situated this as a management strategy among those she considered more forceful and less ‘indulgent’. Fashioning their violence as ‘necessary’ was perhaps another way that mistresses transformed ‘women’s resistance into less threatening gestures’.¹⁴⁷ However, it was also indicative of mistresses’ self-justifying ways.

The entitlement Elizabeth felt emanated from her sense of her own benevolence speaks to another characteristic of slaveholding women’s relationships with enslaved women. Understanding those ‘raised’ in the house or even simply those ‘employed’ there as benefactors of whites’ kindness and civilising efforts, the apparently fortunate few who then acted against their mistresses’ wishes were understood (and treated) as undeserving and ungrateful. Mary Ferrand Henderson, for example, was enraged when an enslaved woman named Jennie absconded in 1858. Jennie, she wrote, was ‘reared in my own room, as one of my own children’, and thus ‘very vile!’ in her ‘base ingratitude!’.¹⁴⁸ In 1856, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher was similarly outraged by an enslaved woman named Sarah’s running away. Sarah had explained that she was responding to Lucy’s children being ‘unkind to her’. This was clearly unimportant to Lucy, who felt she was ‘attached to the child & had taken great pains to improve her in every way’, and was thus ‘greatly distressed + discouraged by her ingratitude & want of principle’.¹⁴⁹ A mistress’s sense of her own paternalism towards a slave they considered favoured thus came with heavy expectations for total acquiescence. Failure to adhere to this could be costly. Indeed, Mary had concluded that Jennie was simply ‘too corrupt to be allowed to remain with them’.¹⁵⁰ A letter to Frances Barbour of Orange County, Virginia, in November 1863 responding to her complaint about an enslaved woman named Delpha’s ‘impudent’ behaviour, explained just what slaveholders felt they were ‘due’: ‘service, labour-ready, willing, faithful service unquestioned obedience’.¹⁵¹

Mistresses thus aligned ideals of female benevolence with their day-to-day roles as slaveholders by representing their violence as necessary, beneficial, and in the spirit of training. That mistresses understood and fashioned their treatment of slaves in this way, however, did not diminish either the range of their abuses of enslaved people, the severity of this abuse, or its effects. Indeed, the fallacy of paternalism was well-understood both by some visitors to the south, and of course, the enslaved people who recognised their mistresses did not beat them for

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 11 1844, SHC.

¹⁴⁷ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 67.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 11, Oct. 10 1858, 73, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁴⁹ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, undated [May 1856], Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

¹⁵⁰ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 11, Oct. 10 1858, 73, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁵¹ Joseph Hiden to F. [Frances] J. Barbour, Nov. 11 1863, Barbour Family Papers, VHS.

their own benefit. For Massachusetts-born Lucy Ruggles, a governess between the Holmes' family's South Carolinian rice plantation and Charleston residency (1845-8), the mistress's violent abuse of slaves reckoned with own her understanding of femininity. Mrs Holmes ordered 'blow after blow' upon slaves 'for the slightest fault', taunted them with 'the most cutting sarcasm and reproaches', and 'grudges them their course food and scanty clothing'. Ruggles felt she 'loves to see them whipped as much as she loves her dinner. And yet she is a woman!'.¹⁵² As Katie Rye, formerly enslaved in Faulkner County, Arkansas remarked: 'Mistress claimed to be a christian and church member but I don't see how she could have been she was so mean'.¹⁵³

While mistresses' abuses of slaves were often centred around labour, though, they sought much more broadly to consolidate their power in the household and establish their superiority above slaves, enforcing a rigid racial-social hierarchy. Mistresses were quick to respond with force to any gesture they deemed disrespectful. In Alabama, for example, Octavia Wyche Otey recorded in her diary in March 1852 that she had 'whipped Maria for talking about me'.¹⁵⁴ Mahala Roach, a plantation mistress in Vicksburg, Mississippi, similarly responded to Margery's 'insolent' behaviour by striking her. 'I am sorry', Roach wrote in 1854, 'but they will not obey without feeling my power'.¹⁵⁵ As Emma Oats remembered, being 'sassy' was 'what most em got 10 lashes, 25, 30 lashes for' in Monroe County, Arkansas.¹⁵⁶ The recollection of abuse over verbal infractions is both extensive and wide-ranging.¹⁵⁷

The outcome of these interactions was not always violent, but it was often severe. When Lucy Delaney's mistress in St Louis, Missouri, threatened to sell her mother for her 'white airs', for example, her mother maintained a 'bold front' and was sold as punishment.¹⁵⁸ What mistresses could perceive as a challenge was highly subjective. As Sallie Carder explained, formerly enslaved in Jackson, Tennessee, her mistress was 'very mean' and simply 'looking too hard at her' could result in a whipping.¹⁵⁹ Mistresses detested those who thought

¹⁵² Lucy Spooner Ruggles, Diary, Aug. 21 1845, 125, Dec. 2 1845, 188, Daniel Ruggles Papers, DU. Other visitors to the south who assumed 'responsibilities' over slaves (with exceptions such as Fanny Kemble) adapted to their slaveholding roles. See Rebecca J. Fraser, *Gender, Race and Family in Nineteenth Century America: From Northern Woman to Plantation Mistress* (Basingstoke, 2013); Wilma King (ed.), *A Northern Woman in the Plantation South: Letters of Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox, 1856-1876* (Columbia, SC, 1997); Wilma King, 'The Mistress and Her Maids: White and Black Women in a Louisiana Household, 1858-1868', in Morton (ed.), *Discovering the Women in Slavery*, 82-106.

¹⁵³ Katie Rye, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 112.

¹⁵⁴ Octavia Wyche Otey, Diary, vol. 2, March 15 1852, 17, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁵ Mahala P.H. Roach, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 51, Jan. 2 1854, 2-3, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁶ Emma Oats, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 222.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, William Gant, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 12; Henry Andrew Williams, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 168; Emma Oats, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 222; Rebecca Hooks, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 174; Tom Haynes, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 227; Mattie Jane Jackson and L.S. Thompson (ed.), *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson: Her Parentage, Experience of Eighteen Years in Slavery, Incidents During the War, Her Escape from Slavery: A True Story* (Lawrence, MA, 1866), 54-5, DocSouth; Lucy A. Delaney, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light, or Struggles for Freedom* (St. Louis, MO, undated), 26-7, DocSouth.

¹⁵⁸ Delaney, 'From the Darkness Cometh the Light', 21-2.

¹⁵⁹ Sallie Carder, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 7. See also Susan Castle, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 180.

‘themselves better than white people’, and ‘put on’ ‘white airs’, resorting to ‘bringing down’ women they did not believe to know their place.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, an enslaved woman’s most ‘gratifying’ quality, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher explained of Judy, was ‘always knowing her place’.¹⁶¹

No more clearly could slaveholding women articulate their desires to construct and maintain the boundary between ‘women and slaves’. These interactions were clearly attempts at ensuring enslaved women adhered to their mistresses’ sense of their respective social stations, and in doing so, slaveholding women embraced the social power slavery offered them. Their intolerance of and response to gestures they perceived as insubordinate suggest their acute awareness of slaves’ disdain for them, as well as further sensitivities to the possibilities of resistance, and ultimately emphasise the fractious nature of their relationships with enslaved women. Indeed, female slaves embraced these means of challenging their mistresses and engaged more frequently ‘in sassing and insubordination’ than men.¹⁶² This likely reflects the close proximity of female domestics with slaveholders, but also their intolerance of the social deference that was being demanded of them.

While white women clearly took punishment and coercion into their own hands, they also used men to mete out punishments on their behalf. A deferred punishment could be preferable or severe, depending on the nature of the infraction and the master or overseer. In Arkansas, Mary Scott recalled being whipped by her master on her mistress’s command, and in Georgia, Leah Garret’s master would whip slaves if her mistress or children ‘told him anything’.¹⁶³ On a plantation in Texas, Esther Easter’s mistress had her Master Jim whip her ‘every time’ he ‘come home’ for being ‘mean’.¹⁶⁴ This likely reflected gendered dynamics in some slaveholders’ relationships, and was certainly used to avoid ‘scenes’ and ‘unladylike’ behaviour.¹⁶⁵ However, for some mistresses, this strategy was owing to their fears of reprisals and revenge. Formerly enslaved in Huntsville, Alabama, Adelaide Vaughn’s mother’s mistress used other enslaved women to punish for fear of reprisals if ‘she was alone’.¹⁶⁶ Louis Hughes believed his wife, Matilda, was not whipped by their mistress in Memphis, Tennessee, because

¹⁶⁰ Brevard in Moore (ed.), *Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War*, 89; Delaney, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light*, 21; Kate E.R. Pickard, *The Kidnapped and the Ransomed. Recollections of Peter Still and His Wife “Vina,” after Forty Years of Slavery* (New York, 1856), 179, DocSouth.

¹⁶¹ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, undated [c.1854], Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

¹⁶² Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 193.

¹⁶³ Mary Scott, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 124; Leah Garrett, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 12. See also Frank Cooper, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 62; Josie Jordan, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 161; Sophia Word, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, VII, 66; Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains, or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York, 1859), 84, DocSouth; John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (London, 1862), 7-8, DocSouth; Sallie Reynolds, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 325.

¹⁶⁴ Esther Easter, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 88-9.

¹⁶⁵ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 38.

¹⁶⁶ Adelaide J. Vaughn, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 7-8. See also Sarah Wilson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 347.

of ‘an open or implied threat perhaps that such treatment would not be endured without resistance or protest of some kind’.¹⁶⁷ Enslaved women were in constant contestation with their mistresses and their own use of violence or threat of violence was used to establish a modicum of control in their relationships with slaveholders. Children, however, were less able to fight off the attacks of their mistresses. Sarah Wilson explained that while her mistress was ‘afraid of grown negroes’, ‘she beat us children all the time’.¹⁶⁸

Certainly, while ‘mistresses simply did not have free reign in determining how slaves should be treated’, even if the master objected, as Solomon Northup’s depiction of the infamous relationship between Mrs Epps and Patsey showed, mistresses were capable of making life ‘completely miserable’.¹⁶⁹ White women punched, slapped, whipped, beat enslaved women (and girls), and pulled hair. Violence escalated to extreme and sadistic attacks. Enslaved women’s abuse of enslaved women (and girls) could include burning, and ‘striking’ or ‘hitting’ with knives (and forks), and biting.¹⁷⁰ Delia Garlic’s mistress ran a hot iron down her arm and hand for hurting the mistress’s baby, and another mistress hit her ‘in the head’ with a piece of ‘stove-wood’ for ‘mocking her betters’.¹⁷¹ A similarly minor infraction – having ‘no butter’ for her mistress’s biscuits – resulted in a group of slaveholding women beating Frank Cooper’s mother with a ‘heavy board’, which broke her back. They left her ‘like a dog to die in the blazin’ noonday sun’.¹⁷² Delia Garlic remembered: ‘Us jest prayed fer strength to endure it to de end’.¹⁷³

Some, however, did not live to tell their experiences. One mistress in Mississippi beat an enslaved cook while the woman was still holding her baby, and the infant died from the resulting skull-fracture.¹⁷⁴ Others could not, or would not, discuss their mistress’s abuse. When

¹⁶⁷ Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom: The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation and in the Home of the Planter* (Milwaukee, WI, 1897), 95, DocSouth.

¹⁶⁸ Sarah Wilson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 347.

¹⁶⁹ Marli F. Weiner, ‘Mistresses, Morality, and the Dilemmas of Slaveholding: The Ideology and Behavior of Elite Antebellum Women’, in Patricia Morton (ed.), *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past* (Athens, GA, 1996), 285; Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River in Louisiana* (Auburn, NY, 1853), 254, DocSouth.

¹⁷⁰ Evidence for this is overwhelming. For examples of a range of white women’s abuse in the testimony of former slaves, see ‘Mistreatment of Slaves’, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 299-304; Mary Scott, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 124; Harriet Robinson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XII, 271; Frank Cooper, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 62; Carrie Bradley Logan Bennet, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 150; Clara Young, *FWP*, Mississippi Narratives, IX, 170; Tom Haynes, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 227; Lila Nichols, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 149; George G. King, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 165; Celestia Avery, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 23-5; Harriet Casey, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 77; Sally Graves, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 130; Georgia Smith, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 3, 280; Annie Page, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 235; Tom Hawkins, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 129; Sarah H. Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn, NY, 1869), 11-3, 117, 123, DocSouth; Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston, MA, 1845), 25, 35-6, DocSouth; Douglas Dorsey, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 94-5; Martha Organ, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 154; J.L. Smith, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 200; Ellen Campbell, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 222. Henrietta Butler, ‘Interview with Ex-Slave Henrietta Butler. Gretna, LA’, 1, LWPA.

¹⁷¹ Delia Garlic, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 129-31.

¹⁷² Frank Cooper, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 62.

¹⁷³ Delia Garlic, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 129-31.

¹⁷⁴ Nealy Harvey, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 80. See also Henry Walton, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 10, 5, 2168; Hannah Fambro, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 332-3; Harriet Robinson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XII, 274; Ellen Fitzgerald, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 303; Unnamed informant in ‘Mistreatment of Slaves’, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 299.

Charlotte Foster was asked to expand upon her description of a ‘fussy and mean’ mistress, ‘she just shook her head and did not reply’.¹⁷⁵ Many bore the scars of their mistresses’ abuse as elderly women.¹⁷⁶ Whether white women’s violence towards enslaved women was regular or sporadic, justified as ‘training’ or a punishment, first-hand or delegated, it was done with the intention of coercing obedience and compliance from slaves and establishing and demonstrating power and authority. Violence, as Sarah Clarke Kaplan writes, is ‘neither epiphenomenal nor symptomatic of social processes, but rather as a *kind of power*’.¹⁷⁷

Accordingly, enslaved women were also abused ‘for nothin’, because their mistress ‘jist joyed whuppin’, ‘to satisfy her spite feeling’, or simply ‘‘cause they had the privilege’.¹⁷⁸ Some former slaves felt their mistresses contrived reasons to punish them, such as hiding a ‘baby’s cap’ or placing cow hairs in butter.¹⁷⁹ Such violence was an embodiment of the power white women felt, sought, and exerted over enslaved women, but were able to ‘justify’ under the guise of economic infractions. Feigned submissiveness, or even genuine obedience, thus did not necessarily protect slaves from abuse. So, many women undoubtedly shared in Hannah Plummer’s mother’s experience. Formerly enslaved in North Carolina, her mother ‘could not please her [mistress] in anything, no matter what she done or how hard she tried’. Instead, she suffered the attacks of a mistress who whipped her ‘until the blood was runnin’ down her back’.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, formerly enslaved in Goldsboro, North Carolina, Talitha Lewis’s mistress Nettie Sherrod (‘as mean a wife as I ever saw’) numbered among those mistresses who simply ‘did not like a black face’.¹⁸¹

Personal dislikes evidently permeated women’s relationships. This was especially clear in mistresses’ abuse of those enslaved women they regarded as sexual competition, who were often on the receiving end of the most extreme of mistresses’ violence. The multi-racial children that symbolised white males’ adultery were also often targets of female slaveholders’ abuse. Differences among enslaved women such as one’s complexion, or one’s ‘relationship’ with a slaveholding male, could deeply influence one’s relationship with, or rather treatment by, their mistress. Some enslaved women’s relationships with white men were decisive; sometimes borne of hope for improved conditions for themselves and their children. The vast

¹⁷⁵ Charlotte Foster, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 80.

¹⁷⁶ See Sarah Frances Shaw Graves, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 130; Annie Page, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 235; Addy Gill, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 326; Susan Merritt, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 78.

¹⁷⁷ Kaplan, ‘Love and Violence/Maternity and Death’, 96.

¹⁷⁸ Mary Scott, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 124; Jane Simpson, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 313; Ria Sorrell, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 300; Sallie Crane, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 53. See also Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 19, 41.

¹⁷⁹ Ria Sorrell, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 302; Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 40. See also Peter Bruner, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, VII, 88.

¹⁸⁰ Hannah Plummer, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 180.

¹⁸¹ Talitha Lewis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 253.

majority were coercive, and the rape of enslaved women by white men was endemic.¹⁸² Yet mistresses largely did not extend their sympathy to either enslaved women or their children born of rape, emphasising the limitations of any notion that women's 'shared' gender ameliorated their relationships.

Interracial sex should not, however, be overstated as the cause of conflict in women's relationships. There is a danger in suggesting this exemplifies how 'the patriarchal imperative could turn woman against woman, white against black'.¹⁸³ This was certainly a 'cause' of some of the most severe abuse enslaved women and children endured, but mistresses' abuses of female slaves were far more diverse in their 'reasoning' than sexual jealousy. White women's violence was not simply an emotional reaction to events beyond their control but purposeful and often methodical. Routine and labour-related violence shaped everyday life in the slaveholding household. It frequently escalated to extreme abuse and was inextricable from mistresses' desire to cultivate and enforce their social power.

'Abuse', however, is a rather nebulous term and not all abuse took the form of physical violence. Slaveholders used a wide variety of means to punish and control enslaved women. Hannah Travis's mother, for example, was made to drink 'old dirty dish water' if she left any dishes soaking and whipped if she refused during her enslavement in Missouri.¹⁸⁴ Some former slaves spoke of being deprived of food and intentionally starved.¹⁸⁵ One mistress did not believe in giving slaves any meat. Consequently, they lived 'on the verge of starvation' and regarded her well-fed pet dog quite jealously.¹⁸⁶ Lou Smith remembered how her mistress in Texas was a 'low-brow' woman who 'never had been used to slaves and she treated us like dogs'. In the absence of their master 'she made our lives a misery to us'. The mistress 'made me take off my clothes and I just crept off and cried'. Lou was 'jest a little child', but she 'knowed I oughten to go without my clothes'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Mistresses' abuse of enslaved women they believed to be in sexual relations with whites and their children are discussed in Chapter Three. For discussion of interracial (white male-enslaved female) sexual relationships and their different forms, see McMillen, *Southern Women*, 25-33; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 34-49; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 134-7; Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana, IL, 2004), 126-31; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 120-3; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford, 2010), 24-7; Livesey, 'Sexual Violence in the Slaveholding Regimes of Louisiana and Texas'; Fay A. Yarbrough, 'Power, Perception and Interracial Sex: Former Slaves Recall a Multiracial South', *Journal of Southern History*, 71, 3 (2005), 559-88.

¹⁸³ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 27.

¹⁸⁴ Hannah Travis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 347. See also Annie B. Boyd, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, II, 58.

¹⁸⁵ Lizzie McCloud, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 4-5; Harriet Robinson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XII, 271; Lizzie McCloud, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 4; Landy Rucker, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 92; Lou Smith, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 301; Annie Hawkins, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 131; Rebecca Hooks, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 174; Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*, 36; Harriet A. Jacobs and Lydia Maria Francis Child (ed.), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself* Linda Brent (Boston, MA, 1861), 22, DocSouth.

¹⁸⁶ John Andrew Jackson, *Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 20.

¹⁸⁷ Lou Smith, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 301. See also Mary Reynolds, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 241.

Mistresses' whippings of enslaved women often included the removal of their clothes, usually stripping a woman to the waist or pulling her dress over her head.¹⁸⁸ Humiliation was part of the spectacle of slave punishment, and in a society that held strict customs on the exposure of women's bodies, such exposure was intended to (and often did) shame enslaved women and to express social difference. One can thus only imagine the delight one enslaved woman, Fannie, might have taken when in a fracas with her mistress their wrestling spilled into the yard and 'Fannie ripped the clothes of her mistress, leaving her virtually naked'.¹⁸⁹

Mistresses' removing enslaved women's clothes was one of many techniques of differentiation. Just as they attacked enslaved women who did not 'know their place' or had 'white airs', mistresses maligned enslaved women and girls as 'a black kinky head hussy' or a 'black good-for-nothing lazy gal', or simply, 'black bitch'.¹⁹⁰ Cutting and shaving enslaved women's hair was a practice or punishment also used by slaveholding women to assert female slaves' blackness. Rebecca Hooks, formerly enslaved in Jones County, Georgia, for example, explained her hair was cut very short 'to offset this likeness' between her and the slaveholders' child (her aunt).¹⁹¹ James Brittian's grandmother (whose 'Old Miss was jealous of her and Old Mawster') was similarly forced to 'wear her hair shaved to the scalp'.¹⁹² Frances Jane Brown's mistress in Winchester, Virginia, was so 'enraged' by her daughter's likeness with Frances that her 'long, black hair was cut zigzag that it might grow curly' and she was 'made to stand in the sun to tan her'.¹⁹³

Rebecca Hooks, aided and abetted by her mother, resisted this treatment.¹⁹⁴ Others, however, were deeply affected by their singling-out. One enslaved child of a white father, ostracised by her mistress, 'crys so hard till her mammy never know what to do'. Her mother 'covered the little girl in smut to darken her complexion'. It was no use, and 'she couldn't never trouble dat straight hair off her noway'.¹⁹⁵ Mistresses' treatment of multi-racial enslaved women in this way sought to assert social distinctions if they were not as plainly evident as she desired. Whether in the realm of work or through their interpersonal interactions with female slaves, mistresses' carefully guarded and articulated the intra-gendered hierarchies upon which

¹⁸⁸ George G. King, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 165-6; Hannah Plummer, *FWP*, XI, 2, 180; Melissa Williamson, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 412. For discussion of social norms over the exposure of women's bodies, see White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 31-4.

¹⁸⁹ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 150.

¹⁹⁰ Sallie Crane, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 51-2; Margaret Nickens, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 264; Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York, 1868), 21, DocSouth; Butler, 'Interview with Ex-Slave Henrietta Butler. Gretna, LA', 1, LWPA.

¹⁹¹ Rebecca Hooks, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 174-5. See also Sarah Ross, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 168; Fannie Tatum, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 258; Mahalia Shores, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 155; Mattie Jenkins, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 95; L. Green, *TAS SSI*, 5, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 78.

¹⁹² James Brittian, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 6, 1, 218.

¹⁹³ Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (Xenia, OH, 1926), 71, DocSouth.

¹⁹⁴ Rebecca Hooks, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 174-5.

¹⁹⁵ Ryer Emmanuel, *FWP*, XIV, 2, 14.

their own privileged positions were premised. Their mechanisms for doing so were diverse, cruel, and practiced on a daily basis.

Though enslaved women's motives and means of resistance are often somewhat elusive, they were assuredly not passive to the power of mistresses. Indeed, enslaved women engaged in a whole spectrum of resistance against their mistresses from manipulation and coercion, to stealing, running away, and physical and verbal gestures. Some enslaved women's resistance responded directly to mistreatment at the hands of their mistresses. When Sophia Word's mistress tried to punish her, for example, Sophia 'shook her until she begged for mercy' in Clay County, Kentucky. 'Aunt' Lorendo, enslaved in Louisiana, returned her mistress's beating (with an iron key) with 'one hard slap'.¹⁹⁶ Similarly tired of her continued abuse by a mistress, one woman stuck sewing-pins in her hair so that her next beating left her mistress's hand 'filled with pins'.¹⁹⁷ Enslaved women especially vociferously rejected their mistresses' abuse when they felt it was unjust. One woman, for example, was punished for 'an act of which she was not guilty' and another 'thout tellin' her why'. Both left their workplaces armed with knives, though these incidences did not escalate to violence.¹⁹⁸

Altercations often resulted in such affirmative statements of wilful resistance. It provided mistresses a warning that their behaviour would not be tolerated, and it also provided enslaved women a means of resisting without using violence and having to deal with its life-altering consequences. Emma Watson remembered such an occasion in Ellis County, Texas, when her 'Miss Tilda' attempted to whip her mother with a 'buggy whip': 'Maw grabs de whip and says, "Miss Tilda, you ain't gwine do dat"'.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, Lila Nichols recalled how in North Carolina, an enslaved woman refused a whipping by her mistress and told her: 'No sir, Missus, 'ain't 'lowin' nobody what wa'r de same kind of shirt I does ter whup me'.²⁰⁰ Some enslaved women thus drew their mistresses' attention to their violations of the precepts of femininity, or perhaps simply asserted their ability to physically resist their mistresses. They were all too aware, however, that the bonds of womanhood seldom transgressed the lines of bondage.

Resistance was also a gesture of solidarity, and enslaved women retaliated abuse on the behalf of others. Mary Armstrong, formerly enslaved in Missouri, remembered her mistress,

¹⁹⁶ Sophia Word, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, VII, 66-7; Octavia V. Rogers, *The House of Bondage, or, Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves, Original and Life Like, As They Appeared in Their Old Plantation and City Slave Life; Together with Pen-Pictures of the Peculiar Institution, with Sights and Insights into Their New Relations as Freedmen, Freemen, and Citizens* (New York, 1890), 71, DocSouth.

¹⁹⁷ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 33-4.

¹⁹⁸ Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, 71; John Rudd, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 171.

¹⁹⁹ Emma Watson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 148.

²⁰⁰ Lila Nichols, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 149.

‘Polly devil’, removed the diaper of Mary’s nine-month-old sister and whipped her until the infant’s eventual death. Mary belonged to Polly’s daughter, and when she saw Polly, Mary beat her in the face with a rock, ensuring she knew ‘that’s for whippin’ my baby sister to death’.²⁰¹ These physical acts undoubtedly gave a sense of retribution, if limited, and were likely intended to discourage white women from their use of violence. The resulting punishments sometimes paled into significance. Sophia Ward, for example, explained that: ‘I didn’t care fer I gave the mistress a good ‘un too’.²⁰² At other times, enslaved women’s responses had more serious ramifications. One woman warned her mistress: ‘If you strike me, it will be the dearest lick ever you struck’. A fight ensued between this enslaved woman and her master, drafted in to managed the defiant woman, and resulted in her being sold.²⁰³

Indeed, it was never a fair fight. Enslaved women always had to consider the risks of such responses to their resistance by vengeful mistresses. For many slaves who attacked their owners, ‘that would have been the last their loved ones heard of them’, and single incidences could thus alter the course of one’s life (and one’s children’s lives).²⁰⁴ Once again, the balance of power sat with mistresses, who were able to determine exactly what constituted an offence deserving of brutal violence or a ruthless sale. Lila Nichols’s mistress, for example, near Rhamkette, North Carolina, became convinced after falling ill that a ‘slave gal’ named Alice had ‘done try ter pizen her’. Whether Alice was poisoning the abusive woman or not, Alice was beaten ‘till de bloods run down her back’, then sold.²⁰⁵

Owing in part at least to the nature of slaveholders’ retributions, enslaved women’s resistance took a broad range of forms. Running away (though this was often complicated by parental responsibilities) directly impinged upon slaveholders as it was often ‘the woman’s owner’ ‘forced to make up the difference’ in labour.²⁰⁶ The confinement of domestic slaves undoubtedly shaped the nature and extent of their participation in the broader enslaved community’s resistance. Even still, one’s situation in the household provided unique opportunities for other types of resistance. Enslaved women utilised opportunities to learn literacy, acquiring skills that were often passed on to other enslaved people. Household

²⁰¹ Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), 314.

²⁰² Sophia Ward, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, VII, 67. See also Annie Hawkins, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 132.

²⁰³ L.R. Ferebee, *A Brief History of the Slave Life of Rev. L. R. Ferebee, and the Battles of Life, and Four Years of His Ministerial Life. Written from Memory To 1882* (Raleigh, NC, 1882), 7, DocSouth.

²⁰⁴ Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, 89.

²⁰⁵ Lila Nichols, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 149.

²⁰⁶ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 40.

servitude offered the possibility for theft of food, money, and information.²⁰⁷ As the aforementioned Dinah, Eliza, and Susan's attempts at controlling their movements suggest, some enslaved women were able to negotiate where they would work, seeking moves between members of the slaveholding family. Others attempted to negotiate the conditions within the slaveholding. Enslaved women generally sought to resist confining household roles, and often refused to sleep in their slaveholders' household, undoubtedly seeking instead the company of one's own kin and community, autonomy, and time for rest.²⁰⁸

Not all challenges to a mistress's authority were physical, then. Power had many expressions. Esther Easter found out her Mistress was 'fiddling round with a neighbor man' in Texas, and told the Master of her infidelity in the spirit of 'fixing to even up for some of them whippings'.²⁰⁹ As a result, the woman was beaten by her husband. These were important gestures in creating boundaries of acceptable behaviour between women, and symbolic challenges to the boundless power of slaveholding women. Much like slaveholding women's abuse was often centred upon constructing and maintaining hierarchies rather than simply coercing labour, when directed towards mistresses, enslaved women's resistance was often focused on challenging or limiting their power, control, and authority in all realms of life. A reluctance to discuss violence, ambiguous language, and a culture of dissemblance all obscure the visibility of enslaved women's resistance.²¹⁰ Each 'lazy' woman, each broken glass, each instruction 'forgotten' could have been an act of resistance. Women's relationships were constant struggles of will, independence, and authority.

Despite the well-documented conflict that characterised women's relationships, however, both enslaved and slaveholding women could be motivated to cultivate 'good' relationships. Rare demonstrations of kindness and reward were only extended to those slaves who were favoured by their mistresses. While autonomy was certainly reduced for 'favourite' slaves, some women who gained the trust of their mistresses might seek out some

²⁰⁷ See, for example, George Washington Albright, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 6, 1, 10-1; Belle Caruthers, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 365; Candis Goodwin, *FWP*, Virginia Narratives, XVII, 17; Lizzie Baker, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 67-8; John White, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 324; Angeline Jones, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 134; Robert Toatley, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 164; Victoria McMullen, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 35-6; Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 80; Elizabeth Ross Hite, 'Interview with Ex-Slave Elizabeth Ross Hite in the 1940s', 3, LWPA; Tempie Cummins, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 4, 3, 1008; Annie Norton, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 8, 7, 2941.

²⁰⁸ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, *Diary*, [June 1857], 131, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU; Octavia Wyche Otey, *Diary*, vol. 2, May 10 1852, 55, May 11 1852, 56, June 27 1852, 67, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC.

²⁰⁹ Esther Easter, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 89.

²¹⁰ Darlene Clark Hine defines dissemblance as 'the behavior and attitudes of black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors'. Darlene Clark Hine, 'Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance', *Signs*, 14, 4 (1989), 912.

independence.²¹¹ Other slaves remembered being taught to read or write by inclined mistresses.²¹² Appearing reliable or trustworthy, then, could be advantageous, though mistresses' favouritisms were precarious at best and came with heavy expectations. Enslaved women's rare contemporaneous letters indicate their use of dissemblance. From Bullock County, Georgia, Vilet Lester's letter to her mistress declared in 1857: 'I do not now which I want to See the worst Miss Rahol or mother'. Ultimately, however, her intention was certainly to 'now what has Ever become of my Presus little girl'.²¹³ Similarly, Matilda Turner's letter to her mistress Jane in 1836 informed her she had named her son after Gurley's own child. This was perhaps a means of entreating her good will, because her concerns were undoubtedly centred upon her 'long anxious' wait 'to heer whether my father was was leaving and how my Sistar and Children was'.²¹⁴ Although far from having the 'upper hand', enslaved women certainly 'understood the value of silence and secrecy' and 'deliberately dissemble[d] their objective reality'.²¹⁵

Enslaved women were well-aware of the conventions and social rituals demanded of them by slaveholders and negotiated these carefully. An enslaved woman named Isabella, for example, used notions of slave-slaveholder mutual obligations and slaveholders' propriety to manipulate her mistress. Isabella was hired to a man whose wife beat her and implored her mistress to '[p]lease not to hire me to Mr Cross next year'. She assured her mistress - in what could be interpreted as a thinly-veiled threat - that 'some persons have asked me if you know how they lived but I told them that you did not know how she went on or you would not have let him hire me'.²¹⁶ Social ideals of good slaveholding practice could shape slaveholders' behavior, especially that of white women. That Isabella seems to have appealed to her mistress's sense of her propriety, rather than sympathy, is indicative of where she believed her mistress's concerns were centred. Isabella sought to reason with her, stating that she would 'try and bear it this year ant not have any noise about it though it is right hard after being hired out for fou[rt]een years and never got a stroke before'. Mistresses, however, did not necessarily respond kindly to threats to their reputation. After the death of Louis and Matilda Hughes's twin babies, their mistress told Matilda she was 'tempted to take that knife' 'and cut you in

²¹¹ Enslaved women, for example, might be left to housekeep in mistresses' absence. See Hannah Valentine to Eliza, Nov. 1 1837, Hannah Valentine to husband [Michael Valentine], Jan. 30 1838, Lethe Jackson to Virginia Campbell, April 18 1838, Hannah [Valentine] to Mary H. Campbell, May 2 1838, Campbell Family Papers, DU; Eliza Moore Chinn McHatten Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of My Girlhood* (New York, 1912), 212, DocSouth.

²¹² Charlie Bell, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 6, 1, 123; Callie Washington, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 10, 5, 2189; Maggie Pinkard, *TAS SSI*, Oklahoma Narratives, 12, 5, 254.

²¹³ Vilet Lester to Patsey Patterson, Aug. 29 1857, Joseph Allred Papers, DU.

²¹⁴ Matilda Turner to mistress [Jane Gurley], Sep. 9 1836, Jane Gurley Papers, SHC.

²¹⁵ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 344.

²¹⁶ Isabella to mistress [Mrs Archibald Henderson], undated, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

two' for going 'all around the neighborhood and told the people that I killed your babies, and almost whipped you to death'.²¹⁷

Nevertheless, white women recognised their own interests in fostering amicable relationships with enslaved women. Considering how daunted slaveholding women were by the responsibilities they found as young housekeepers, experienced enslaved women could be invaluablely helpful.²¹⁸ Indeed, former slaveholders recalled the 'help and support' enslaved women provided them in the household, and noted their 'reliance' on slave women in the 'unremitting struggles' of housekeeping.²¹⁹ A 'favorite maid' could also give indispensable detail on 'what goes on in her house'.²²⁰ The superficial nature of amicability often in women's relationships, however, became plainly evident during the Civil War. In South Carolina, slaveholding widow Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard, for example, noted that as the war approached in 1860, her female slaves had become increasingly bold in their expressions of disrespect for her and 'the men are not half as impudent as the women are'. The overtness of slaves' defiance caused her to reflect on the possibility of their dissemblance and, by January 1861, she felt she could not 'tell whether they have any good feelings for their owners or not'.²²¹

Keziah's doubt did not stymie her support for the war and she felt 'willing to die rather than free our slaves in their present uncivilized state'. Slaveholding women's broad support for the Confederate cause emphasises their own commitment to slaveholding and 'southern values'; they wished 'death to the men who wear Federal blue' and asserted that 'no woman wavered in her allegiance to the Southern cause'.²²² But myths of their own paternalism upon which their defense of the system so often rested were slowly unraveled. Keziah's slaves ceased to conceal their feelings towards her: some 'seem to dislike me & never care to look at me' and 'I scarce ever get a civil word from [them] no matter how kind & indulgent to them'. She became suspicious she was being poisoned, or at least taunted by her cook. She was, to use her own words, 'awakened to the fact that they *hate me*' and 'care nothing for me'.²²³

Brevard was, of course, not alone in her realisation. Nearby, in Charleston, Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut could not 'detect any change in the demeanor of these negro servants', but

²¹⁷ Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 99-100.

²¹⁸ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 163.

²¹⁹ Susan Dabney Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter* (Baltimore, MD, 1887), 193, DocSouth; Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, 96.

²²⁰ Margaret Ann Meta Morris Grimball, Diary, [Jan.] 12 [1861], 8, 'Journal of Meta Morris Grimball, South Carolina, December 1860-February 1866', DocSouth.

²²¹ Brevard in Moore (ed.), *Plantation Mistress on the Eve of Civil War*, Nov. 9 1860, 49, Jan. 26 1861, 81.

²²² Andrews, *War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 140; Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 27. White women's frustrations with slavery and the war did not largely stymie their support for the Confederate cause. See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 243, 369; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 23, 69, 79.

²²³ Brevard in Moore (ed.), *Plantation Mistress on the Eve of Civil War*, Nov. 9 1860, 50, Jan. 26 1861, 81, Jan. 30 1861, 83, March 28 1861, 105, Feb. 3 1861, 86, Feb. 13 1861, 89.

found ‘they carry it too far’. It was April, 1861, and how could the slaves not hear ‘the awful roar going on in the bay’? Realising that ‘[p]eople talk before them as if they were chairs and tables’, Chesnut questioned whether enslaved people were ‘stolidly stupid’, or, ‘wiser than we are; silent and strong, biding their time’.²²⁴ Later in the year, in Richmond, Virginia, Mary found herself ‘always studying these creatures’, ‘inscrutable in their way and past finding out’.²²⁵ However, when ‘Mammy, the negro woman, who had nursed [the Martin family]’, abandoned her slaveholders in Lincolnton, North Carolina, in 1865, Mary found ‘[t]hat daunted me’.²²⁶ The overtness of enslaved women’s disdain for their mistresses during the Civil War indicated they had long-practiced concealment, and in the most intimate spaces of slavery, and the closest proximity to slaveholders. The household, then, with its veneer of domesticity and familiarity, enveloped women’s worlds of work, violence, and constant struggles for power.

iv. Re-evaluating the ‘mistress’

Racism and slavery were embedded in the fabric of southern society and shaped the thought and behaviour of white southerners. Social systems are, however, not necessarily deterministic of human behaviour. Both slaveholding and enslaved women were able to show kindness that transcended racial divides and were not always entirely self-motivated. Former slaves sometimes remembered their relationships with mistresses as close ones. Formerly enslaved on a vast plantation in Wachovia, North Carolina, Betty Cofer considered her mistress: ‘the best friend I ever had’. Betty waited on the young slaveholder and slept on the floor in her bedroom. When freedom came, Ella continued to support Betty who loved Ella ‘better than any one or anythin’ else in the world’.²²⁷ In Texas, Easter Wells recalled a female slaveholder, Arline, with similar fondness: ‘I loved her and she loved me’.²²⁸ Former slaves also remembered mistresses positively when they felt whites had been ‘kind’ or ‘good’ to them.²²⁹

The sense of friendship some formerly enslaved women felt they enjoyed with mistresses was sometimes shared with white women, who emphasised the longevity of their relationships. Tennessean Mary Polk Branch was ‘especially attached’ to her maid, Virginia,

²²⁴ Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut, Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery (eds), *A Diary from Dixie as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, Wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States Senator from South Carolina, 1859-1861, and Afterward an Aide to Jefferson Davis and a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army by Mary Boykin Chesnut* (New York, 1905), April 13 1861, 38, DocSouth.

²²⁵ Chesnut, *Diary from Dixie*, July 27 1861, 93.

²²⁶ Chesnut, *Diary from Dixie*, Feb. 16 1865, 344.

²²⁷ Betty Cofer, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 172.

²²⁸ Easter Wells, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 316-9.

²²⁹ Henrietta McCullers, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 73; Betty Robertson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 267. See also Liza Jones, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 155-6; Elsie Reece, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 235; Mandy Hadnot, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 104.

and could not ‘recall the time when she was not my maid’.²³⁰ Irby Morgan, also of Tennessee, felt very close to her slave, Ella, who she considered ‘one of my best friends’ and ‘like one of my family’.²³¹ These type of comments might be dismissed as aspects of the nostalgic and deeply political postbellum laments for the ‘old South’. The sentiments of formerly enslaved women and white southern women articulated such sentiments in ways that contemporaneous testimony seldom did. While the Federal Writers’ Project interviewees were inclined for various reasons to give more favourable testimony of their slaveholders, addressing some of the areas where mistresses were represented sympathetically provides means of analysing the nature and limitations of mistresses’ ‘paternalism’, broadening the understanding of both mistresses’ mechanisms of control and their modes of interaction with enslaved people. The testimony of former slaves in particular indicates several key areas where white women were often understood to be positive influences on the lives of slaves. These can be characterised as *ad hoc* interventions or ‘gendered’ roles (including care in sickness, or religious instruction).

Ad hoc gestures such as intervening into the sale and punishment of slaves are, for Marli Weiner, indicative of mistresses’ affection for slaves and to prevent what they deemed as abuse.²³² Mistresses’ favouritisms and their vague sense of their paternalism led them to sometimes intervene in those aspects of slavery widely understood as its most unpalatable features. The slave-trader was sometimes avoided, for example. Maria Page, for example, expressed that she had ‘tried every way I could’ to get ‘homes for them’ when ‘our servants were divided’, but reluctantly ‘had to send them South’ in 1859.²³³ While these gestures were often borne of the culture of personalism and propriety, other mistresses seemed to have taken account of slaves’ wishes. In 1852 in Raleigh, North Carolina, Ann Mordecai informed her daughter Margaret that she had allowed an enslaved woman named Lucy to be moved plantation ‘as she did not like to be separated from her husband’.²³⁴ Women were also more likely to manumit slaves than men in their wills.²³⁵ Promises of keeping families together, or manumissions, however, often failed to materialise and were undoubtedly used in many cases to incentivise loyalty and hard work. As one song described:

My ole missus promise me

²³⁰ Mary Polk Branch, *Memoirs of a Southern Woman “Within the Lines,” and a Genealogical Record* (Chicago, c.1912), 12, DocSouth.

²³¹ Irby Morgan, *How it Was: Four Years Among the Rebels* (Nashville, TN, 1892), 28-30, DocSouth.

²³² See Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 132, 71, 75-8, 80.

²³³ Maria Page to Mary Dame, Jan. 13 1859, Dame Family Papers, VHS. See also Lucy Cushing Irving to Mary Dame, Dec. 26 1851, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

²³⁴ Mother [Ann Willis Lane Mordecai] to Mag [Margaret] Devereux, Jan. 25 1852, Devereux Family Papers, DU.

²³⁵ Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 137.

When she died she'd set me free
But she done dead this many years ago
And here I'm a hoein' the same old row[...]²³⁶

While a female slaveholder might avoid selling favoured slaves to 'strangers', though, and a manumission might one day materialise, even key slaves were often traded among family members, and incredibly confined. And, even somewhat amiable relationships could be quickly destroyed. Annie Burton, for example, remembered that her mother (an enslaved cook) and her mistress were 'children together, and grew up to be mothers together' near Clayton, Alabama. When they 'got into an argument', however, her 'mother was whipped', 'refused to do any more work', and ran away for three years.²³⁷ Indeed, Mary Meta Grimball, a plantation mistress near Charleston, South Carolina, showed none of her father's 'old feeling about selling hereditary negroes' and believed their slaves should be sold 'after their conduct to him', she informed her husband in 1862.²³⁸

Though mistresses' affections and favouritisms were certainly fickle, they were also sometimes limited in their abilities to effect change by their lack of legal authority and the position of male patriarchs. Susan Nelson's mistress in Charleston, South Carolina, for example, was thwarted in her attempt to free a slave when 'the rest of the family didn't agree', and Kentuckian Miss Gordon's 'several brothers' did not share her convictions to free an enslaved family (though she was eventually successful).²³⁹ All the same, mistresses were often able to effect change when they chose to do so. Mamie Thompson explained that her mother's mistress told her husband that 'if he sold Mattie she would quit him', and Lucy Gallman recalled her mistress removed her from 'the block'.²⁴⁰

Whether intentional or not, these interventions curried favour with some enslaved women. Julia Williams, for example, recalled her mistress in Chesterfield County, Virginia, fondly for 'she nevah let me be sold'.²⁴¹ Many of those enslaved women who were the recipients of such interventions were, like Mamie's mother Mattie, 'kept' in their mistress's employ. Mattie was her mistress's 'house girl' and 'tended to the children and cleaned the house'.²⁴² Considering how female slaveholders understood domestic slaves as benefactors of

²³⁶ Merton Knowles, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 69.

²³⁷ Annie L. Burton, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (Boston, MA, 1909), 8, DocSouth.

²³⁸ M.M. [Mary Meta] Grimball to husband [John Grimball], March 28 1862, Grimball Family Papers, SHC.

²³⁹ Susan Nelson, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, 14, 3, 215; Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, 37. See Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 75-6.

²⁴⁰ Mamie Thompson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 318; Lucy Gallman, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 100.

²⁴¹ Julia Williams, *FWP*, Ohio Narratives, XII, 102.

²⁴² Mamie Thompson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 318.

their benevolence and accordingly demanded their total subservience, these interventions were certainly used to foster a sense of obligation and reciprocity.

Interventions into punishments or sales, however, were gladly received. In Georgia, Henrietta Williams's mistress 'fussed with [her husband] so much he never did whip me any more', and Jane Montgomery's mistress in Louisiana 'would git a gun and make [her husband] stop' beating her.²⁴³ They were not always successful. South Carolinian Anne Broome remembered her mistress attempted to intervene with sales but 'tears didn't count with old marster', and in Arkansas Maggie Wesmoland recalled how her teenaged mistress 'would cry and beg' her middle-aged husband to stop abusing Maggie who was 'scared to death of him'.²⁴⁴ Such limitations have, in a large part, encouraged a sympathetic interpretation of slaveholding women. Yet, it is easy to overstate the significance of these interventions. Of course, for enslaved women they were incredibly significant; hence their recollection many years after the fact. Though mistresses might have been limited in their abilities to prevent punishment or sale by men, their roles as household managers generally granted them positions of great influence and power over enslaved women. In these positions, their prevailing roles were in the day-to-day maintenance of slavery which was fundamentally reliant upon their exploitation and abuse of enslaved women. The power mistresses cultivated within their positions was, by and large, not used to reform, alter, or challenge the system, but to protect their own interests in it.

Indeed, while mistresses' interventions could be an act of kindness to a favourite slave, or motivated by the promise of an amicable relationship, some mistresses simply intervened in punishments in order to protect their property (a possibility Weiner does not entertain).²⁴⁵ When Cicely Cawthorn's cousin, for example, was captured having escaped from the plantation for Charleston, South Carolina, her mistress intervened in the overseer's punishment not to protect the woman, but her property: 'Mistis said it injured the woman to whip her that way, so then Marster made 'em be more careful'.²⁴⁶ Similarly, Nathan Best remembered this as the reason that his mistress in Mississippi urged the overseer's restraint, and 'didn' low [the overseer] to kill none of us, 'kase dat would lose her money'.²⁴⁷ These interventions also did not necessarily mean slaves' were relieved of punishment. As Filmore Taylor Hancock

²⁴³ Jane Montgomery, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 228; Henrietta Williams, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 163.

²⁴⁴ Anne Broome, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 105; Maggie Wesmoland, *WPA*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 99-100.

²⁴⁵ Sallie Blakely, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 63.

²⁴⁶ Cicely Cawthorn, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 184.

²⁴⁷ Nathan Best, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 6, 1, 129-30.

explained, though his mistress did not allow their master to ‘tech es’ because it ‘injured the woman to whip her that way’, it simply meant that ‘she done de whuppin’.²⁴⁸

The vast majority of mistresses’ *ad hoc* interventions were reserved for key slaves, who Michael Tadman defines as ‘a small percentage of elite or unusually privileged slaves’.²⁴⁹ As Suzanne Lebsock identifies, mistresses often ‘operated out of an essentially personal frame of reference’.²⁵⁰ Thus, they were more likely to recognise key slaves. One’s favouritism, however, could be short-lived, was often dependent on a slave’s total acquiescence, and generally resulted in even stronger demands both for one’s time and one’s obedience. White women thus participated in a culture of ‘personalism’, as Joan Cashin notes, but simultaneously upheld racist and socially/politically conservative views.²⁵¹ Their fostering of amicability with female slaves was largely self-interested, and was used by mistresses to establish their sense of their own paternalism.

This personalism and paternalism was often expressed at the death of a slave, and slaveholders were more likely to express ‘attachment’, ‘affection’, and ‘sadness’ for slaves at their deaths than any other time. Ellen Mordecai, for example, wrote to her sister Margaret from their family home near Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1842 to express her sadness that their ‘old nurse’ Harriet had died, leaving a ‘little baby only a few months old’.²⁵² Ellen had lost her mother as a child, and she and her (half) sister also lost their father in their early childhood and thus perhaps felt some attachment to their ‘nurse’. In Columbia, South Carolina, Grace Brown Elmore wrote a lengthier lament for her ‘mammy’, explaining in 1861: ‘I miss you Mamma every day since you left me’.²⁵³ While Grace’s comments were driven by her desire to reflect slaveholder-slave relations positively, sentiments such as Ellen’s may have been ‘genuine’, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues, but they were certainly not widespread: expressions of sadness typically only applied to key slaves and were rarely treated as ‘the loss of a friend’.²⁵⁴ They were also often expressed within the trope of sentimentality, which is certainly misleading in its excessive and effusive nature.²⁵⁵ Of course, these gestures should never be

²⁴⁸ Filmore Taylor Hancock, *TAS SSI*, Arkansas, Colorado, Minnesota, Missouri, and Oregon and Washington Narratives, 2, 178. See also Mattie Dillworth, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 613-4.

²⁴⁹ Tadman, ‘The Persistent Myth of Paternalism’, 8.

²⁵⁰ Lebsock, however, suggests this personalism meant ‘white women were in fact a subversive influence on chattel slavery’. Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 138.

²⁵¹ Cashin, ‘Decidedly Opposed to the Union’, 736-7.

²⁵² Ellen [Mordecai] to Margaret Devereux, Dec. 10 [1842], Devereux Family Papers, DU. See also A.M. [Anna Matilda] King to husband [Thomas Butler King], Aug. 6 1854, T. Butler King Papers, SHC; J.E.J. [Jane E. Johnston] to Mary [Jane McNish Hazlehurst], Dec. 7 [1843], Leighton Wilson Hazlehurst Papers, DU.

²⁵³ Grace Brown Elmore, Diary, Dec. 1 1861, Grace Brown Elmore Papers, SHC.

²⁵⁴ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 129; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 374.

²⁵⁵ See Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 16; Craig Thompson Friend, ‘Little Eva’s Last Breath: Childhood Death and Parental Mourning in “Our Family, White and Black”’, in Anya Jabour and Craig Thompson Friend (eds), *Family Values in the Old South* (Gainesville, FL, 2010), 64, 82.

isolated from the context of human ownership, the coercion of labour, and the precarious nature of interracial affections.

Much more frequently, slaveholding women simply listed the deaths and serious illnesses of slaves as a matter of fact with no comment. Expressions of apparent grief were often inextricable from property considerations. In 1857, for example, after the death of a man named Tom and having witnessed his bereaved wife's 'great distress', Mary Ferrand Henderson expressed his death was a 'great loss to us more than \$2000 - for he hired readily at \$225', despite simultaneously expressing she was 'attached' to the servant and 'grieved'.²⁵⁶ Both Elizabeth Baldwin Wiley Harris, a farmer near Warrenton, Virginia, and Georgian slaveholder Margaret Tillotson Kemble Nourse, shared in the feeling that the death of a slave was first a loss to their owners.²⁵⁷ Slaveholding women were more likely to express sadness on the grounds of a loss of labour, and money, than anything else.

White women's affection or care for slaves was also dependent on their submission to the will of whites. Elizabeth Frances Perry depicted this of Eliza. She felt Eliza was 'discontented, impertinent, immoral, & dishonest', when apparently feigning sickness and doing 'nothing', but when industrious and compliant was a 'smart servant'.²⁵⁸ Positive remarks about slaves were generally accompanied by, and contingent upon, their qualities as labourers. Nancy was a 'very sweet girl' because she 'has a great knack at making herself useful'. Lucy Ann was a 'good creature' because she had 'excellent properties' including her 'honesty'.²⁵⁹ Women were sorry to part with their slaves because they were 'good', or 'perfectly honest & truthful, respectful & good tempered'.²⁶⁰ That recalcitrant or disliked slaves were 'disposed off' only emphasises the limitations of any amicability.²⁶¹

Mistresses' affections, then, were precarious at best. Yet, their relationships with key slaves and their gestures of paternalism were important to their own identities as benevolent women. Mistresses' attempts to fashion themselves as paternalistic may have been successful as indicated by the increased likelihood that enslaved women would approach a mistress rather

²⁵⁶ Mary Ferrand Henderson, vol. 2, part 8, April 6 1857, 59-60, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC. Similarly, see Lucy Jane Cushing to Mary Dame, June 17 1858, Dame Family Papers, VHS; Matilda Hamilton, Diary, May 13 [1857], Hamilton Family Papers, VHS; R. Haywood to Jane Gurley, June 2 1839, Jane Gurley Papers, SHC; Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Sep. 18 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

²⁵⁷ Margaret Tillotson Kemble Nourse, Diary, Nov. 1862, VHS; Elizabeth Baldwin Wiley Harris to sister, Feb. 18. 1860, Elizabeth Baldwin Wiley Harris Papers, DU. This was often shared even within expressions of grief of a religious nature. See Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens, GA, 2011), 200-2.

²⁵⁸ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 11 1844, SHC.

²⁵⁹ M.M.A [Mira M. Alexander] to Mrs Caleb Logan [Agatha Marshall Logan], Jan. 8 1848, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC; Annie [Mary Ann Gwyn] to S.L. [Selina Louisa] Lenoir, Sep. 6 [1840], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

²⁶⁰ Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson, Diary [typed transcription], Dec. 31 1849, 15, Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson Papers, SHC; Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, undated [c.1854], Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

²⁶¹ Mary Elizabeth Garnett to sister [Harriet Wise], Aug. 15 1863, Wise Family Papers, VHS. See also M.A. [Mira M. Alexander] to Agatha [Marshall Logan], March 12 [1850], Louis Marshall Papers, SHC; Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], [Aug. 8 1839], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

than a master for assistance.²⁶² South Carolinian plantation mistress Mary Boykin Chesnut, for example, noted the many enslaved people who ‘called upon her’ for help (seemingly for health reasons) who she ‘never could refuse an interview’.²⁶³ On the vast Butler plantations of the Georgia sea islands, British-born Fanny Kemble similarly ‘could not but hear [enslaved people’s] complaints’ despite her ‘miserable limited means’ to ‘better their condition while I was here’.²⁶⁴ Such requests might have been made with the notion that white women were more likely to sympathise with women’s problems than men. However, enslaved women were also well-aware of the gendered responsibilities of masters and mistresses, and directed their requests accordingly. For some enslaved women appeals to the mistress were simply a last resort when all other avenues were exhausted.²⁶⁵ Rather than ‘recognizing mistresses as potential allies’ and demonstrating ‘belief in a shared female understanding’ in a ‘powerful leap across the gulf of race’, then, these appeals better demonstrate slaves’ awareness of the precepts of white femininity, their awareness of gendered labour roles, and, ultimately, their desire to entreat support from wherever it could be found.²⁶⁶

The gendered roles mistresses took in southern slaveholdings were generally duties, responsibilities, and labours, rather than desires to improve the conditions of enslaved people. While Marli Weiner suggests domestic ideals meant ‘white women were expected to extend the net of their moral benevolence widely’, Thavolia Glymph argues domesticity was understood as ‘a critical agent of “southern civilization”’ and that violence ‘transgressed the idea of white female gentility’.²⁶⁷ It was the gendered labour of mistresses, however, that enabled these aspects of their roles to be reconciled. In the realm of healthcare, for example, mistresses often took key roles in managing the care of sick slaves. Mistresses dispensed medicine, administered minor medical treatments, oversaw nursing, and determined appropriate courses of treatment.²⁶⁸ Their roles could be significant. For example, on the Retreat plantation in Saint Simons Island, Georgia, Anna Matilda Page King remarked to her son, Lord, in the grips of a cholera outbreak in 1849: ‘I have no human aid to look to if sickness

²⁶² West, *Chains of Love*, 132; Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*, 37; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 348. Wilma Dunaway, however, finds that ‘[b]ecause mistresses were less powerful, Appalachian slaves appealed much more often to white males who might mediate their causes with masters’. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, 176.

²⁶³ Chesnut, *Diary from Dixie*, 22.

²⁶⁴ Frances Anne Kemble in Catherine Clinton (ed.), *Fanny Kemble’s Journals* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 111.

²⁶⁵ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 23.

²⁶⁶ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 137.

²⁶⁷ Weiner, ‘Mistresses, Morality, and the Dilemmas of Slaveholding’ 279-80; Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 89, 36.

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Tom Hawkins, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 133; Dan Smith, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 96; Carrie Davis, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 107; Irene Poole, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 321; Mary Rice, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, VI, 329; Gus Johnson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 2, 209; Nicey Pugh, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 325; Maria Mason Tabb Hubbard, *Diary*, Nov. 14 1861, 29, VHS; A.M. [Anna Matilda] King to husband [Thomas Butler King], July 11 1848, T. Butler King Papers, SHC; Elizabeth Lee to Ann Matilda Washington, Sep. 25 [c.1832], Richard Bland Lee Papers, VHS; Susanna C. Clay to C.C. [Clement Claiborne] Clay, July 14 1826, C.C. Clay Papers, DU.

visits my family or plantation - all eyes are turned to me for all the wants in sickness or in health'.²⁶⁹ This was some responsibility. Young Virginian mistress Angelina Selden Edrington, for example, repeatedly prayed for the health of sick slave children.²⁷⁰ Former slaves who remembered their mistresses more fondly often related this to their mistress's care for them in sickness.²⁷¹

While mistresses felt concerned for their enslaved 'patients' and expressed regret at their deaths, though, their medical-care for slaves was a responsibility rather than driven by compassion in the majority of cases. Recognising mistresses' roles in healthcare as gendered labour is fundamentally important in revising interpretations that nursing reflected 'genuine caring'.²⁷² It was usually a reluctant role as sick slaves deprived mistresses of labour and were a risk to the smooth-running of the household, thus mistresses felt deeply inconvenienced by slaves' illnesses. A young Sarah Lois Wadley, living in her family homes in Louisiana and Georgia, for example, remarked when 'Emmeline has the diptheria but not at all badly' that she hoped 'she will get over it easily', as 'we could not do without her now'.²⁷³ N.H. Hotchkins similarly understood an enslaved people's illness as it related to herself. She complained in 1846 that '[s]ometimes cousin my woman, negro man, two or three negro children would be sick at once [...] So I would have to do my work myself'.²⁷⁴ For Sarah Harrison, in Virginia, the sickness of an enslaved woman named Eliza was a great burden as 'Eliza relieves me from so much manual labour too that I think that has contributed to my better estate'.²⁷⁵ Such comments emphasise that mistresses attitudes towards enslaved women were centred around their use-value.

Not only did sick slaves create an absence of labourers, they also created additional work for mistresses. Caring for sick slaves was time-consuming and draining. As Elizabeth Lee, a slaveholder in Fairfax County, Virginia, remarked following an enslaved woman's illness: 'I am again freed from nursing at home, from the drudgery and anxiety of it'. Elizabeth was especially bitter as she believed Marjory's 'colera' had been 'brought on' by her 'ill' and 'bad' 'conduct'.²⁷⁶ In South Carolina, Mary Meta Grimball was 'so very much engaged' with nursing 'that I have no time to think' in 1862. When another slave fell ill, Grimball remarked

²⁶⁹ A.M. [Anna Matilda] King to Lord [King], July 24 1849, T. Butler King Papers, SHC.

²⁷⁰ Angelina Selden Edrington, Diary, Sep. 5 1857, Dec. 25 1860, Edrington Family Papers, VHS.

²⁷¹ See, for example, Easter Wells, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, IV, XII, 317; Mattie Lee, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 224; Alice Battle, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 42; Arthur Colson, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 220; Sara Crocker, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 226; Elsie Moreland, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 4, 2, 456-7; James Burton, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 6, 1, 306; Polly Turner Cancer, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 342.

²⁷² Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 97.

²⁷³ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, vol. 3, Aug. 26 1863, 43, Sarah Lois Wadley Papers, SHC.

²⁷⁴ N.H. Hotchkins to Sophie M. Hunt, Nov. 1 1846, Hughes Family Papers, SHC.

²⁷⁵ Sarah Harrison to Elizabeth Whiting Conrad, June 20 1843, Holmes Conrad Family Papers, VHS.

²⁷⁶ Elizabeth Lee to Ann Matilda Washington, Sep. 25 [c.1832], Richard Bland Lee Papers, VHS.

‘if they should both get through I shall be glad: but this adds to the annoyance’.²⁷⁷ When slaves were taken ill, slaveholders saw themselves as sufferers: their mobility was restricted, and their work increased. As Elizabeth Lee also observed, because ‘they took no slaves in all the Hosbital [...]’, most mistresses had little choice.²⁷⁸

Of course, mistresses’ nursing also had an economic incentive. Alabamian Sarah Douglas, for example, recalled that ‘[i]f I got sick old miss would give me plenty of medicine because she wanted me to stay well in order to work’.²⁷⁹ Betty Carter Bassett, writing to her son ‘in the land of slavery’ in 1816, similarly explained that the reasonable treatment of slaves was incentivised by the fact that ‘the Lord will repay you with double’ in their labour.²⁸⁰ This work rarely ‘stemmed from a sense of maternalism that crossed racial boundaries’ and to describe this work as ‘nurturing’ rather than ‘nursing’ misrepresents the form it typically took.²⁸¹ As Sharla Fett has argued, the ‘fatiguing, repetitive, and dirty’ work of nursing fell to enslaved women, and ‘both planters and slave communities depended heavily on slave women for the bulk of daily health work’.²⁸²

While mistresses’ labour in health-care might not have been generally driven by any compassion for enslaved people, their religious instruction of slaves was perhaps more nuanced in its motivations. Slaveholding women did express concern for their slaves’ religious lives, and attempted to impart their own beliefs in a sense of responsibility related to conversion-centred evangelism.²⁸³ A plantation mistress, teacher, and mother-of-six, Eliza Clitherall reflected upon how her mother had taught her of ‘the responsibility to which Masters & Mistresses were liable not only for the care of their Servants bodies but for their Souls’.²⁸⁴ It was a sentiment shared by Gladys Robertson’s interviewer who explained that ‘the darkies were deeply religious and learned much of the Bible from devout mistresses who felt it was their holy duty to teach these ignorant people the word of god’.²⁸⁵ Mistresses are understood to have had greater roles in religious instruction on smaller slaveholdings where this was ‘less time-consuming’ and ‘more manageable’. Yet, like other aspects of slaveholding women’s roles, Katherine Rohrer finds that the emphasis on mistresses’ religious instruction in African

²⁷⁷ M.M. [Mary Meta] Grimball to John Grimball, March 28 1862, Grimball Family Papers, SHC.

²⁷⁸ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, vol. 3, Aug. 26 1863, 43, Sarah Lois Wadley Papers, SHC.

²⁷⁹ Sarah Douglas, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 189. Similarly, see Mariah Calloway, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 174; Nancy Jackson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, 2, 193.

²⁸⁰ Betty Carter Bassett to George Washington Bassett, May 26 1816, Bassett Family Papers, VHS.

²⁸¹ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 100; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 45, 70.

²⁸² Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 112, 116, 123.

²⁸³ See, for example, Rebecca S. C. Pilsbury, Diary, Dec. 23 1848, SHC; Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], Nov. 11 1856, 31, SHC; Alma Hibbard Journal, undated, 39, DU; Matilda Hamilton, Diary, Jan. 4 1857, Jan. 11 1857, Feb. 1 1857, Hamilton Family Papers, VHS; Angelina Selden Edrington, Diary, July 8 1860, July 29 1860, Dec. 15 1860, Edrington Family Papers, VHS; Anne Raney Thomas Coleman, ‘The History of Her Life’, 13, DU.

²⁸⁴ Caroline Elizabeth Burgwin Clitherall, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, 2, SHC.

²⁸⁵ Gladys Robertson, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, VII, 85.

Americans' and white women's postbellum testimony was in harsh disjuncture with contemporaneous sources.²⁸⁶

Many former slaves were also acutely aware of the limitations of mistresses' interests in their religious lives. Some emphasised the performative purposes of their inclusion in local churches. Harriet Casey, enslaved in Missouri, remembered her mistress 'would take a couple of us young ones to church but when we got home things were different', much like Annie Hawkins who remembered they only went to church 'or folks would have found out how mean they was to us'.²⁸⁷ Thus, the influence of white women's sense of propriety on their treatment of slaves should not be understated. Others recognised that mistresses used religious instruction as a means of instilling obedience.²⁸⁸ Victoria McMullen, for example, recalled that her grandmother, enslaved in Louisiana, felt slaves' religious instruction was simply a list of commands to '[s]tay out of your missis' and master's hen house', '[d]on't steal your missis' and master's hams' and so forth.²⁸⁹ Ida Henry similarly remembered mistresses' instrumental use of religion. She recalled the mistress would read to them from the bible 'and show us pictures of de Devil in de Bible and tell us dat if we was not good and if we would steal and tell us lies dat old Satan would git us' in Marshall County, Texas.²⁹⁰ Christianity in the antebellum south was imbued with, even inextricable from, proslavery politics.²⁹¹ For some former slaves religious teachings seemed deeply hypocritical, as Josephine Howard expressed. Reflecting on her enslavement near Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Josephine questioned how: 'Dey allus done tell us it am wrong to lie and steal, but why did de white folks steal my mammy and her mammy?'²⁹²

That mistresses imagined themselves as Christian and motherly figures, however, was incontrovertible. Mistresses' feelings that their time was spent 'caring' for slaves led to assertions such as Rebecca Pilsbury's who in 1848 stated: 'I am glad to say I believe them [the slaves] happier generally than their masters'.²⁹³ Susan Dabney Smedes, once the young mistress of a sprawling plantation in Mississippi, recalled (with no sense of irony) in her 1887

²⁸⁶ Katherine E. Rohrer, 'Slaveholding Women and the Religious Instruction of Slaves in Post-Emancipation Memory', *Journal of Southern Religion*, 15 (2013) <<http://jsr.fsu.edu/issues/vol15/rohrer.html>>.

²⁸⁷ Harriet Casey, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 75; Annie Hawkins, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 132. See also Hannah Austin, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 20; Celestia Avery, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 25.

²⁸⁸ A possibility not entertained by Marli Weiner. See Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 80.

²⁸⁹ Victoria McMullen, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 36-7.

²⁹⁰ Ida Henry, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 135. Similarly, see Louis Johnson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 105; Hannah Austin, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 20; John White, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 325.

²⁹¹ See Rohrer, 'Slaveholding Women and the Religious Instruction of Slaves in Post-Emancipation Memory'; Genovese and Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self Deception*, 78.

²⁹² Josephine Howard, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 2, 163.

²⁹³ Rebecca S.C. Pilsbury, Diary, Dec. 5 1848, SHC.

reflections ‘a saying that the mistress of a plantation was the most complete slave on it’.²⁹⁴ Owing to the domestic and often care-centred roles of slaveholding women, mistresses were able to understand and represent themselves as caretakers, responsible for the well-being of people (black and white) rather than business-orientated slaveholders. Their roles were sometimes used quite consciously to this end.²⁹⁵ The fashioning of white women as paternalistic figures strengthened proslavery defenses of the institution’s benevolent character. Mistresses facilitated the construction of the household as a private, familial, intimate space rather than one where violence, resistance, and work characterised daily life.

It is important not to reproduce mistresses’ visions of slavery. Domestic ideals and relationships with key slaves might have led mistresses to at times mitigate some of the harshness of slavery, manifest in efforts to keep some families together, to restrict ‘excessive’ punishments, or to provide religious instruction. These behaviours were crucial for slaveholding women to reconcile the gendered ideals of their morality and benevolence with the reality of slaveholding. Gestures of kindness, however, were typically limited to favoured slaves, and had complex motivations and consequences. They were enmeshed with mistresses’ mechanisms of control. Mistresses were also concerned with their reputation, and certainly sought to cultivate amicable relationships with slaves in their own interest. Any expressions of generosity, of course, came with obligations for reciprocity that could be life-long. Only the most anomalous women made sustained commitments to improve the conditions and lives of the slaves they owned. Much of mistresses’ ‘nurturing’ work was, in fact, gendered labour. It was the ideal of white femininity and the gendering of care-work that made these roles fall under her remit.

Interpretations of mistress-slave relationships, are, to some extent, a matter of emphasis: the constancy of violence, the ubiquity of mistresses’ self-interest, and the precariousness of interracial ‘affections’, or those rare instances of ‘kindness’ that occurred within these patterns of behavior. For Weiner, this emphasis falls on the latter. Mistresses were ‘mediators’ of slavery, and ‘the aid they provided helped to make slavery more tolerable for the slaves than it might have been’.²⁹⁶ Yet, by and large, slaveholding women did not reject, resist, or reform slavery, though. Control, as slaveholders understood, was ‘properly exerted over minds’, and mistresses were often masterful in manipulation.²⁹⁷ They utilised a broad

²⁹⁴ Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 191. For descriptions of mistresses as caretakers of slaves, see William Quarles Poindexter to E., March 9 1852, Holladay Family Papers, SHC; Louisa Cheairs McKenny Sheppard, ‘A Confederate Girlhood’, 6-7, SHC.

²⁹⁵ Dusiinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 369.

²⁹⁶ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 146.

²⁹⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, “‘Trying to Do a Man’s Business’: Slavery, Violence and Gender in the American Civil War”, *Gender & History*, 4, 2, (1992), 197.

spectrum of mechanisms of control that encompassed both physical abuse and the fabrication of mutual loyalties and obligations to cultivate a smooth-running household. The incentive of a relationship that might yield some favouritism or material benefit could certainly complement the whip in fostering domestic harmony.

Paternalism was also a double-edged sword. What might have encouraged white women to intervene in 'excessive' physical punishment, was also what justified the use of the whip to impart good habits. What might have encouraged white women to make an attempt to keep a slave family together, also emboldened her to separate a mother from her child for it to be 'raised' under the civilising influences of the 'big house'. This paternalism was inseparable from racism, ownership, and labour. It does not detract from white women's systematic exploitation and abuse of enslaved women, but rather suggests at a distinctly feminine mode of slave-ownership and slave-management. While mistresses fashioned slavery as a system of racial reciprocity in which they were burdened by their responsibilities to social 'others', they were nevertheless instrumental to the day-to-day functioning of the slavery and at the centre of enslaved women's exploitation.

There is, therefore, no doubt whether slaveholding women's power 'existed at all'.²⁹⁸ From the outset, the differences between 'women and slaves' embedded in the system of slavery put one group in a position of privilege over the other. Mistresses were legally disempowered and certainly suffered a range of exploitations in a staunchly patriarchal south. However, this does not mean they did not assume many powers over others, and it does not mean that they disappear below the threshold of accountability for their actions. Mistresses identified with the racial and economic interests of the ruling class. Women were socialised as belonging to the slaveholding class, recognised the expectations of southern wives and mothers, and understood slaveholding as intrinsic to both their success in their labour-roles and their lifestyles. They were well-aware of the limitations imposed upon them as women, acknowledged the many burdens of slaveholding, but embraced the social power they could establish within this system over enslaved women.

Mistresses were absolutely central to the maintenance of slavery. Their roles in household management were well-defined, and husband absenteeism emphasised their responsibilities. That mistresses' performed gendered labour, felt the weight of domestic demands and husband's expectations, did not encourage interracial bonding. Rather, as household managers, mistresses routinely relied upon coercion and violence among a range of

²⁹⁸ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 9.

management strategies in maintaining households entirely dependent upon slave labour. The nature of mistresses' roles in inter-household slave-trading is especially important in confirming both mistresses' power and the labour-centred nature of their relationships with enslaved women. Slaveholding women had a clear sense of ownership over domestic slaves in particular and saw them primarily in terms of their use-value.

Yet, their abuse of enslaved women was equally related to their own notions of 'respect' and 'authority', and thus the defence of their own positions in the social-racial hierarchy. They sought to ensure women's differences were clearly expressed and understood, whether through the delineation of labour roles or in their violent insistences upon enslaved women's deference. Thus, the dynamic interactions of mistresses' racism and their economic interests are quite clear. Enslaved women negotiated women's roles, resisted their mistresses' abuses, and exercised dissemblance in establishing their independence, power, and sometimes simply in seeking strategies for survival and stability. The 'feminine face of paternalism' was, for many enslaved women, actually the face of their oppression.²⁹⁹

'Home', then, rather than the 'private' sanctum of the south, better resembled a productive and female-centred household, where the close confines of the 'big house' emphasised the inequalities and exploitations between women. The household was embedded in the system of slavery. Slaveholding women's articulations of the racist and economic values of slaveholding reconstituted southern social hierarchies in an intimate and daily manner: in the nursery, the kitchen, and the parlour. It was in these sites that they raised their children. The absence of 'emotional identification' between women and the centrality of white women to enslaved women's exploitation and are essential contexts in understanding the relationality of motherhood in the antebellum south. Mistresses' constructions of social difference, their labour interests, and patterns of re-direction and commodification, were marked continuities between work and mother-work; they were dynamics that shaped both slaveholding and enslaved women's mothering on a day-to-day basis.

²⁹⁹ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 137, 131-2.

Chapter Two

Mother: Slaveholding Women and Motherhood

The training of her children was her work. She watched over them, inspired them, led them, governed them; her will impelled them; her word to them, as to her servants, was law. She reaped the reward. If she admired them, she was too wise to let them know it; but her sympathy and tenderness were theirs always, and they worshipped her.

Thomas Nelson Page (1892)¹

I just stumble along & get over it just the best way that I can, & the only song that I can sing truly from my heart is this I am like the old woman who lived in her shoe she had so many children she didnt know what to do & so on [...] oh how I do miss my seamstress & all the good nurses that I used to have, I do think every body ought to stop having children there dreadful time.

Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds (undated)²

Thomas Nelson Page's memorialisation of the plantation mistresses and mothers of 'Old Virginia', a moonlight-and-magnolia reminiscence typical of 'Lost Cause' literature, depicted slaveholding women's lives as 'one long act of devotion'.³ Writing to her husband's mother in Charlotte County, Virginia, slaveholder and mother-of-eight Lucy Jane Edmunds drew quite a different picture of motherhood. 'I think my road is a much rougher one than yours was in your day', she explained, as 'the busiest woman I reck that you ever seen'. Innocent men, Lucy wrote, 'little know what a mother suffers for a baby'.⁴ While the juxtaposition of such representations of mistresses' mothering of course emphasises the distance between women's lived experiences and cultural constructions of motherhood, Page's veneration of the maternal role was a postbellum iteration of a long-held sentimental ideal. Though it certainly did not

¹ Thomas Nelson Page, *Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War* (New York, 1897), 41-2, DocSouth.

² Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds to mother [Jane Watkins Edmunds], undated, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS.

³ Page, *Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War*, 38.

⁴ Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds to mother [Jane Watkins Edmunds], undated, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS.

reflect women's experiences, it was a salient 'cultural script'.⁵ Both Page and Edmunds agreed on one important aspect of slaveholding mothers' lives, though: 'servants' and 'good nurses'.

Indeed, the slave labour so central to the household and women's relationships similarly structured mistresses' mothering practices. Female slaveholders, as Lucy's comments suggest, felt burdened by the demands of mothering alongside their household responsibilities, and habitually relied upon enslaved women in managing these demands and in facilitating their mobility, independence, leisure time, and rest. While for Vera Lynn Kennedy '[n]arratives of birth and motherhood' were important for southerners to 'differentiate themselves from their northern compatriots', slaveholding women firmly distinguished their own maternal roles from those of enslaved women.⁶ Mistresses understood their mothering as a role of leadership, guidance, and nurturing, but recognised mother-work as delegable labour. In addition to domestic work more broadly, the washing, dressing, feeding, and supervision of mistresses' children was placed in the purview of enslaved nurses. Slaveholding mothers thus bifurcated motherhood along the lines of bondage, rendering enslaved women's mothering a commodity and a transferrable form of labour.

Motherhood was a site through which slaveholding women's labour interests were clearly expressed. This is discernible through the consideration of two key interventions slaveholding women made into enslaved women's lives: the use of enslaved women as nurses for mistresses' children, and their use of enslaved children's labour. For those enslaved nurses who were mothers, their labour for white families was a forceful re-direction of their mother-work. The early removal of enslaved mothers' children by their mistresses to be 'raised' in the house effected even more enduring mother-child separations, which were driven by mistresses' interests in slave labour and emphasise their utter disregard for enslaved mothers' bonds with their children. This was one of the many ways in which enslaved women suffered maternal exploitation simultaneously on the basis of their mistresses' motherhood and on the basis of their own. Enslaved mothers' experiences of these interventions make an important contribution to understanding the nature of maternal exploitation and the relationality of women's mothering, and have been often overlooked owing both to the ubiquity of these practices and the relative paucity of enslaved women's first-hand testimony. By focusing upon the expression of power through women's maternal interactions and interventions, the

⁵ Doyle, "The Highest Pleasure of Which Woman's Nature Is Capable", 972.

⁶ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 4.

limitations of interpretations that ‘biology’, ‘family’, and ‘children’ were grounds for women’s bonding, or ‘created bonds that seemed to defy the power relationships of slavery’, are clear.⁷

This chapter thus explores how slaveholding women’s mothering was both differentiated from enslaved women’s mothering and reliant upon their exploitation. The implications of slaveholding on motherhood were, of course, structural as well as social. ‘Privilege did not ensure better health’, but it systematically afforded women different care, resources, and conditions in which to mother.⁸ Equally, ‘[p]regnancies, confinements, suckling babies, and nurturing infants’ were not similarly ‘unceasing and demanding activities for black and white women’.⁹ Slave labour alleviated slaveholding mothers from the most arduous aspects of parenting and its associated labours, and mistresses exercised control to varying degrees over their childcare arrangements that allowed them to determine their maternal role. That many of mistresses’ privileges were directly dependent upon the exploitation of slave labour only emphasises the interrelationships between women’s advantages and disadvantages as mothers. Thus, while the veneration of upper-class white women’s mothering was restrictive, their slaveholding afforded them unparalleled privileges: evident from the very meanings afforded their mothering that so deeply influenced their opportunities to mother, through to the practicalities of bearing and raising children.

Socio-cultural ideals certainly emphasised the significance of white upper-class women’s maternal roles. In post-Revolutionary America, a new model of motherhood emerged. Free white mothers assumed a ‘political function’ through their influence on husbands and sons, and ‘the creation of virtuous citizens was dependent on the presence of wives and mothers who were well informed’.¹⁰ The paradoxical legacy of this Enlightenment-era reassessment of white female identity was both an ‘extension of visas’ for mothers as well as a ‘stifling’ prescription.¹¹ While enslaved women’s mothering was essential for economic production, then, white women’s mothering was an important site of cultural production.¹² This was a distinction with roots much earlier in slavery’s history: white women were persecuted for sexual relationships with black men as early as 1662, refining ‘the legal meanings and

⁷ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 87; Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 6. See also Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 75-9.

⁸ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 25, 94.

⁹ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 57.

¹⁰ Kerber, ‘The Republican Mother’, 202-4; Kerber, ‘A Constitutional Right to be Treated Like American Ladies’, 25. See also Eyal Rabinovitch, ‘Gender and the Public Sphere: Alternative Forms of Integration in Nineteenth-Century America’, *Sociological Theory*, 19, 3 (2001), 353-6.

¹¹ Kerber, ‘The Republican Mother’, 205; Jeffrey Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999), 69; Zagarri, ‘Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother’, 192-215. For broader context to these changes, see Susan E. Chase, ‘The Institution and Experience of Motherhood’, in Susan E. Chase and Mary F. Rogers (eds), *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2001), 62-4; S. Jay Kleinberg, ‘Continuity and Change: The Women of Anglo-America’, in R.A. Burchell (ed.), *The End of Anglo-America: Historical Essays in the Study of Cultural Divergence* (Manchester, 1991), 60-86.

¹² Steve Martinot, ‘Motherhood and the Invention of Race’, *Hypatia*, 22, 2 (2007), 90.

practical consequences of racial difference'.¹³ The cultural emphasis on white women's importance as mothers undoubtedly swelled, however, in the antebellum era. Conceptualised by Barbara Welter as the 'cult of True Womanhood', motherhood was venerated as an experience through which women could gain status, influence, and respect, but within the decidedly feminine sphere of the home.¹⁴ As one nineteenth century 'guide' to women's roles declared:

[...] a woman must be domestic. Her heart must be at home. She must not be on the look-out for excitement of any kind, but must find her pleasure as well as her occupation in the sphere which is assigned to her.¹⁵

Infant care took a central role in these constructions of woman's role. Mothers were encouraged to pay great interest to the moral, religious, and intellectual development of their children. The burgeoning market for prescriptive literature, novels, and guide-books in the nineteenth century emphasised ideas of white women's mothering as sacred, natural, and politically important with new vigour, and an unprecedented amount of literature was directed at, written by, and bought by women.¹⁶ Congruent with the ever-increasing authority of science and women's increasing participation in public health, white women were newly expected to be educated in their roles as mothers.¹⁷

The extent to which these ideas influenced slaveholding mothers is somewhat difficult to gauge. The southern 'region's agrarian lifestyle' was, in many ways, more influential than 'rhetoric', and the concept of 'separate spheres' was certainly less applicable to rural women engaged in farming work.¹⁸ Of course, even among the slaveholding class, the idea of woman's sole responsibility being her motherly and wifely duties had little resonance for most women. Women also demonstrated agency within cultural ideals of their mothering and did not necessarily accept their defined roles. But, as Patricia Treichler argues: 'Ideology is lived, not

¹³ Ariela Gross, 'Beyond Black and White: Cultural Approaches to Race and Slavery', *Columbia Law Review*, 101, 3 (2001), 669. See also Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), 187.

¹⁴ Barbara Welter suggests antebellum ideals of white womanhood hinged upon the 'four cardinal virtues' of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', *American Quarterly*, 18, 2 (1966), 152.

¹⁵ Mrs John Sandford, *Woman in her Social and Domestic Character* (London, 1831), 169, DU. This text was widely reprinted in the U.S.

¹⁶ Leah Rawls Atkins, 'High Cotton: The Antebellum Alabama Plantation Mistress and the Cotton Culture', *Agricultural History*, 68, 2 (1994), 93; Lamar Riley Murphy, *Enter the Physician: The Transformation of Domestic Medicine, 1760-1860* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1991), 52; Nancy Wolocho, *Women and the American Experience: A Concise History* (New York, 2002), 100; S. Jay Kleinberg, *Women in the United States, 1830-1945* (Basingstoke, 1999), 71.

¹⁷ Murphy, *Enter the Physician*, 52, 64; Rima D. Apple, 'Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Social History of Medicine*, 8, 2 (1995), 166; Morantz-Sanchez, 'Making Women Modern', 490.

¹⁸ Kleinberg, *Women in the United States*, 42.

simply created and flung out over society like a great net'.¹⁹ Slaveholding women were certainly preoccupied with how to best perform their maternal duties, but what those duties entailed, and what constituted the work of slaves, shaped a distinctly slaveholding mode of mothering. This did not preclude that within women's 'domestic space', they 'gained both a new degree of autonomy and a new degree of authority over others', and established a 'positive consciousness of gender' in the idealisation of feminine values.²⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg suggests the 'nineteenth century world of female intimacy' and 'the biological realities' of womanhood 'bound women together in physical and emotional intimacy', and more recently, Katy Simpson Smith has stressed white southern motherhood was a 'communal endeavour'.²¹ Motherhood could thus be an empowering experience, but ultimately 'subjected women to an exacting standard that the realities of mothering could rarely match'.²²

i. Approaching motherhood

White women in the antebellum south typically became mothers around the age of twenty-two, and could expect to have several children before they were twenty-five.²³ In the course of their lifetimes, they bore on average over five infants.²⁴ Slaveholding women typically lived with their husbands and their children but the family had an 'elastic structure' and often included family members 'beyond the nuclear core'.²⁵ White women who married slaveholders were generally of slaveholding families themselves. Dowries ensured class compatibility and high levels of cousin marriage are indicative of slaveholders' desires for property concentration.²⁶ Nevertheless, women of and entering the slaveholding class showed considerable control over their choice of suitors. Though parents certainly offered their opinions, these were seldom deterministic. Romantic love took importance in choosing partners, and mistresses enjoyed

¹⁹ Patricia A. Treichler, 'Feminism, Medicine, and the Meaning of Childbirth', in Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (eds), *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (New York, 1990), 118.

²⁰ Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 72-4. See also Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 85.

²¹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford, 1985), 75, 60; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 83.

²² Doyle, "'The Highest Pleasure of Which Woman's Nature Is Capable'", 972-3.

²³ James Trussell and Richard H. Steckel, 'The Age of Slaves at Menarche and Their First Birth,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8, 3 (1978), 492; Table 12.2, 'Average Number of Children Aged 10 or Less among Rural Families in 1860 by Region of Residence in 1850', in Richard H. Steckel, 'The Fertility Transition in the United States: Tests of Alternative Hypotheses', in Claudia Goldin and Hugh Rockoff (eds), *Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History: A Volume to Honor Robert W Fogel* (Chicago, IL, 1992), 355.

²⁴ Estimates of family size range between five and seven children and declined across the nineteenth century, but more gradually than in other areas of the U.S. See Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 15; Janet Golden, *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle* (Cambridge, 1996), 39-40; Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York, 2011), 118; Joanna N. Lahey, 'Birthing a Nation: The Effect of Fertility Control Access on the Nineteenth-Century Demographic Transition', *Journal of Economic History*, 74, 2 (2014), 482-508; Steckel, 'The Fertility Transition in the United States', 351-74.

²⁵ Joan E. Cashin, 'The Structure of Antebellum Planter Families: "The Ties that Bound us was Strong"', *Journal of Southern History*, 56, 1 (1990), 56-7.

²⁶ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 85-7; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 20-1.

intricate courtship rituals.²⁷

While slaveholding women's experiences of mothering seldom reflected its romanticised representations, mistresses certainly placed great meaning in this role, and commonly expressed the happiness they found in motherhood to their family members and friends. In Smithville, North Carolina, Kate DeRosset Meares wrote to her husband, Gaston, after the birth of their baby Maggie in 1851 that 'you don't know what a comfort she is to me'.²⁸ Mira Alexander of Woodford County, Kentucky, was similarly delighted at the birth of her 'sweetest dearest little creature'. She was, Mira informed her cousin in 1850, 'a constant pleasure to us all'.²⁹ For many mistresses, motherhood provided a sense of purpose. As Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher in Rockingham County, Virginia, diarised: 'a mother cannot give away to despondency & gloom with a helpless babe dependent on her'.³⁰

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas also expressed her pleasure in parenthood, writing in 1857 of her happiness 'in the prospect of the gift of another such tie of love'. She hoped 'that I may do my duty as a mother to the immortal soul entrusted to my care'.³¹ Gertrude was the daughter of immensely prosperous plantation owner Turner Clanton, who married Jefferson Thomas in 1852 and resided near Augusta, Georgia. By 1865, though, her enthusiasm was somewhat diminished: she was older, exhausted, and living amidst the turmoil of the Civil War. Gertrude lamented that: 'Unfortunately I have the prospect of again adding to the little members of my household'.³² Most mothers expressed happiness in some aspects of motherhood, but also expressed their concerns over the various strains it placed upon them. Harriet A. Hamner likely summarised the feelings of many mothers when she described motherhood as 'a spring of constant happiness notwithstanding all its cares and anxieties and toils which are not few'.³³

As such, while few mistresses seem to have outright rejected motherhood, they certainly sought to control the role of parenthood in their lives. Scholars have suggested that 'planters did not try to limit family size' or that 'birth-control efforts' were 'limited and unsuccessful if not non-existent'.³⁴ Yet, despite the limited evidence of women's use of birth-

²⁷ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 71, 74, 79; Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville, VA, 2002), 89-90, 106; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 24; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 60-2; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 69-70.

²⁸ Kate M. [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares] to Gaston [Meares], April 3 1851, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC; Annie to Ellen [Ravenel], April 29 1853, Ravenel Family Papers, SHC.

²⁹ M.M.A [Mira M. Alexander] to Agatha [Marshall Logan], Feb. 2 1850, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

³⁰ Lucy Walton Fletcher, Diary, undated [Dec. 1855], Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

³¹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Feb. 20 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU. Referred to generally as Gertrude, and henceforth Gertrude Thomas.

³² Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Feb. 12 1865, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

³³ Harriet A. Hamner to Gustavia Butler Adie, Oct. 12 1849, Adie Family Papers, VHS.

³⁴ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 25, 28; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 107.

control, this was one of ‘the great attitudinal changes of the early nineteenth century’.³⁵ Janet Farrell Brodie identifies that antebellum women’s methods of birth-control included the limitation of intercourse to the ‘agnetic period’, douching, abstinence, and withdrawal.³⁶ Few, however, appear to have resorted to extreme measures such as infanticide.³⁷ Slaveholding women’s private expressions demonstrate changing attitudes to motherhood, though, and Jan Lewis and Kenneth Lockridge’s study of Virginian gentry women reveals ‘that a definite trend to lower marital fertility had commenced by the 1840s and 1850s’.³⁸

Slaveholding women sought to control the frequency with which they bore their children. In 1856, for example, Gertrude Thomas expressed her wish for ‘other children’ but with a ‘considerable lapse of time between them’. The following year, when she found herself pregnant, she again emphasised her desire for ‘long intervals’. Fortunately for Gertrude, she believed that ‘Mr Thomas views the subject with the same idea of myself and is gratified at the prospect’.³⁹ Others’ intentions were not necessarily shared with husbands, who may have desired more children or simply to maintain conjugal relations. Rape was another circumstance through which women’s control over their childbearing could be compromised. Though discussion of this is elusive in women’s diaries and correspondence, marital rape was probable as ‘domestic relations presupposed the husband’s right to sexual access to the wife’s body’.⁴⁰

Those who were unsuccessful or chose not to limit their pregnancies often found their patterns of childbearing exhausting. Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall, of Jefferson County, Florida, expressed such a sentiment. She wrote in 1831 of how:

Three babies in less than three years are enough to make one tired of Babies, I think.— at least so I generally say when my feeble health makes me feel the toil of nursing & the loss of rest with peculiar heaviness [...]⁴¹

Especially prolific women like Ella Jerly, who had six children in eight years, were thus the subject of friends’ sympathies.⁴² While some remained ‘consistent in my disadmiration of little babies’, and others could not bear children, most slaveholding women became mothers.⁴³

³⁵ Jan Lewis and Kenneth Lockridge, “‘Sally Has Been Sick’: Pregnancy and Family Limitation Among Virginia Gentry Women, 1780-1830”, *Journal of Social History*, 22, 1 (1988), 12-3.

³⁶ Janet Farrell Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in 19th Century America* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 2, 3-4, 17-8, 28, 30-1.

³⁷ See Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 172-5; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 99.

³⁸ Lewis and Lockridge, “‘Sally Has Been Sick’”, 4.

³⁹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, July 26 1856, Feb. 20 1857, Ella Clanton Gertrude Thomas Papers, DU.

⁴⁰ Kerber, ‘A Constitutional Right to be Treated Like American Ladies’, 22. See also Jill Elaine Hasday, ‘Contest and Consent: A Legal History of Marital Rape’, *California Law Review*, 88, 5 (2000), 1433.

⁴¹ Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall to Louisa Elizabeth Carrington, May 23 1831, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall Papers, VHS.

⁴² Matilda Hamilton, Diary, June 22 1857, Hamilton Family Papers, VHS.

⁴³ Maria Smith to Sarah Sergeant Wise, Feb. 23 1845, Wise Family Papers, VHS.

A large part of their trepidation around and reluctance towards childbearing was owing to the physical risks it presented. Virginian Mary Selina Swift Allison, for example, was anticipating her ‘time of trial’ with great ‘uneasiness’, and waited ‘every hour to be calld to suffer [...] more than I ever did in my life’ in the winter of 1831.⁴⁴ Dread and apprehension were common sentiments.⁴⁵ Even strong religious beliefs did not abate women’s concerns about their approaching parturitions. A heavily pregnant Frances Moore Webb Bumpas, for example, was the wife of a minister and the editor of the Greensboro, North Carolina’s ‘Weekly Message’, yet greatly feared the ‘sufferings’ and ‘dangers’ of her ‘approaching critical period’ in 1844. ‘What if death should come!’, she asked. ‘Am I prepared?’⁴⁶

Clearly, childbirth itself was especially feared, and women described to one another their experiences of painful and problematic deliveries. Eliza Cochran wrote of the ‘most horrible agony’ of her fifteen and half hour labour, and her subjection to ‘instruments for an hour and half’ to Mary Ker near Natchez, Mississippi, in 1858.⁴⁷ In 1850, Lucy Jane Cushing wrote to her sister Mary Dame, of Danville, Virginia, to tell her how her daughter had ‘sunk’ under her ‘long & painful labour’ and ‘has never been out of bed yet’.⁴⁸ A period of ill-health, however, could extend for the length of a pregnancy. In 1839, for instance, Catherine Kenan Price wrote to her sister Elizabeth in Carrollton, Mississippi, pitying the ‘poor little creature’ of her sister-in-law, who ‘has been in bad health ever since they were married until the birth of the child’.⁴⁹

Slaveholding women’s reluctance to become mothers often exceeded its risks to their health, though. Innumerable comments expressing women’s dread could have been related to any aspect of mothering. In 1801, for example, Jane Williams’s daughter, Ferebee, ‘prayed’ that her sickness was not ‘from the same cause that you are putting her’.⁵⁰ Others were quite explicit in articulating that their apprehension towards mothering was centred upon the restrictions it imposed upon them. In 1859, for example, Mary May Irving wrote to her aunt Mary Dame expressing her disappointment at not being able to visit owing to her pregnancy. She explained how she ‘had looked forward with such pleasure’ to her trip, but ‘had to linger all hope – and now have in prospect the want of lifes ills’. Irving had ‘felt too disheartened to write you anything about it’ and thought of ‘such a formidable job’ with ‘dread’.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Mary Selina Swift Allison, Diary, Nov. 29 1831, Dec. 18 1831, VHS.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth G. Fischer to Anna E. Hoskins, June 1 1839, Higginbotham Family Papers, VHS; Walter Brashear to Margaret Brashear, Aug. 9 1821, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

⁴⁶ Frances Moore Webb Bumpas Diary, Feb. 6 1844, 18, Bumpas Family Papers, SHC.

⁴⁷ Eliza Cochran to Mary [Susan] Ker, Feb. 13 1858, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC.

⁴⁸ Lucy Jane Cushing to Mary Dame, May 15 1850, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

⁴⁹ C.K. [Catherine Kenan] Price to Elizabeth J. Blanks, Nov. 1 1840, Elizabeth J. Blanks Papers, DU.

⁵⁰ Jane Williams to Eliza Eagles Haywood, Aug. 18 1801, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

⁵¹ Mary May Irving to Mary Dame, Jan. 12 1859, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset similarly discussed the demands of motherhood as an unwelcome imposition into her personal life. Eliza had some eleven children over the course of her marriage to Wilmington, North Carolina physician and businessman Armand J. DeRosset. In 1842, with ‘two baby’s on my arm and three children in bed’, she complained that since ‘woman was made to stay at home and take care of children’, she would have to resign her ‘great desire to visit Geneva’. Her frustrations were quite clear: ‘I never expect to make a visit further than this place from Wilmington again’.⁵² Eliza discussed the confining nature of motherhood some years later in 1846, remarking this time of a friend who was ‘sadly to be pitied’ when she learnt the ‘poor thing’ ‘expects to again become a Mother’. She added: ‘they do not go out’.⁵³ This sentiment is crucial to understanding slaveholding women’s decisions to use slave labour for much of their mother-work, and in establishing that slaveholding women did not simply accept motherhood as their ‘sacred and singular occupation’ but sought to control the demands parenthood placed upon them.⁵⁴ That slaveholding women’s troubled feelings around motherhood reflected (in part, at least) concerns over lifestyle, suggests women’s changing approaches to motherhood did not simply reflect the physical risks it posed, and adds much to Lewis and Lockridge’s analysis.

Thus, while slaveholding women embraced many aspects of motherhood, and found importance and meaning in their roles as mothers, slaveholding women endeavoured to control the regularity and role of motherhood in their lives, negotiating their own desires with those of their husbands. Their ability to effectively regulate or prevent childbearing was limited. Yet, their positions as slaveholders privileged them as mothers both in the conditions they bore and raised their children, and their unique means of managing the demands of parenthood: slave labour.

ii. Pregnancy and health

Slaveholding women’s concerns over parturition were certainly well-founded. In 1850, the U.S. census reported that 2% of white women’s deaths occurred in childbirth, with a regional high of 5.4% recorded in Florida.⁵⁵ Childbearing in the southern region carried increased risks because of the prominence of virulent disease; abetted by the climate, poor sanitation, and a

⁵² Eliza [Jane Lord DeRosset] to Dr A.J. DeRosset, Sep. 28 1842, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

⁵³ Mother [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset] to Catherine D. DeRosset, Jan. 31 1846, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

⁵⁴ McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 6.

⁵⁵ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 45.

public-health vacuum.⁵⁶ Cholera infantum, for example, was 5.5 times more common in the southern region, and maternal mortality was also higher in regions of endemic malaria.⁵⁷

Miscarriage (often contemporaneously termed ‘abortion’) was also a common threat to the health of mother and foetus. In North Carolina, in 1843, Frances Webb Moore Bumpas described how she believed her ‘over exertion’ had led her to suffer ‘an abortion’.⁵⁸ Some women repeatedly suffered such losses. In Virginia, in 1859, Lucy Jane Cushing described a woman who had a ‘frequent liability to hemorage’ when ‘in the family way’. Cushing hoped that - this time - ‘she may yet escape’.⁵⁹ Medicine was poorly equipped to support pre-natal complications, including premature births, which were also a cause of much anguish. Gertrude Thomas experienced this when her own baby was born two months prematurely in December, 1855. The child survived ‘a few weeks’, but ‘the little treasure which has been loaned me for so short a time, winged its flight to the God who gave it’.⁶⁰ Her pregnancy had been a difficult one, and when the following summer she suspected she was again in ‘a peculiar situation’, she considered it ‘[a] calamity which I would especially dread this summer for I have no disposition to renew the past unpleasant summer’.⁶¹

Slaveholding women’s experiences of still-births were sadly common. In 1803, for example, Rebecca Williams wrote that her sister’s infant was ‘born dead’. Though the infant was revived, Rebecca expressed her ‘fear that it will not live’.⁶² A mother’s health could be at risk, too. In South Carolina, Elizabeth Frances Perry explained that after giving birth to a still-born child she ‘was so ill; that my life for a short time was considered in danger’. ‘I am not’, she wrote in 1843, ‘about to be a mother for the fourth time’.⁶³ Many mothers, like Eliza Cochran, were thus ‘delighted to have anything alive’.⁶⁴ Painful experiences were certainly likely to lead women to approach childbearing with increased trepidation. Indeed, as Elizabeth Fischer explained to her sister in 1842: ‘The approaching prospect of another babe recalls my little departed one’.⁶⁵

Accordingly, the healthcare of pregnant women was a principal concern of white women and their families. In pregnancy, slaveholding mothers often determined their ‘case’ at the point of ‘quickening’ (foetal movement). Though they certainly remained active into their

⁵⁶ Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, 2006), 27.

⁵⁷ McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 341; Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 19.

⁵⁸ Frances Moore Webb Bumpas, Diary, May 8 1843, SHC.

⁵⁹ Lucy Jane Cushing to Mary Dame, Feb. 22 1859, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

⁶⁰ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Jan. 1 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁶¹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, June 11 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁶² Rebecca Williams to Ferebee Hall, Oct. 26 1803, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

⁶³ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, April 6 1843, SHC.

⁶⁴ Eliza Cochran to Mary [Susan] Ker, Feb. 13 1858, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth G. Fischer to Anna E. Hoskins, March 10 1842, Higginbotham Family Papers, VHS.

pregnancies, slaveholding mothers' ability to delegate manual labour was another considerable and relative privilege they enjoyed as mothers. Mistresses were able to determine the extent of their physical activity, and to follow advice for light exercise and fresh air, rather than performing hard manual work.⁶⁶ While slaveholding mothers remained active throughout their pregnancies, a 'change in routine' was probable across the spectrum of slaveholders, and enslaved nurses were also on hand to care for other children.⁶⁷ The 'new understanding' of the necessity of 'maternal and medical attention during fetal development' meant that although routine prenatal care was not common place, medical assistance could be summoned in the event of problems or concerns.⁶⁸

The medical field was characterised by competing ideas and authorities and the profession remained 'badly muddled' by 1840.⁶⁹ The emergence of professionalised reproductive medicine has been characterised as anything from 'a gradual but inexorable suppression of women's medical prowess' to antebellum doctors' 'campaign to denigrate the skills of female midwives'.⁷⁰ For the first half of the nineteenth century, though, 'mothers were still considered authorities concerning infant care', and by 1900, more than 95% of childbirths in the U.S. still occurred in the home.⁷¹ Physicians' 'attendance was sporadic, control was tenuous, and influence was uneven', and in the south, agrarian lifestyles, remoteness, and women-centred practices influenced the extent of women's engagement with physicians.⁷²

Slaveholding women's use of male physicians during pregnancy, childbirth, and recovery, evidences that traditional practices were merging with new, male-centred medicine. However, mistresses exercised considerable choice in their arrangements and the recommendations of physicians and home medical guides were considered in tandem with the advice of other women, husbands, and practical opportunity. Husbands certainly took central roles in decision-making over women's childbearing, including advising on prenatal healthcare.⁷³ Slaveholding fathers advised their wives to negotiate the different medical advice available to them carefully. In Virginia, Robert Young Conrad's advice to his wife Elizabeth was fairly typical. In 1831, their child was suffering a 'protracted disease', and Robert suggested she followed the prescriptions of both '[t]he Doctors & the old women here'. The

⁶⁶ McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 39, 25; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 152.

⁶⁷ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 65. See also McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 43.

⁶⁸ McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 25, 27.

⁶⁹ Hugh M. Ayer, 'Nineteenth Century Medicine', *Indiana Magazine of History*, 48, 3 (1952), 254. See also Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 139-42; Catherine Kohler Riessman, 'Women and Medicalization, A New Perspective' in Weitz (ed.), *Politics of Women's Bodies*, 50.

⁷⁰ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 91; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 67.

⁷¹ Bernice L. Hausman, *Mother's Milk: Breastfeeding Controversies in American Culture* (New York, 2003), 11; Mary E. Gibson, 'Getting Back to Basics', *American Journal of Nursing*, 105, 10 (2005), 72c.

⁷² Murphy, *Enter the Physician*, 32.

⁷³ See Sally G. McMillen, 'Antebellum Southern Fathers and the Health Care of Children', *Journal of Southern History*, 60, 3 (1994), 513-32.

following year, he warned her: 'Beware of phisic'.⁷⁴ Women navigated these different sources of authority constantly. Laura Norwood, for example, discussed her sister's medical care with her mother, suggesting in 1841 that:

I know it is best generally to abide entirely by the advice of the physician we employ but hints may sometimes be suggested for their consideration - and might come very well from an old lady like you.⁷⁵

Likewise, when fellow North Carolinian Mary Jeffreys Bethell's infant daughter was 'sick and weak' from weaning, she 'wrote to Ma' and followed both her advice and the advice of a 'Dr Walker'.⁷⁶ Women discussed different treatments, and only from time-to-time, medical texts.⁷⁷

While slaveholding women were certainly overwhelmed by often-conflicting advice, the burden of decision-making ended with themselves. In 1838 in South Carolina, for example, Elizabeth Frances Perry found herself at 'a loss of what to do' when 'Mrs Dr Butler' and her husband urged her to deliver her baby in Greenville, but her mother 'wishes me to go to town'. It was Perry's first child. Ultimately, her decision was influenced where she felt she 'would have good assistance'.⁷⁸ Likewise, in 1842 in Virginia, Elizabeth Fischer's husband advised for her to leave home for her confinement, but she 'could not consent to it as there is such a difficulty in promptly procuring efficient medical aid'.⁷⁹

Slaveholding women could be quite adamant about their healthcare, and did not necessarily accept others' suggestions, whether a family member or professional. 'Mrs Jones', for example, 'positively refused to be bled' despite the urges of her husband when she fell ill during her pregnancy in 1833.⁸⁰ Hers was an unfortunate decision, because she died. The responsibility of decision-making, especially over children's healthcare, could certainly be a daunting prospect. Physicians were approached especially sceptically. In the case of Mary Ferrand Henderson, her decision to rely upon a doctor deeply grieved her. After the death of her son 'Baldy', Henderson found: 'Reflecting upon the medical treatment of the precious wee one almost maddens me'. The 'deceptive' doctor, she believed, 'pronounces and prescribes for disease too hastily'. In 1854, the North Carolinian slaveholder again expressed her haunting

⁷⁴ Robert Young Conrad to Elizabeth Whiting Conrad, Sep. 11 1831, Aug. 12 1832, Holmes Conrad Papers, VHS.

⁷⁵ Laura [Norwood] to S.L. [Selina Louisa] Lenoir, May 29 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁷⁶ Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], 6, SHC.

⁷⁷ S.L.L. [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Betsy Lenoir, Nov. 8 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, April 17 1838, Elizabeth Frances Perry Diary, SHC.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth G. Fischer to Anna E. Hoskins, March 10 1842, Higginbotham Family Papers, VHS.

⁸⁰ Mary [Fraser Davie] to mother [Mary DeSassure Fraser], Oct. 12 1833, Fraser Family Papers, DU.

sense of responsibility for her child's death: 'I blame myself yes I erred erred erred terribly, fatally'.⁸¹

Despite the burden of responsibility white women felt, mistresses were clearly able to access different types of medical care and exercise choice over their course of treatment if influenced by family. Allopathic medicinal practices, homeopathy, water cures, and 'traditional' physicians all numbered among the choices open to slaveholding mothers.⁸² They were thus able to seek different medical opinions. M. Sergeant, for example, wrote in 1845 of a friend who 'has been in charge of all the physicians in America'. The Fraser family of South Carolina were able to consult two doctors to pursue the best course of treatment when Mary suffered 'engorgement of the womb' in 1865.⁸³ This was facilitated both by slaveholding women's wealth and their ability to travel, both of which delineated them from other women in the south. For example, when Mary Meta Grimball was unwell, she was able to travel to New York to 'consult a celebrated Phisician' and Anne Rebecca Holmes Powell noted an ill friend's husband would take her to Philadelphia to try and find treatment for her ailments.⁸⁴

Slaveholding families were also able to leave those areas they believed were conducive to ill health: avoiding seasonal illnesses, epidemics and infectious diseases, or simply for a 'change of air'.⁸⁵ Their control over the care and treatment of their children was yet another privilege they enjoyed as slaveholders. In the winter of 1856, Lizzie Bain wrote of her concern that there was a 'good deal of sickening among the children here, especially the babies' in Petersburg, North Carolina, which had resulted in several deaths. Bain, though, was able to determine to 'not expose her' daughter as her primary caregiver and keep her inside.⁸⁶ Slaves, on the other hand, often had little ability to exercise such choice over their childcare arrangements.

Despite the horrible risks of childbearing in the south, then, slaveholding mothers made relatively informed decisions regarding healthcare based upon their navigation of various sources of authority. Yet, they relied most heavily upon other women throughout their pregnancies and childbirth. Despite the isolation of some plantations, visiting and extensive networks of correspondence developed a distinct, female-orientated culture that fostered individual and group identities. These female networks were especially important for mothers,

⁸¹ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 1, Dec. 21 1854, 6-7, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

⁸² McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 12-3.

⁸³ M. Sergeant to Sarah Sergeant Wise, March 7 1845, Wise Family Papers, VHS; Frederick [Fraser] to Mrs Davie, Sep. 19 1865, Fraser Family Papers, DU.

⁸⁴ Lewis Morris to J. [John] B. Grimball, Sep. 19 1855, Grimball Family Papers, SHC; Anne Rebecca Holmes Powell to Mary Faulkner, Jan. 21 [undated], Faulkner Family Papers, VHS.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Elizabeth Hill Boyd to Mary Faulkner, March 6 1839, Faulkner Family Papers, VHS; John Berkley Grimball, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 3, May 1 1834, 35, vol. 4, May 13 1835, 2.

⁸⁶ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Mollie Bain Biting], Dec. 9 1856, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

who depended upon one another for advice and support.⁸⁷ In 1831, for example, Elizabeth Fischer advised her pregnant sister in Albemarle County, Virginia, to take ‘plenty of exercise’ ‘on level ground’ and implored her to ‘better ask advice’ should she share her Elizabeth’s own experience of ‘giddiness or sort of vertigo’.⁸⁸ Such practical advice was abundant and forthcoming, and was even accompanied with supplies. In North Carolina, for example, Selina Lenoir sent her daughter-in-law Cornelia ‘black snake root’. She too offered words of advice for the ‘weaken’d and worried’ mother: ‘take a little more exercise’ and ‘lie down a little when fatigued’.⁸⁹ Women’s correspondence evidences not only the importance of women to one another, but also the extent to which slaveholding women’s pregnancies were treated cautiously and the health of a mother given paramount importance.

Slaveholding women’s letter-writing was evidently one of the many small but significant privileges that shaped their mothering, enabling them to procure and provide support remotely. The geography of the south, and its infrastructure, did not always make this easy, though. As Beckie Warren in Texas expressed to Sallie Spears in Virginia, ‘I hoped every mail since to hear of your safe confinement [...] The mails between us are very uncertain’.⁹⁰ Beckie’s letter was sent in 1861, and of course, the context of war only furthered the likelihood of disruptions. Frontierswomen, too, likely found regular communications problematic. Nevertheless, as Katy Simpson Smith has recognised, ‘mothers never hesitated’ to send advice and doctors often remained a reluctant relinquishing of maternal ‘competence’.⁹¹ Yet, slaveholding mothers usually had the choice.

iii. Childbirth and recovery

For the much-dreaded parturition, women continued to be important sources of support for one another. Slaveholding women commonly travelled to ‘nurse’ one another during their confinements and one or several female companions for this physically trying event was customary. Slaveholding women coached and calmed expectant mothers, cared for infants and their siblings, and nursed expectant and new mothers. In Virginia, for example, Lucy Jane Cushing accompanied her aunt Luce through a ‘long & painful labour’, and her sister had been

⁸⁷ Though Catherine Clinton argued southern female communities were not prevalent owing in a large part to their physical isolation, Katy Simpson Smith in particular identifies the communal nature of mothering. See Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 11; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 83.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth G. Fischer to Anna E. Hoskins, Jan. 1831, Higginbotham Family Papers, VHS.

⁸⁹ Mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Cornelia [Lenoir], undated, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁹⁰ R. [Beckie] Warren to Sallie [Spears], Sep. 13 [1861], Spears and Hicks Family Papers, SHC.

⁹¹ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 92-3.

with their aunt for five weeks, or, in all likelihood, the entire duration of her confinement in 1850.⁹² These networks of support were hugely important to women. Lucy again assembled the Dame women for her sister's confinement several years later, informing her aunt that 'she wishes you, to be with her by all means at that time, & so do I'.⁹³

This was, however, not always possible. Mary Jeffreys Bethell, for example, expressed her dismay that she would not be able to 'be with her [daughter] in that trying time'. Bethell lived in Rockingham County, North Carolina, some distance from her pregnant daughter in Arkansas. She wrote in 1862: 'I do not know whether she will come here or not, I do not know that I can get out there'. Prayer had to suffice.⁹⁴ Even when family or friends were unable to support white women in their childbirth and confinement, though, they benefitted from the support of women around them. Despite an absence of friends or family during one woman's confinement in 1823, for instance, she enjoyed the 'company and attention to everything I thought I might want' from 'the neighbors' and expressed that she would, therefore, 'always respect them for their kindness at such a time'.⁹⁵

Some of the most important women to expectant mothers at this trying time was, of course, midwives. While mistresses and their husbands increasingly chose to use doctors, many still relied upon midwives, as indicated by the presence of various 'Mrs' at children's births whose formal address suggests they were hired, white midwives.⁹⁶ Their choices were duly pragmatic. The best made plans could be rendered all but useless by a miscalculated due-date, an early delivery, emergency, or the unavailability of a chosen doctor or midwife. Often, whoever was at hand would have to suffice. In 1814, Jane Williams explained just what women could have to resolve among themselves. An expectant mother experienced an 'abortion' that nearly took her life, inducing an 'alarming and dangerous flooding' with blood 'running in torrents'. Jane and 'Mrs Waddell' 'hated to make the application' but 'had no even time to send for a Doctors [...] she would not have been alive when a Doctor got here'.⁹⁷

Remoteness seemed to particularly problematise parturition plans. In Mississippi, a pregnant Sarah Butler complained to her mother of her concerns living some six hours away from the nearest doctor in 1850.⁹⁸ Thus, slaveholding mothers commonly reported their babies

⁹² Lucy Jane Cushing to Mary Dame, May 15 1850, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

⁹³ Lucy Jane Cushing to Mary Dame, June 19 1857, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

⁹⁴ Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], Feb. 10 1862, 75, SHC.

⁹⁵ Unsigned to Mira [Eliza Mira Lenoir], April 26 1823, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Sarah Graham to Stephen Graham, Nov. 24 1819, Kenan Family Papers, SHC; John Berkley Grimball, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 6, April 18 1840, 52, May 2 1840, 53-4, SHC.

⁹⁷ Jane Williams to Elizabeth [Eliza] E. Haywood, Dec. 20 1814, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

⁹⁸ Sarah E. Butler to Mother [Mary Baker Ker], Oct. 8 1850, Oct. 28 1850, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC.

had been born before a midwife ‘got here’ or ‘did not get here in time’.⁹⁹ Like Mary Jeffreys Bethell, women were made reliant on those around them, in her case, her ‘[s]ister Jane’ and ‘my woman Harriet’.¹⁰⁰ Gertrude Thomas’s baby similarly ‘came so quickly’ it was born before either ‘the doctor’ or ‘Mrs Carmichael’ arrived, undoubtedly unexpected due to its prematurity. Only her husband and a couple of enslaved women were present, though ‘[n]either of them knew anything’.¹⁰¹ It was in these cases of emergency that slaveholding mistresses were most likely to rely upon enslaved women.

Yet, enslaved women’s roles as midwives have been subject to considerable attention. With the emergent use of male physicians in the birthing room, on occasion, white men and enslaved midwives could be ‘strange bedfellows’ and both colluding and conflicting voices of authority, according to Tanfer Emin Tunc.¹⁰² Some enslaved midwives were able to achieve a high level of mobility and payment for their services.¹⁰³ Praising and valuing a woman’s labour, however, was not akin to emotional intimacy. Indeed, the meaning of black women’s sometime-presence in the birthing room has been largely overstated in its significance.

For Vera Lynn Kennedy, childbirth ‘generated the potential for mutual dependence and the creation of a community of women’, who ‘possessed a degree of mutuality based on their gender’. Yet, because ‘[b]irth assistants were chosen for their availability rather than for their social identity’ and after childbirth ‘social divisions were often firmly reasserted’, Kennedy recognises the pragmatism that led to enslaved women’s presence in the birthing room, and thus nullifies its significance.¹⁰⁴ Tunc even suggests white women’s use of slave midwives evidences mistresses’ creation of ‘networks of female solidarity and mutual assistance with enslaved women’. As ‘reproductive beings’, Tunc alleges women shared ‘cultural experiences and solidarity’ in a ‘procreative union’.¹⁰⁵ Yet, that mistresses only occasionally ‘attended the births of bondswomen’ is unexplained if ‘reproductive beings’ found mutual importance in these events.¹⁰⁶ As Craig Thompson Friend highlights, the ‘expectation’ for enslaved people at ‘the emotional milestones of the white’s family’s life’ was not generally reciprocated.¹⁰⁷ Rather, slaveholding women’s pragmatism is clear. The uncertainties of childbirth, coupled

⁹⁹ Sarah Graham to Stephen Graham, Nov. 24 1819, Kenan Family Papers, SHC; Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], June 6 1855, 22, SHC.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], June 6 1855, 22, SHC.

¹⁰¹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, April 16 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

¹⁰² Tunc, ‘The Mistress, the Midwife, and the Medical Doctor’, 408.

¹⁰³ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 66-8.

¹⁰⁴ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 57-8, 83. Similarly, see McMillen, *Southern Women*, 72; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 57; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 148.

¹⁰⁵ Tunc, ‘The Mistress, the Midwife, and the Medical Doctor’, 397.

¹⁰⁶ Tunc, ‘The Mistress, the Midwife, and the Medical Doctor’, 396.

¹⁰⁷ Friend, ‘Little Eva’s Last Breath’, 64. See also Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 22.

with the remoteness of many slaveholding domiciles, and an apparent scarcity of doctors and midwives, meant white women had to approach childbearing with flexibility.

It was other slaveholding women who comprised mistresses' 'networks of female solidarity'. From the near constant exchange of advice, and visiting, the importance of other women in shaping one another's mothering is clear. The vastness (and underdeveloped infrastructure) of the south, financial restrictions, obligations at home, and the input of husbands and family could all limit slaveholding women's choices and control over their childbearing practices. Yet, slaveholders' ability to determine their medical treatment, to travel, to maintain correspondence, and to choose family and friends from far and wide to be present throughout parturition were privileges not shared with enslaved women. Instead, expectant enslaved mothers were denied these very choices by slaveholders while their childbearing was further problematised by family dispersal, slave labour, and endemic physical and sexual violence. These issues simply did not effect slaveholding mothers to elicit any meaningful comparison.

After childbirth, white women's mothering would continue to be shaped by their privileges as slaveholders and upper-class white women. The after-care slaveholding women received and the time they spent in confinement was largely dependent on their health, their personal inclination, and any household pressures. Confinement to the birthing room, typically a room prepared in one's own or a family member's house, generally lasted around a month. Lizzie Bain, for example, remarked that she had not left the 'boundary' of her mother's room for four weeks after the birth of her child in 1858.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, one woman 'never come off half so well in confinement as I have at present' and thus was making clothes before the baby was four weeks old.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, South Carolinian Mary Meta Grimball dismissed her hired nurse early as she was finding recovery from childbirth in 1840 - in her husband's words - 'quite easy'.¹¹⁰ Meta herself, however, explained her decision as 'necessary economy', thus giving some insight into what could impinge upon women's recommended confinement times.¹¹¹

Other women were kept in long confinements by ill health. One ailing woman, for example, spent two months in bed rest.¹¹² Well women, on the other hand, exacted a certain degree of choice over when they were ready to resume their domestic responsibilities. Of

¹⁰⁸ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], Nov. 20 1858, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

¹⁰⁹ Eliza to Elizabeth Lenoir, Nov. 23 1845, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹¹⁰ John Berkley Grimball, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 6, May 2 1840, 53-4, SHC.

¹¹¹ Grimball, 'Journal of Meta Morris Grimball', July 11 [1861], 38-9, DocSouth.

¹¹² [?] to Frances Brashear, Oct. 15 1843, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

course, this was a privilege largely influenced by class, and those women who had more prominent roles in running farms were under greater pressure to return to work. Plantation mistresses though, showed considerably more flexibility. Some white women simply enjoyed their confinements as respite. For example, in 1853 on their Green Lawn plantation near Meridianville, Alabama, Octavia Wyche Otey felt she had become ‘really lazy’: she slept all night and morning despite her husband’s efforts to make her ‘get up’. ‘I will not do so any more if I can help it’, she determined. Her baby boy was nearly five weeks old.¹¹³

While Otey’s ability for relaxation may not have been widely shared, slaveholding mothers’ health was prioritised and their families were concerned with ensuring adequate rest and appropriate medical care was afforded new mothers. Beliefs in the ‘overdevelopment of the nervous organization’ of privileged white women, and that they thus suffered more during and after childbirth, shaped the way mistresses were treated.¹¹⁴ Doctors in South Carolina consulting on the engorgement of a woman’s womb in 1865, for example, recommended that though it was expected to ‘yield to the treatment’, ‘she must be very careful for a year after’ and be fed ‘nourishing food’.¹¹⁵ In 1814, North Carolinian Jane Williams noted her daughter, Becky, had been ‘ordered’ by a doctor to have ‘no noise, a Dark room, and not the smallest exertion of her own’ (‘not as much as to use the chamber’), after a feared case of inflammation of the womb following the delivery of her infant.¹¹⁶ One man wrote that his wife’s health in 1816 was ‘so wretched’ and her nervous system ‘so affected that she cannot sit in a room while a person walks across the floor’.¹¹⁷ Though these concerns for the health of white southern mothers were fully legitimate in the minds of both patient and advisor, they surely drew upon socio-scientific constructions of white women’s frailty. Certainly, these prescriptions would not have been extended to enslaved women, and these beliefs furthered slaveholding women’s ability to delegate labour to enslaved women.

The differences between slaveholding mothers and other southerners were also evident in the conditions in which mistresses birthed their children. For privileged slaveholders, ‘[u]pper-floor nurseries were sunlit with access to fresh air; high ceilings, dry walls, and shuttered windows were considered essential’.¹¹⁸ In 1846, Robert E. Lee explained to his mother that his wife’s nursery ‘must be kept quiet & of a regular temperature, & the children,

¹¹³ Octavia Wyche Otey, Diary, vol. 4, Sep. 23 1853, 6, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC.

¹¹⁴ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 115.

¹¹⁵ Frederick [Fraser] to Mrs Davie, Sep. 19 1865, Fraser Family Papers, DU.

¹¹⁶ Jane Williams to Elizabeth [Eliza] E. Haywood, April 6 1814, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

¹¹⁷ Brother to Louis Marshall, Dec. 23 1816, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

¹¹⁸ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 156.

servants & all those who have no business there must be kept out'.¹¹⁹ Farmers and yeowomen, on the other hand, were less likely to even have two story houses, let alone nurseries or birthing rooms.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, slaveholders were an economically privileged social group and their housing reflected that. They were much more likely to be able to create a clean, warm, dry, and ventilated space in which to give birth than enslaved or poor women. Slaveholding provided labour to maintain these spaces and their inhabitants, and crucially, to keep dressings, bedding, and clothing clean.

Slaveholders' advantages included their ability to engage in the growing commerce for items designed at easing mothering. In Virginia, for example, George Watson was able to buy a 'sucking bottle' for his and his wife Ann's baby in 1824.¹²¹ Similarly, in Louisiana in 1849, Fanny Brashear wrote to her husband Henry requesting he buy 'another ring of [?] rubber' to ease their baby's teething.¹²² As slaveholders, George Watson and Henry Lawrence were often in urban areas of trade and commerce like Richmond and New Orleans respectively, which enabled rurally-based women to access these emergent commercial markets. The extent to which slaveholding privileged mothers should not be understated: not only were mistresses' alleviated from heavy mother-work and beneficiaries of the wealth incumbent with the ownership of human beings, but in a world of non-disposable diapers and where animal milk had to be freshly expressed and purified for each feed, enslaved women performed essential and extensive work for slaveholding mothers.

This is not to say slaveholding women's experiences of motherhood were easy, though. While many women were simply tired mother-managers, other women suffered psychologically with the process of motherhood. Annie Gwyn, Laura Norwood's sister and Selina Lenoir's daughter, for example, suffered badly with 'the blues'. Though medical definitions and understandings of postpartum depression would not develop until much later, some new mothers were undoubtedly suffering with such problems. Annie's struggles were clear. When her husband Jamie was busy with work she found: 'I have just sat here the live long day and right until bedtime by my lone self'. She described to her (childless) sister Sade in 1843: 'this business of having children is an awful thing'. Annie, however, was able to procure the assistance of an enslaved nurse as she confronted these struggles.¹²³

¹¹⁹ R.E. Lee to Mary Lee Custis, Feb. 14 1846, Lee Family Papers, VHS.

¹²⁰ Stephanie McCurry describes of yeomen houses: 'men and women did live in mostly crude, unchinked double log cabins with porches in front and kitchens behind and with chimneys of sticks and clay and unglazed windows'. McCurry, 'Producing Dependence', 56-7.

¹²¹ George Watson to Ann Watson, Aug. 19 1824, Sep. 23 1824, Watson Family Papers, VHS.

¹²² [?] indicates an illegible word. Fanny [Frances] E. Lawrence to Henry [E. Lawrence], Feb. 27 1849, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

¹²³ A. [Mary Ann Gwyn] to S.J. [Sarah Jones] Lenoir., Dec. 31 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC. See also Annie [Mary Ann Gwyn] to Sade [Sarah Jones Lenoir], Dec. 3 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

Childrearing in the antebellum south was challenging, and slaveholding mothers confronted poor health conditions and a muddled medical field while attempting to meet high social expectations and the demands of household management. Motherhood was an experience fraught with trepidation, tribulation, and sadly, loss. Yet, slaveholding women were uniquely privileged mothers in the south. They received much better treatment than their enslaved or poor contemporaries, and parented with resources, opportunities, and assistance unique to their class. While their very wealth and lifestyles were built upon the subjugation and exploitation of enslaved people, slaveholding women's mothering directly disadvantaged enslaved women. The customary choice of delegating mother-work to enslaved women and children emphasises the inextricability of one woman's advantage and another woman's disadvantage as mothers.

iv. Childcare, labour, and mother-work

As new mothers, mistresses were able to spend ample time with their children. They exercised control over the nurses chosen for their children, their childcare, and infant-feeding arrangements. While many slaveholding mothers breastfed, others used wet-nurses, and some relied upon animal milk to nourish their infants. Like other aspects of their parenting, white women often found infant-feeding challenging but their privileged social status and the ownership of slaves gave them choices other women simply did not have.¹²⁴

Yet, mistresses felt burdened by their responsibilities. While household management alone was understood as cumbersome, motherhood was an additional, more exhausting and emotionally demanding responsibility; for many slaveholding women, marking a new epoch in their tiredness and frustration. In Florida, for example, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall found herself struggling with the demands of motherhood after four years of married life. In 1831, she explained: 'The cares of Maternity and of Housekeeping fell very heavily upon your honorable servant - and truth to say, I am almost as tired of one as the other'. Laura believed her husband considered her 'the most miserable, poor, good-for-noth[ing] woman he ever saw'.¹²⁵ In North Carolina, Lizzie Bain realised she had similarly drawn 'rather a dark picture of life with children' in a letter to her sister in 1859. She added - optimistically, or desperately - 'it is hoped it will not always be so'.¹²⁶ Both Lizzie and Laura, however, relied upon enslaved

¹²⁴ Slaveholding women's infant-feeding practices are discussed at length in Chapter Four.

¹²⁵ Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall to Louisa Elizabeth Carrington, May 23 1831, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall Papers, VHS.

¹²⁶ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Mollie Bain Bitting], Feb. 3 1859, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

women to both care for their children and maintain their households. As Laura had commented in 1828 (several years and several children prior), enslaved women provided ‘great “comfort”’ by performing housekeeping and domestic work.¹²⁷

Disruptions to white women’s slave-labour arrangements emphasise the extent of their dependence upon enslaved women in shaping their roles as mothers. Virginian mother-of-eight Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds’s feeling that she simply ‘stumble along & get over it just the best way that I can’ was owing, in part at least, to her lack of ‘sufficient’ enslaved labour, as she wrote to her mother-in-law.¹²⁸ For mistresses of smaller slaveholdings and hire-mistresses, frequent changes in household labour arrangements meant the day-to-day responsibilities of motherhood could be quite variable. Sarah Dandridge Cook Duval of New Kent County, Virginia, for example, struggled with caring for a young baby and a constant stream of visitors alongside her domestic responsibilities. But, because of the demands of the crop cycle, she also lacked her usual domestic servants. ‘On the whole’, she wrote to her aunt in 1858, ‘my life is very much of a struggle’.¹²⁹

Though the extent to which women relied on nurses was influenced by their wealth, those able to use enslaved nurses habitually did so. Slaveholding women played central roles in the care of their children and often commented on nursing their children, especially during times of illness. The extent of mistresses’ reliance on enslaved nurses, however, has been often understated, largely owing to the interpretation that given ‘the close attention planter mothers gave to children, probably few allowed nurses to assume major importance’.¹³⁰ But ‘almost all’ slaveholding mothers used enslaved nurses.¹³¹ This is not to suggest white women did not care for their children, and in arguing that ‘[a]lthough [...] slave women and children often served as assistants and child-sitters, the majority of healthy white women accepted their maternal role with commitment and love’, Sally McMillen constructs a misleading binary.¹³² Able to delegate undesirable and arduous aspects of childcare, and feeling burdened by their responsibilities, slaveholding mothers understood the importance of their roles as mothers differently than the diapering, feeding, washing, and other labours that constituted mother-work.

¹²⁷ Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall to Louisa Elizabeth Carrington, March 6 1828, Laura Henrietta Wirt Randall Papers, VHS.

¹²⁸ Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds to mother [Jane Watkins Edmunds], undated, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS.

¹²⁹ Sarah Duval to aunt, Jan. 1 1858, Sarah Dandridge Cooke Duval Papers, VHS.

¹³⁰ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 34.

¹³¹ Fox-Genovese, ‘Family and Female Identity in the Antebellum South’, 28; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 137. Wilma Dunaway finds two-thirds of enslaved women were employed at some point as caregivers to white children in the Appalachian region.

Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 140.

¹³² McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 6.

The new emphases on upper-class mothers' importance positioned slaveholding women as leading children's development. Ideals emphasised mothers' responsibility for physical, emotional, moral, and intellectual nurturing of their children born *tabula rasa*.¹³³ Slaveholding women understood their children as impressionable, and shaped by their early 'training'. They discussed the best way of educating their young children, and were heavily involved in their instruction.¹³⁴ This construction of motherhood enabled upper-class women to delegate mother-work in the spirit of a more enlightened and important role. Slaveholding facilitated it.

Mistresses were thus able to take important roles in children's development while delegating the cumbersome aspects of motherhood (which, as their comments show, was most aspects of motherhood). In Alabama, Octavia Wyche Otey, for instance, took great interest in 'Infant Philosophy' and vowed 'to pay more attention to [her baby] Imogene's raising' in the spring of 1852.¹³⁵ Despite this commitment to her children and their development, Octavia used the labour of at least three house 'servants' (Parthenia, Maria, and Lina), to assist with mother-work and childcare. Eliza Clitherall was similarly able to benefit from outsourcing the duties associated with parenthood. As she noted, 'having excellent servants, & a good seamstress, I had abundance of time to devote to my precious children without neglecting my family domestic duties'.¹³⁶

This did not diminish the significance of the maternal role, though. Clitherall felt great concerns over her responsibility and the 'solemn accountability is there in store for the negligent guardians of immortal souls'.¹³⁷ Similarly, in North Carolina, Frances Moore Webb Bumpas prayed to 'have grace to train her [daughter] right for which I need to become better' in 1845. Her sentiment was echoed by Lucila Agnes McCorkle, in Talladega, Alabama, who wished 'not be a stumbling block in [her children's] way - but a leader a guide - so help Divine being!', as she wrote in 1859.¹³⁸ Eliza, Frances, and Lucila all relied upon enslaved women to perform mother-work for them, nevertheless.

Indeed, slaveholding mothers enjoyed and valued their mothering and their children

¹³³ See Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 96-7; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 107-11; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 49-50; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Planation Household*, 278-80; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 8. Slaveholding mothers thus also took greater roles in home-educating their children. See Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 117-24, 138-42, 86; Fox-Genovese, 'Family and Female Identity in the Antebellum South', 28.

¹³⁴ Penelope Eliza Wilson to Gustavia Adie, Feb. 28 1855, Adie Family Papers VHS; Caroline Olivia Laurens, Diary, Jan. 1826, 5, May 29 1827, 12, SHC; Jane Chancellor Payne, Diary, Oct. 2 1838, VHS; Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 19, 22; Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, April 6 1843, SHC; Frances Moore Webb Bumpas, Diary, July 28 1844, 21-2, April 3 1846, 36, SHC.

¹³⁵ Octavia Wyche Otey, Diary, vol. 2, April 7 1852, 31, April 8 1852, 32, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC.

¹³⁶ Caroline Elizabeth Burgwin Clitherall, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 5, 33, SHC.

¹³⁷ Caroline Elizabeth Burgwin Clitherall, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 5, 30, SHC.

¹³⁸ Frances Moore Webb Bumpas, Diary, April 24 1845, 31, SHC; Lucila Agnes McCorkle, Diary, vol. 2, '3rd Sabbath' June 1859, 16, William P. McCorkle Papers, SHC.

while relying on these enslaved women and children as nurses to perform mother-work for them. Mahala Roach, a mistress and mother in Vicksburg, Mississippi, for example, found her baby John ‘a pleasure’, but John was largely cared for by an enslaved girl called Ailsie. Marjory and Henrietta performed other forms of mother-work for Roach, too. Ailsie was ‘only little’ but Roach was entirely dependent upon her, and remarked in 1860 upon finding the enslaved child sick, that ‘if she dies it will be a great loss to me!’.¹³⁹ Roach’s reliance upon Ailsie was quite typical. Writing to Mary Ker of Natchez, Mississippi, Eliza Cochran described how her three-month-old child ‘took a disease called “Scald Head”’ and ‘the poor child required constant attendance’ in 1858. Cochran was deeply concerned by her child’s health, and was ‘delighted to say’ the child was ‘almost well’. Yet, she remarked that while she was writing, ‘his nurse is trying to put him to sleep in the next room’.¹⁴⁰ Maternal care and maternal outsourcing were thus completely compatible in the minds of slaveholding mothers. As Mississippian Belle Kearney remarked, ‘the black “mammy” relieved [the mistress] of the actual drudgery of child-worry’.¹⁴¹

Even if the responsibilities of guardianship weighed heavily upon slaveholding mothers, then, cultural ideals of upper-class white motherhood and the ownership of slaves together facilitated their delegation of primary care responsibilities. This was entirely in keeping with social norms, and shaped the day-to-day lives and lifestyles of slaveholding mothers. This practice was reliant not only on the veneration of white women’s own motherhood, but the ownership and devaluation of black women’s own mothering.¹⁴² By separating *motherhood* from *mother-work*, slaveholders effectively rendered enslaved women’s care a commodity and a transferable labour that could be purchased or hired for, or re-directed to, their own children, without usurping their own importance and identities as mothers. Enslaved nurses, sometimes mothers themselves and at other times just children, were altogether nappy-changers, child-carers, bottle-feeders (breast-feeders, too), and baby-bathers, who could be bought and hired, traded and sold. Sometimes, these nurses were drawn from the plantation’s slaves, and at other times, mistresses’ engaged their informal networks of slave-trading to recruit likely nurses, or sought services through the formal marketplace. These multi-dimensional markets for mother-work were centred around white women’s demands.

Slaveholding mothers certainly preferred familiar nurses. In Smithville, North Carolina, Kate DeRosset Meares expressed how she wished for ‘Maumer’ to be ‘here to mind the baby

¹³⁹ Mahala P.H. Roach, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 55, May 25 1860, 275, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁴⁰ Eliza Cochran to Mary [Susan] Ker, Feb. 13 1858, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC.

¹⁴¹ Belle Kearney, *A Slaveholder’s Daughter* (New York, 1900), 3, DocSouth.

¹⁴² This is discussed in section iii of Chapter Three.

for me', wishing her a 'howd'ye' in 1854.¹⁴³ In Virginia, Mary Clark Vest Watkins shared Kate's preference for a favoured nurse. She had, in 1860, been successful in coercing 'Mammy' to come and 'nurse for me'. Mary felt 'very fortunate' because 'I can trust her so implicitly'.¹⁴⁴ A known and trustworthy child-carer was preferable and thus even the most valued nurses were frequently moved between family members as mothers' desires dictated. However, for many women, a new baby meant a new nurse. Women like Annie Gwyn outlined their intentions after the birth of a child 'to get a good careful nurse'.¹⁴⁵ Lizzie Bain similarly planned to get 'a small girl to nurse Alice' to replace the recalcitrant Rose in 1857.¹⁴⁶ Mistresses not only procured nurses, they proffered them too. Mira Alexander wrote to her cousin in 1848 to inform her that 'whenever you go to Louisville if you want Lucy Ann you can have her' and in 1844, faced with the 'appalling prospect' of four female slaves and their six young children, Laura Norwood sought to hire out Adeline 'in place of the last Nurse but they did not want her'.¹⁴⁷

Mother-work was one of the principal forms of labour traded through slaveholding women's informal networks and mothers spent great deals of time, energy, and often money, ensuring their eventual satisfaction with their 'staff' of nurses. Their efforts were assisted by family members, who endeavoured to provide new mothers with suitable slave labour.¹⁴⁸ As Gaston Meares wrote to his wife Kate in 1855:

You had better write me to Richmond, stating exactly what sort of servant you would like me to buy [...] my greatest desire is to please you and consult the happiness of our dear little family [...]¹⁴⁹

Mistresses, however, were clearly not reliant upon male kin in securing slave labourers. Gaston was well aware that Kate had likely taken the task into her own hands after 'Maurer's' apparent unavailability. 'If you should have secured one in Wilmington', he wrote, 'you could telegraph me'.¹⁵⁰

Nurses did not perform childcare alone. Dressing children seemed to be the purvey of enslaved or hired help. Enslaved women washed and ironed clothes of white children and the

¹⁴³ Kate [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares] to mother [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset], July 7 1854, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Clark Vest Watkins to Phebe Howson Clark Bailey, March 4 1860, Bailey Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁴⁵ A. [Mary Ann Gwyn] to S.J. [Sarah Jones] Lenoir, Dec. 31 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁴⁶ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to mother, Jan. 6 1857, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

¹⁴⁷ M.M.A [Mira M. Alexander] to Mrs Caleb Logan [Agatha Marshall Logan], [Jan. 5 1848], Louis Marshall Papers, SHC; L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed Col. Thomas Lenoir], Oct. 16 1844, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Caroline Elizabeth Burgwin Clitherall, *Diary* [typed transcription], vol. 5, 15, SHC; E. [Mrs A. J DeRosset Jr] to M.M. [Magdalen Mary] DeRosset, July 14 1838, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁴⁹ Gaston Meares to Kate [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares], Feb. 15 1855, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

entire white family. They performed housework and cleaning, and were responsible for the majority of cooking and meal preparation. Enslaved women were also often in charge of milking. They made clothes, did sewing, carding, weaving, and spinning. Slaveholding women demanded enslaved ‘domestics’ to perform a wide range of tasks. Mary Walker described a friend whose child had been ‘running about nearly all winter taking care of himself’ because she had ‘not been able to get servants until now’. The newly acquired enslaved woman attended the child, cleaned the house, and did ‘anything else May wishes’, Walker informed Gustavia Adie in Leesburg, Virginia.¹⁵¹ One southerner remarked in 1860 of her cousin who was ‘such a woman’ for parenting five children while unwell, but still found time ‘cut out & make clothes take a walk down with the street’. With ‘five satans at each elbow’, however, it was Mary’s ‘maid’ who was ‘nearly dead’.¹⁵² Mother-work merged with gendered labour more broadly.

The nurses who slaveholders relied upon who were mothers themselves were sometimes able to keep their children with them, especially on smallholdings where there may not have been a dedicated nurse for enslaved children. Some nurses were thus able to use their roles to spend more time with their children.¹⁵³ However, slaveholders sought to ensure the primacy of their own child’s needs. Accordingly, enslaved nurses were often separated from their own children, especially if they were hired explicitly in this capacity. Though enslaved mothers who worked in agricultural roles performed an endless routine of slave-labour and mother-work, the latter could be a fulfilling, if exhausting, endeavour. For enslaved mothers confined to the care of white children, though, opportunities to engage in this meaningful work was even more curtailed.

Nurses were typically required to sleep in the room of their charge and the reliance of slaveholding women on their nurses was extensive. Kate DeRosset Meares, for example, wrote to her husband Gaston that she ‘slept alone with her [baby] last night’ and that ‘I dress & undress her everyday, myself’, in 1851.¹⁵⁴ In 1832, Virginian Mary Selina Swift Allison similarly remarked that, nine days after the birth of her child, she had dressed her baby herself. She added: ‘Indeed I have been compeled to do so as I have no one to do it for me’.¹⁵⁵ Both Kate and Mary’s comments illuminate the normalcy and extent of mothers’ delegation of mother-work. Because of the very ubiquity of their use of enslaved nurses, the degree of slaveholding mothers’ dependency is once again most evident when their labour arrangements

¹⁵¹ Mary Walker to Gustavia Adie, April 13 [undated], Adie Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁵² Loule [Selina Louisa Norwood] to Sade [Sarah Jones Lenoir], April 23 1860, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵³ This is discussed in section iv of Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁴ Kate M. [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares] to Gaston [Meares], April 3 1851, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁵ Mary Selina Swift Allison, Diary, Jan. 17 1832, VHS.

were disrupted. When Jane Eliza Meade's 'house maid', Rose, went to visit family, for instance, Jane's baby 'had to dispense with her nurse, & we all of course had our hands full' on their Virginian slaveholding. Jane had other enslaved women to rely upon for domestic labour. She noted, however, that 'the bread is only mediocre'.¹⁵⁶ In 1853, Mahala Roach was similarly aggrieved by the absence of a slave creating extra mother-work for her. When 'little' Ailsie was sick, Roach found she was 'compelled to take entire care of the baby'.¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, respite in periods of illness for domestics could be heavily curtailed by demanding mistresses. Mary Ferrand Henderson, for example, desired to take a nurse for her baby with her on a trip to New Berne, and though the 'old woman' she selected 'complains of weakness', Mary determined that 'it is not so, she is strong enough and will make a capital nurse I think'.¹⁵⁸

Nurses facilitated mistresses' engagement in other aspects of household life. In North Carolina, for example, Annie Gwyn found she had 'to nurse [the baby] all the time myself, or so near it that I cant do any settled work', she informed her sister Sade in 1854.¹⁵⁹ M.J. Walker similarly complained in 1836 that with a new baby, and 'no additional servant', her time was consumed and: 'I have not at any rate done what I ought to have done'.¹⁶⁰ Nurses, however, were equally utilised to retain a mother's leisure time, mobility, and a degree of independence. Indeed, while slaveholding women were quick to complain of the burdens of household management and motherhood, their ability for leisure activities was unparalleled, though varying in extent among the slaveholding class. Slaveholding women did not simply receive guests, but frequently visited friends and family from day-to-day visits structured by proximity to longer-term visits. Some trips, especially for relatively isolated women, could extend entire seasons.¹⁶¹ Correspondence, reading, and sewing were also popular past-times that the majority of mistresses found some time to enjoy. Religious activity through local churches, revivals, and conventions, was also a popular engagement.

It was enslaved nurses that facilitated slaveholding mothers' participation in such activities across the slaveholding class. A minister's wife in Rockingham County, Virginia, for

¹⁵⁶ Jane Eliza Meade to Mrs Richard [Kate] H. Meade, undated, Meade Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁵⁷ Mahala Roach, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 50, March 28 1853, 40, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁸ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 11, Oct. 9 1858, 73, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁹ Annie [Mary Ann Gwyn] to Sade [Sarah Jones Lenoir], Dec. 3 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁰ M.J. Walker to Elizabeth DeRosset, Aug. 12 1836, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁶¹ For a range of examples of visiting patterns in the south, see Mahala Roach, Diary [Mississippi], Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC; Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary [Georgia], Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU; Ellen Louise Power, Diary [Louisiana], SHC; Angelina Selden Edrington, Diary [Virginia], Edrington Family Papers; Rebecca S.C. Pillsbury, Diary [Texas], SHC; Sally Lyons Taliaferro, Diary [North Carolina], William Booth Taliaferro Papers, SHC. For discussion of long visits, see Anne Jennings Wise to Mrs Henry Wise, undated [c.1837], Wise Family Papers, VHS; Coon [Emma Slade] to Kate, Oct. 8 1854, Coon [Emma Slade Prescott] to Kate, May 11 1860, Helen M. Blount Prescott Papers, SHC; Ellen [Mordecai] to Margaret Devereux, Dec. 19 [1842], Devereux Family Papers, DU; Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, April 6 1843, SHC.

example, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher quickly realised her dependency upon her ‘servant woman’ when she allowed the woman to attend a religious meeting. This not only meant that Lucy herself could not go, but left Lucy ‘troubled’ as she found herself ‘with no servant of 3 little children’ in 1857.¹⁶² In Mississippi, Mahala Roach often noted how she would have to take responsibility for her baby for Ailsie ‘to do her Saturdays’ work’, ‘to wosh’, when she was ill, or went to church.¹⁶³ Enslaved nurses were indispensable in that slaveholding mothers could both leave their children at home under a nurse’s supervision, and that a nurse could take a child on small excursions such as visiting other whites or attending church.¹⁶⁴

Accordingly, nurses’ mobility became closely tied to the will of their mistresses, and ‘favourite’ nurses and domestics were often chosen to make trips of various duration with the slaveholding family. Patsy Harris Wyatt expressed this privilege in the heat of the Virginian summer, 1852, as she explained ‘the family have moved over, to Dr Franks – for some respite, from sickness - until the sickly season is over’.¹⁶⁵ As Anne Porter wrote, many southern families made such ‘a tour every year with half a dozen of infants & two or three negro girls to take care of them’. Porter, then, was apparently unusual in finding this practice ‘ridiculous’.¹⁶⁶

While this travel could represent ‘privilege and mobility’, for many enslaved women (especially those with children), it was another form of forced movement.¹⁶⁷ Susan Dabney Smedes recalled how her mother, the mistress of a vast plantation in Mississippi, was forced to ‘regretfully’ make a ‘new list’ of slaves to accompany their family trip when she found some enslaved people had ‘the most clamorous’ reaction to their selection to travel. They did not want to be ‘torn from home and friends, perhaps husband and children’.¹⁶⁸ While Smedes undoubtedly related the tale to emphasise her mother’s benevolence, she revealed instead how enslaved mothers evidently resisted the dispersal of their families for large parts of the year and the distress this inflicted upon them.

Enslaved nurses were demanded to leave their own children in fulfilling this role for mistresses. A former slave named Malinda, for example, owned by a preacher in ‘Ca’lina’, remembered being separated from her mother when she ‘tuk long trips wid ole Mistis to de

¹⁶² Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, Sep. 27 1857, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

¹⁶³ Mahala Roach, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 53, Nov. 8 1856, 156, Dec. 27 1856, 183; vol. 54, Nov. 6 1857, 163; vol. 50, Sep. 28 1853, 113; vol. 55, May 15 1860, 237, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Octavia Wyche Otey, Diary, vol. 4, Sep. 30 1853, 13, Oct. 4 1853, 15, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC; Ellen Louise Power, Diary, Jan. 16 1862, 9, SHC; Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, April 8 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

¹⁶⁵ Patsy Harris Wyatt to [?], Aug. 29 1852, Doswell Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁶⁶ A. Porter to [?], June 15 1836, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁷ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 19.

¹⁶⁸ Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 109.

Blue Ridge Mountings and sometimes over de big water'.¹⁶⁹ Betty Guwn was a mother herself under slavery. Formerly enslaved on a tobacco plantation near Canton, Kentucky, she recalled how she spent some three months a year 'down with my Mistress' at her owners' other residence in Mississippi, near New Orleans. She remembered how this was 'a long time to be separated' from her husband and children.¹⁷⁰ Enslaved mothers bore the burdens of caring for their owners' children at direct cost to parenting their own, and the privileges slaveholding women enjoyed were entirely reliant upon curtailing enslaved women's own maternal roles in using enslaved mothers as nurses.

The sheer time enslaved women spent mothering white children is reflected in their charges' attachments. A young Cynthia Sills, for example, remarked in 1847 that a white child, Bob, 'calls Mary that is his nurse Ma'.¹⁷¹ Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset commented to her husband in 1842 that their 'fretful' baby, Luly, could only be consoled by an enslaved woman named Maria or herself, and thus expressed her desire for an additional nurse.¹⁷² Both Mary May Irving and Mahala Roach described their children as 'very fond' and 'so fond' of Liddy and Ailsie respectively.¹⁷³ Mistresses did not seem to express any resentment over their children's affections for their nurses. And, though slaveholding women's children's attachments show the regularity with which they were cared for by enslaved women and girls and nurses were clearly valuable to white mothers, this did not necessarily afford enslaved women any benefits.

While domestic servants were 'omnipresent and indispensable' to mistresses and 'the main reliance of white women in their arduous duties', enslaved nurses experienced amplified confinement and constant labour.¹⁷⁴ They often worked twenty-four hour days. Mary Lindsay remarked her when her mistress, 'was having and nursing her two children', the enslaved nurse 'old Vici' 'had to stay with her all the time'.¹⁷⁵ Slaveholding mothers, too, testified their use of slave women in this way. Laura Norwood ensured her enslaved nurse was on constant call. She was pleased to have 'Aunt Venus', who 'still keeps [the baby] at night' so Norwood could 'begin to sleep better'.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Mary Ferrand Henderson found her young baby was 'a very bad child in crying after me' and 'completely wears me out when I yield to him'. Fortunately for Mary, and less so for her enslaved nurse, Jane, Mary was able to 'give him up

¹⁶⁹ Malinda in 'Combined Interviews', *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 220.

¹⁷⁰ Betty Guwn, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 99.

¹⁷¹ Cynthia Sills to Louisa M. Sills, July 26 1847, Louisa M. Jelks Sills Papers, DU.

¹⁷² Eliza [Jane Lord DeRosset] to Dr A.J. DeRosset, Sep. 28 1842, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷³ Mary May Irving to Mary Dame, Nov. 18 1857, Dame Family Papers, VHS; Mahala Roach, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 54, July 23 1857, 109, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁴ Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (New York, 1895), 4, DocSouth; Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, 96.

¹⁷⁵ Mary Lindsay, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 180.

¹⁷⁶ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to Sarah J. [Jones] Lenoir, June 13 1844, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

to Jane [...] out of sight & hearing'.¹⁷⁷ In her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs recounted that her aunt, Nancy, was 'required' to sleep at the door of her mistress's bedroom, 'until one midnight she was forced to leave, to give premature birth to a child'. Nancy would, living in a doorway, give birth to six children. Harriet remarked how: 'I well remember her patient sorrow as she held the last dead baby in her arms'.¹⁷⁸

Thus an enslaved nurse's skill often only led to her being more confined to the white family. In Kentucky, for example, Mira Alexander was delighted with the skill of an enslaved woman named Charlotte as a nurse. She remarked to her cousin in 1849:

I do give Charlotte the preference for the management of children, few mothers combine gentleness and firmness as she does. Catharine is always ready to take her child so she never has an excuse for being away from Priscilla a moment [...] she sleeps in the nursery where I can hear her if she stirs.¹⁷⁹

Charlotte received a rare compliment as an enslaved mother from her mistress. Yet, this only led her to be further separated from her own child. Female slaveholders sought to control all aspects of enslaved women's mothering to their advantage, whether that was denigrating a mother-child bond in justifying their separation, or ensuring a 'good' mother was caring for a white child rather than their own. One can only imagine how Charlotte felt when she was forced to give her baby to Catharine and care for Priscilla. As Mira wrote, Charlotte had no excuse for being away from the child for 'a moment': her own child was quite literally taken from her so she could care for her owner's child instead. This happened on a daily basis in the slaveholding households of the south. Such intimate and painful interactions together formed the patterns of re-direction, prioritisation, and exploitation that characterised mother-work.

Mistresses' dependencies upon particular nurses could, however, minimise their likelihood of sale or hire. Yet, staying in the household was not necessarily preferable. As Mary Ferrand Henderson wrote of her baby's nurse in 1858:

she is high tempered dishonest & impertinent, her faults over balance her good qualities - she is a very bad negro & I ought to sell her - but is a good nurse &

¹⁷⁷ Mary Ferrand Henderson, *Diary*, vol. 2, part 8, Jan. 16 1857, 5, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁸ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 217-8.

¹⁷⁹ M.M. [Mira M. Alexander] to Agatha [Marshall Logan], Sep. 24 [1849], Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

the baby loves her - this misconduct cannot be soon over looked she shall be severely punished for it - I think she ought to be sold.¹⁸⁰

Henderson was clearly torn between her desire to be rid of the slave, and her reliance on her as a successful nurse. Many domestic slaves thus ended up in a limbo whereby their slaveholders were compelled to keep them, but they bore the brunt of both slaveholders' disdain and their attempts to 'reform' them.

Lizzie Bain was similarly in two minds when faced with an enslaved woman named Rose, who was a skilled nurse but apparently an antagonist of her mistress. Rose's expressions of love for her mother and 'all' at Lizzie's sister's household, through the slaveholding sisters' letters, might suggest she was hoping for a move to Lizzie's sister's household in Germantown, North Carolina.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, Lizzie hired Rose away. Rose was a 'hopeless case' (and an expense) with 'long established habits', so Lizzie sent her to where 'she will be managed properly'.¹⁸² Rose was 'very unwilling to go cries very much', but Lizzie reported a week later 'she is as well satisfied as she could be away from me'.¹⁸³ No matter Rose's feelings about her new 'home', she was returned to the Bains's around four months later. Lizzie had clearly grown reliant on her labour: her daughter Alice was 'at the most troublesome age' and Lizzie was 'compelled' to get the nurse back (though she would be disappointed to find Rose 'is worse than ever').¹⁸⁴ Had Rose been trying to escape the Bain household, this would have been disappointing, especially given that her young charge Alice had 'got to spitting in persons faces'.¹⁸⁵ Though mistresses' reliance on enslaved nurses might have problematised their being sold, even valued nurses could also be moved between networks of slaveholders as needs, desires, and economics dictated.

Nurses were also subject to the scrutiny of their slaveholders. Fanny Lawrence, for example, felt all of her enslaved nurses were negligent and remarked in February, 1850, that 'it is about as much as I can stand to have three such creatures to deal with as I have here' in New Orleans.¹⁸⁶ For something as minor as the loss of a child's new hat by an enslaved nurse named Caroline, Fanny resolved that 'she is getting spoilt here and the sooner she leaves the

¹⁸⁰ Mary Ferrand Henderson, *Diary*, vol. 2, part 11, Oct. 6 1858, 71-2, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁸¹ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], May 22 1857, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

¹⁸² Lizzie [Bain Partin] to mother, Jan. 6 1857, Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], Feb. 16 1858, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

¹⁸³ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], Feb. 16 1858, Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], Feb. 24 1858, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

¹⁸⁴ Lizzie [Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], June 22 1858, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

¹⁸⁵ L. [Lizzie Bain Partin] to sister [Molly Bain Bitting], March 31 1858, William T. Bain Papers, DU.

¹⁸⁶ Fanny [Frances E. Lawrence] to Henry [E. Lawrence], May 22 1850, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

better'.¹⁸⁷ Mary Ferrand Henderson also directed stern attention to a woman she had identified as a 'bad nurse'. 'She is smart and valuable', Henderson reflected in 1858, 'I must try to control her'.¹⁸⁸ Despite delegating childcare to enslaved women, then, white women were often suspicious of the quality of their care. Annie Gwyn, for example, speculated that her baby may have 'been pinched a little' by recalcitrant nurses, writing to her sister in 1854.¹⁸⁹ The ramifications of slaveholders' suspicions were often serious. Hector Godbold recalled how as an enslaved child nurse: 'My Missus gi'e me uh good beatin' one time when I did drap one uv dem baby. Jes put me head under her feet en beat me dat 'way'.¹⁹⁰ For those slaves with mistresses (or masters) quick to the whip, nursing work would have surely been characterised by a constant nervousness over the inevitable knocks and scratches infants incurred.

Slaveholding women's mothering was entirely reliant upon enslaved women's mother-work, and such practices of re-direction and commodification were completely normalised. Motherhood has certainly 'been an easy way to frame women's persistent oppression' and mothers established meaning, power, and identity in their roles.¹⁹¹ However, the extent to which slaveholding mothers' maternal roles were established through the exploitation of enslaved women must be emphasised. This is crucial in understanding the inextricability of women's privileges and disadvantages, and further affirms the problematic nature of similarising aspects of women's mothering or emphasising their bonds in this area. Intra-gendered maternal exploitation was systemic, and the image of Catherine's baby being taken from her to care for Priscilla serves as a poignant reminder of what this routinely entailed for enslaved mothers.

Enslaved women like Catherine bore the burden of mother-work that was not even for their own families. The overnight nature of this work, and the forced travel it often entailed, gives some indication of how costly re-directed mothering was for enslaved women as well as the proximity it demanded between them and their owners. Mistresses' discussion of their childcare arrangements also draws attention to the fact that they actually gave very little detail to where their nurses lived, whether they had children, or details of children when their nurses were mothers. They are silences indicative of the role enslaved nurses took in their owners' lives: mother-workers, not mothers. Enslaved nurses thus often appear in slaveholding women's diaries and correspondence in fleeting glimpses. After a five-year silence in her diary,

¹⁸⁷ F.E.L. [Frances E. Lawrence] to Henry [E. Lawrence], Feb. 1850, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁸ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 11, Oct. 23 1858, 80, Henderson Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁹ Annie [Mary Anne Gwyn] to S.J. [Sarah Jones] Lenoir, March 14 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁹⁰ Hector Godbold, *TAS SSI*, Oklahoma Narratives, 12, 5, 144.

¹⁹¹ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 269.

however, Elizabeth Perry gave some description of her household in Greenville, South Carolina:

Minerva cooks & milks & one day in the week washes. Eliza irons, sews, puts the house to rights & cooks the day Minerva washes. Delia minds the baby & one day in the week assists Minerva in washing. Lindy waits in the house, & helps take care of the children [...] The rest are children too young yet to be of service.¹⁹²

Minerva and Eliza were mothers themselves: Minerva had two young children (Charlotte and John) and Eliza had three children (Edward, Clara, and Sarah). Elizabeth, however, found Eliza a ‘great trouble’. She denigrated her relationship with her children, declaring; ‘she is such a bad example to her children, they would do much better without her’. Six-year-old Clara, Perry felt, already ‘promises to be pest’.¹⁹³ These could be foreboding signs of imminent attempts at family dispersal. As for most enslaved domestics, Eliza’s work for her owners’ family was imposed upon her as a duty more important than parenting her own children, who were always vulnerable to the interventions of slaveholders.

How these enslaved mothers felt about the mother-work they were performing for their mistresses is difficult to ascertain through Perry’s and others’ testimony, though the Perry’s was clearly a household fraught with tension. Enslaved women deprived of time with and material resources for their own children of course resented supporting another woman’s family, though. A mother in Greenville, North Carolina, wrote a letter to her sister, Sophie Manly, illuminating this. She complained about an enslaved woman who was a ‘slow coach’ and the:

very little work I get, for every time I go in the kitchen she’s sewing up a little rage - I told her the other day to make herself easy, for she should have all the clothes that Lilly had worn out & she would get them in plenty time - upon hearing which she seemed better reconciled.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² In March 1838, Perry was heavily pregnant and about to assume housekeeping, having just hired a cook ‘from Mrs Croft’. By March 1844, the Perry family had some eleven servants (and three children). Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 28 1838, March 11 1844, March 15 1844, SHC.

¹⁹³ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 15 1844, SHC.

¹⁹⁴ Sis Co [Cora Manly Singeltary] to Soph [Sophie Manly], March 2 1856, Manly Family Papers, SHC.

By describing the woman's need for clothes in 'time', it seems this enslaved woman was pregnant. She certainly appeared to resent labouring for her mistress's child, Lilly, and was only 'reconciled' with some promise that her own child would receive some clothes, albeit 'clothes that Lilly had worn out'. This was the type of mother-work that was appropriated and re-directed by mistresses on a day-to-day basis. Mistresses appropriated both productive labours and nurturing ones.

Former slave Katie Sutton provided a rare insight into how enslaved women experienced these routinised interventions in an interview with the Federal Writers' Project. She told her interviewer how as a child:

My mammy had to spend so much of her time at humoring the little white chilluns that she scarcely ever had time to sing her own babies to sleep. Old Missus and Young Missus told the little slave chilluns that the stork brought the white babies, but that slave chilluns were all hatched out from buzzard's eggs, and we believed it.¹⁹⁵

Sutton's mother had clearly related to her the pain and frustration of re-directed mothering. She also explained how her mistresses provided 'the little slave chilluns' a birth narrative that represented the differences between them and 'the white babies'. Rather than allowing reproduction to be understood as a commonality, slaveholders ensured that this experience was racialised. Mistresses thus extended their techniques of differentiation to encompass mothering not simply through practice, but ideologically too. Rather than southerners using '[n]arratives of birth and motherhood' 'to link people together', to return to Vera Lynn Kennedy's argument, they were used to set them apart.¹⁹⁶

Sutton's discussion of her mother's sentiment continued in her relation of a song that her interviewer noted as a 'lullaby':

¹⁹⁵ Katie Sutton, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 210.

¹⁹⁶ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 4.

A snow white stork flew down from the sky,
Rock-a-bye my baby, bye:
To take a baby gal so fair,
To young Missus, waitin' there;
When all was quiet as a mouse,
In old Massa's big fine house.

Dat little white gal was borned rich and free,
She's de sap from out a sugah tree;
But you are jes as sweet to me,
My little colored chile.
Jes lay your head upon my bres'
And res, and res, and res, and res,
My little colored chile.

To a cabin in a woodland drear,
You've come, a mammy's heart to cheer;
In this ole slave's cabin,
Your hands my heartstrings grabbin;
Jes lay your head upon my bres,
Jes snuggle close and res, and res,
My little colored chile.

Yo daddy ploughs old Massa's corn
You mammy does de cookin'
She'll give dinner to her hungry chile,
Wyen no body is lookin,
Don't be ashamed my child I beg;
'case you was hatched from a buzzard's egg,
My little colored chile.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Katie Sutton, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 210-1.

The song again iterates the significance of these birth-narratives. Not only was reproduction racialised, but the song relates the different values children were afforded dependent upon their birth of ‘buzzard’s egg’ or ‘snow white stork’. Moreover, as a lullaby, this song was intended to be sung from parent to child. The mother-figure thus related an incredibly powerful message to her enslaved child: that despite these degrading narratives, the enslaved child should feel loved and unashamed. An act of theft from the slaveholder for her child, and her insistence that ‘you are jes as sweet to me’, emphasised to young children that despite mother’s time with the white child, her love and her loyalty was with her own.

Katie Sutton’s memory provides great insight into the way in which enslaved mothers sought to impart their children’s worth and their love for their children in a system that sought to deny it. Her mother, who nursed white children but had ‘scarcely ever had time’ for nurturing her own, was among countless enslaved mothers who did the same. The re-direction of enslaved women’s mothering was not necessarily done with intentional malice, but mistresses’ ingrained sense of superiority and entitlement, and their lack of value for enslaved women’s bonds with their children. It happened with such frequency that the use of enslaved nurses was absolutely customary in the slaveholding south, and one of the most unsettling characteristics of these practices are their absolute normalcy. It is important not to lose sight of enslaved women’s experiences of this, despite its ordinariness, and despite the lack of testimony that speaks to this crucial aspect of enslaved women’s maternal exploitation.

v. Child labour

Yet, just as women like Mahala Roach’s use of ‘little’ Ailsie indicates, many enslaved nurses were not mothers. In fact, mistresses’ desires for slave children as nurses was a central aspect of their demands for child-labour that so frequently separated children from their families at strikingly young ages. Of course, family dispersal was characteristic of slavery as an institution, and one third of ‘children (aged fourteen and under) would have been separated from one or both parents by the trade’.¹⁹⁸ The end of the transatlantic trade together with westward expansion and the monumental increases in cotton production meant the likelihood of such separations increased across the antebellum period. Family separations were especially common on the often financially-unstable smallholdings of the upper-south, and the prioritisation of male slaves increased the likelihood of female-headed households: ‘Only one-

¹⁹⁸ Tadman, ‘The Persistent Myth of Paternalism’, 14.

fifth of the Appalachian slave households were complete families in which parents and children resided together' and 'nearly two-thirds of all Appalachian slave sales separated children from their families'.¹⁹⁹ Historians have suggested, however, that 'the number of young children sold apart from parents was never large'.²⁰⁰

Mistresses' demands for child labour in their households thus extended the reach of familial separations beyond where the slave-trade would otherwise reach, because children as young as three and four were commonly removed from their parents for the purposes of household servitude. The extent of mistresses' reliance upon child labour, its nature, and its effects on enslaved children (and mothers), however, has rarely been centralised.²⁰¹ Though Wilma Dunaway notes the practice of removing of children for house-service, for instance, she states that 'masters selected them to be child laborers in their houses'.²⁰² Yet, this was a female-centred practice. Slaveholding women's relationships with slave children far from resembled a 'tangle of compassion and economics', and mistresses were central in the systematic separation of enslaved children from their parents for slave labour.²⁰³ Mistresses were often given child slaves, but they also removed children from their parents within plantations, from their own family members' slaveholdings, as well as procuring and proffering child labour in their informal networks of slave-trading. This was primarily in the spirit of raising skilled labourers and faithful slaves while seeking to capitalise upon even the youngest enslaved people's work. That '[t]he number of children – girls especially – assigned to house service exceeded the number who would practice the occupation in adulthood', suggests they also did so with cash value in mind.²⁰⁴

While the study of child slaves certainly 'adds a different dimension to the study of domestic slaves', the 'bittersweet' nature of domestic servitude for children can be explored in more depth.²⁰⁵ Mistresses' use and abuse of child slaves is best understood as both a form of child-exploitation and an aspect of enslaved women's maternal exploitation. Indeed, mistresses' use of child labour gives insights into several important aspects of enslaved women's maternal exploitation. Firstly, this female-centred intervention expressed mistresses'

¹⁹⁹ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 63; Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 260.

²⁰⁰ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 89.

²⁰¹ Katy Simpson Smith and Vera Lynn Kennedy, for example, give attention to forcible separations of parents and children and childcare arrangements for slaves but give little discussion of the specific roles of white women in this. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese makes some discussion of mistresses' use of enslaved girls' labour, and mentions their 'mothers' distress', but does not explore this in further depth. See Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 246-9; Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 86-90; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 152.

²⁰² Dunaway, *Women, Work and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 261.

²⁰³ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 90.

²⁰⁴ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 118. Jonathan Martin suggests hiring of enslaved children resembled an 'apprenticeship system', where young girls were hired away explicitly to be trained as domestic servants for future service. Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 62-3.

²⁰⁵ King, *Stolen Childhood*, 84.

labour interests in slave children, and emphasises their utter disregard for enslaved mothers' bonds with their children. Furthermore, child nurses and likely domestic servants were often taken from 'the quarters', evidencing the ways in which slaveholding women's maternal exploitation of female slaves affected mothers who did not even work directly under the supervision of their mistresses. Mistresses that fractured mother-child relationships in this way also demonstrate how maternal exploitation extended long into slaves' lives as mothers. Fathers, grandparents, siblings, and fictive kin could also be deeply affected by the removal of child kin and maternal exploitation thus reverberated widely throughout enslaved communities.

Finally, mistresses' roles in child-labour practices also give insights into the role of labour in slave children's lives. Damian Alan Pargas suggests that the variations in the age that slave children were introduced to slave labour across the south, as observed through comparative study, can be apportioned to 'the economic and cultural diversity of the slave South'.²⁰⁶ The household, however, to reiterate Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's argument, 'operated under similar structural constraints' across the south, 'notwithstanding differences in degree'.²⁰⁷ Thus, household child-labour practices were a intervention into slave childhood that was common across the southern region to a greater or lesser extent.

Children who were 'raised' in the house were typically separated from their own families. Mistresses' desires for child-servants reflected the slaveholders' understanding that 'the best way to develop good house servants, who were notoriously difficult to come by, was to raise them'.²⁰⁸ As such, mistresses focused considerable time and energy on choosing child slaves for domestic service and 'developing' them as skilled labourers. Virginian slaveholder Letitia Burwell explained her mother chose children between ages ten and twelve who were 'most obliging in disposition and quickest at learning' to bring into the house.²⁰⁹ As Adeline Blakely's mistress believed, by taking a five-year-old enslaved child from her parents to her new home in Fayetteville, Arkansas, 'she could raise me as she wanted me to be'.²¹⁰ These children were 'investments' as future skilled domestic servants. Mahala Jewel similarly recognised that she was raised in the house for her future value: her mistress, a slaveholder of Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 'said I was gwin have to wait on her when she got old'.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Damian Alan Pargas, 'From the Cradle to the Fields: Slave Childcare and Childhood in the Antebellum South', *Slavery & Abolition*, 32, 4 (2011), 478.

²⁰⁷ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 68.

²⁰⁸ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 153.

²⁰⁹ Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 4.

²¹⁰ Adeline Blakely, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 182. See also Delia Thompson, *FWP*, South Carolina, XIV, 4, 160; Adah Isabelle Suggs, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 90.

²¹¹ Mahala Jewel, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 317.

Enslaved children were demanded to work in various capacities. Texan plantation mistress Ann Raney Thomas Coleman, for example, recalled that her ‘little negro girl’, Adeline, only six years old, was a nurse to her child as well as a seasonal cotton picker. Adeline was threatened, scolded, and whipped, often running away.²¹² Coleman, however, felt that she was an understanding mistress to Adeline. Inherent to these mother-child separations was the belief that black children were better off with slaveholders than their own kin. The extent to which they believed their own rhetoric is questionable, but as Mary Ferrand Henderson and Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher’s comments in Chapter One have shown, household servitude was considered a privilege enslaved women were expected to recognise through life-long subservience.

Mistresses typically selected enslaved children for house service who were of an age they thought would be of use to them, and they rarely took children simply to dote upon them. Iran Nelson, for example, remembered, it was only ‘when I got big enough’ that her mistress was ‘goin’ take me for a house girl’.²¹³ This is indicative of the ways white women utilised black women’s mothering to their advantage: such ties could be severed when an enslaved child was deemed suitably useful to a slaveholder. Though slave children were more likely to be taken for house service when they were able to assume a role in labour rather than prove a childcare burden, this, as aforementioned, could be as young as age three or four, only marginally older than the infants they complained encumbered household labour routines.²¹⁴

Former slaves from across the south remembered their early introductions to slave labour. Mary Flagg ‘was raised up in a hotel’ in Winchester, Mississippi, and recalled how her mistress ‘took me away from my mother when I was four years old’ to be her ‘body servant’.²¹⁵ Evidently, mistresses’ use of child-labour far exceeded nursing work or that directly related to mothering. However, it was a central aspect of their roles, and this is emphasised in white women’s common descriptions of their nurses as ‘small’, ‘little’, and ‘girl’.²¹⁶ Ellen Betts, enslaved near Opelousas, Louisiana, for example, began nursing early in her childhood. Aged seven or eight, she nursed white and black children, and ‘had to tote de feet while ‘nother gal tote de head’. ‘I was sech a li’l one’, she remembered, and ‘nuss so many chillen it done went

²¹² Ann Raney Thomas Coleman, ‘The History of Her Life’, 17, DU.

²¹³ Iran Nelson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 203.

²¹⁴ 48% of WPA informants who discussed child labour began working before age seven. Richard Steckel adds that enslaved children were ‘extraordinarily small’ and ‘below most of the average heights observed these days for children in the poorest populations of developing countries’. Richard H. Steckel, ‘Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States’, in David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (eds), *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), 44, 48.

²¹⁵ Mary Flagg, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 312.

²¹⁶ See, for example, Lizzie [Bain Partin] to mother, Jan. 6 1857, William T. Bain Papers, DU; Mahala Roach, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 50, 38, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC; Anne C. Holmes Black to Catherine Price, June 5 1846, Elizabeth J. Blanks Papers, DU; Mary E. Bateman, Diary, May 15 1856, 56, SHC.

an stunted my growth'.²¹⁷ Girls, especially, were socialised into roles of 'care'. Sallie Crane remembered being so small a nurse (she was seven or eight years old) that she could 'barely lift the baby' and 'would have to drag them 'round' on Harmon Bishop's plantation in Hempstead County, Arkansas. She explained: 'I was jus' a young girl and I couldn't keep track of all them chilen' and 'they would whip me all day for it'.²¹⁸

The young age at which this labour evidently began poses serious challenges to assertions that enslaved children 'did little that can easily be called work', 'enjoyed considerable freedom', or 'enjoyed light work loads and an appreciable amount of time for play'.²¹⁹ Likewise, that '[d]aughters of plantation owners began their working lives at a much earlier age than slave women did' overlooks the differences in the nature and extent of slave children's work, and that it was uniquely characterised by forced filial separation and systematised abuse.²²⁰ The roles of child slaves far exceeded, though it certainly included, 'a variety of chores'.²²¹ This work was not easy for enslaved children.

Not all slaves' 'raised' in the whites' house remembered their experiences wholly negatively, though. While 'raising' enslaved children in the big house certainly served an important function in socialising and training young slaves, such circumstances could also occur in the event of the death of a biological mother, especially if another slave was unable to raise the enslaved child. Some mistresses who took enslaved children to be 'raised' in the house clearly treated them relatively well, and enslaved children could be indulged by mistresses who they remembered with affection.²²² Though the material advantages of household servitude were by no means guaranteed, children in the house could receive preferable clothing and sometimes better food than other slaves.²²³ Mistresses' 'indulging' slave children in the household was, however, often part of their broader attempts to encourage the affection of young slaves and foster a sense of her own nurturing role. Small gestures exemplified this, whether it was throwing 'dimes to de nigger chillen jes' like feedin' chickens' or sprinkling 'sugar on the meat block' for 'little niggers', kind words and pats on the head, or gifts of candy and apples.²²⁴

²¹⁷ Ellen Betts, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 76-7.

²¹⁸ Sallie Crane, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, 2, 2, 52-3. See also Pauline Howell, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 341; Mary Divine, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 103.

²¹⁹ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 8; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 152, 156.

²²⁰ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 8.

²²¹ King, *Stolen Childhood*, 24.

²²² See, for example, Louis Lucas, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 297; Lizzie Hill, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 176; Maggie Broyles, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 324-5; Mary Myhand, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 178; Georgia Smith, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 3, 279-80.

²²³ Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*, 34.

²²⁴ Ellen Betts, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 78; Bob Benford, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 146; Samuel Boulware, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 66; Bob Maynard, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 225; Mariah Calloway, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 174.

Being ‘raised’ in the slaveholding household was sometimes regarded as a mark of distinction. Formerly enslaved near Nashville, Tennessee, Henry Walker, for example, remarked that ‘[w]hite folks raised me up [...] taught me to do right and I ain’t forgot it’. He was sure to inform his interviewer, though: ‘I didn’t like slavery’.²²⁵ Millie Evans felt more strongly. Formerly enslaved on a large plantation in North Carolina, she felt that she ‘had the bes’ mistress an’ maser in the worl’ and they was Christian fo’ks an they taught us to be Christian like too’. Millie was well-aware that she was only ‘raised’ by her mistress, however, because ‘[m]y Ma had to work hard’.²²⁶ Some former slaves came to think of their mistresses in a motherly manner nevertheless. Lizzie Dunn, for instance, stated her mistress was ‘next to our own mother’ on a small farm near Hernando, Mississippi. In Washington, Wilkes County, Georgia, on a large plantation, Mariah Callaway’s mother died and she was raised by her grandmother. Her mistress ‘often told me that she was my mother and was supposed to look after me’.²²⁷

In these cases, children appear to have formed bonds with their slaveholders, but this did not mitigate that these were relationships generally produced by separating children from their families. Even close relationships were in the context of ownership, and seeking to foster dependency and devotion was in the spirit of developing loyal slaves. Formerly enslaved in New Orleans, Dianah Watson’s ‘old missy done take me from my mammy when I’s a small baby and raised me to a full-growned woman’. She recalled that she ‘slep’ in the same room with my young missy and had a good time in slavery, didn’t suffer for nothin’ and never was cut and slashed like some’. She stated, however, that this was as her young mistress’s ‘own nigger slave’.²²⁸ That Dianah related to her interviewer that her mistress had ‘taken’ her from her mother is also significant. Dianah’s fond memories of her mistress reveal how good treatment did not preclude the fact that their relations were proprietary ones, and they were also at the cost of one’s relationship with their own parents. Dianah also recalled that when she saw her mother sold later in her childhood, upon asking her mistress why, she responded: ‘To go to her husband’.²²⁹ The woman was disinclined to allow Dianah to join her mother, and instead, felt Dianah was privileged in her position. As other slaves delighted at their emancipation, the mistress told her: ‘They been in slavery but you don’t know what slavery is, Dianah’.²³⁰

²²⁵ Henry Walker, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 30.

²²⁶ Millie Evans, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 242.

²²⁷ Lizzie Dunn, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 221; Mariah Callaway, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 174. For further descriptions of mistress-slave relationships resembling mother-child ones, see Laura Thornton, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 323; Jane Osbrook, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 232; Dolly Haynes, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 259.

²²⁸ Dianah Watson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 144.

²²⁹ Dianah Watson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 145.

²³⁰ Dianah Watson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 146.

These relationships, then, were important to mistresses in fostering their own sense of benevolence, yet were entirely reliant upon their manipulation of enslaved mother-child relationships for their own benefit. The removal of enslaved children from their families provided an opportunity to isolate enslaved children. One enslaved child, Armaci, was so confined by her white owners that she developed into a ‘passive, submissive, and hardworking’ slave. The child became ‘afraid to leave’ with her own father.²³¹ Formerly enslaved near Richmond, Virginia, Julia Williams explained how slaveholders used enslaved children’s isolation to exploit them as labourers. She remembered her mistress liked her, ‘she ‘didn suffer for anything befoh dim Yankees come’, and she was never sold. But this ‘favouritism’ came at great cost. Julia ‘was nevah lowed to go out and soshiate with de othah slaves much. I was in de house all time’. She added: ‘I nevah had time foh play. Mrs. she keep me busy and I work when I jus little girl and all mah life’.²³² Formerly enslaved in Raleigh, North Carolina, Betty Foreman Chessier similarly described her childhood without her mother in the ‘Big House’ as if ‘I was almost in prison’. Betty ‘didn’t never stay with my mammy doing of slavery’ but lived in the big house, sleeping on the floor under a dining room table with three other slaves. She related that she was clothed, fed, and seldom whipped, but remembered the loss of her childhood: ‘I couldn’t play with any of the darkies and I doesn’t remember playing in my life when I was a little girl’.²³³

Mistresses prioritised enslaved children as labourers and even ‘pets’ would find their privileges tenuous and often short-lived. Of course, many former slaves rejected any suggestion that they had been ‘raised’ by their mistresses as anything other than slaves. Jermain Wesley Loguen wrote to his mistress in 1860 refuting such a claim, demanding of her: ‘Woman, did you raise your own children for the market?’²³⁴ Despite her amicable relations with the slaveholding children, Harriet Gresham also expressed the inextricability of social relations from the context of human ownership. ‘Somethin allus happened though to remind me dat I was jist a piece of property’, she remembered.²³⁵ The differences between enslaved and free children were clear. Emma L. Howard was ‘brung up in de house wid the white chillun’ on the Shepherd plantation in Lowndes County, Alabama, visiting her mother just twice a week for a bath. Emma’s slaveholders, she recalled, ‘was both good’, yet she recited a song that suggests the constancy of the fear of one’s sale or separation. It was ‘one of de saddest songs we sung

²³¹ Brenda Stevenson, ‘Distress and Discord in Virginia Slave Families, 1830-1861’, in Bleser (ed.), *In Joy and In Sorrow*, 106.

²³² Julia Williams, *FWP*, Ohio Narratives, XII, 105-6.

²³³ Betty Foreman Chessier, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 30-1.

²³⁴ Jermain Wesley Loguen, *The Rev. J.W. Loguen, as a Slave and as a Freeman. A Narrative of Real Life* (Syracuse, NY, 1859), 452-5, DocSouth.

²³⁵ Harriet Gresham, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 156.

durin' slavery days', she explained, that 'always did make me cry':

Mammy, is Ol' Masssa gwin'er sell us tomorrow?

Yes, my chile.

What he gwin'er sell us?

Way down South in Georgia.²³⁶

For many children 'raised' in the house, it was the separation from their parents that shaped their memories of their early introduction to this labour. Many separations occurred within the boundaries of slaveholdings or family networks of slaveholdings. However, even for those slave children nearby to their parents, visits to their own mothers were seriously restricted, as Emma L. Howard's experience suggests. Similarly, Adeline Willis worked as a child 'waiting in the house' while 'her mother worked in the field'. But '[t]he first thing I recollect', she told her interviewer, 'is my love for my Mother'. 'I loved her so and would cry when I couldn't be with her'.²³⁷ Much as Genia Woodbery remembered, even a relatively kind mistress did not allay the pain of being apart from one's family. She remembered how nursing the white children: 'make me hu't lak in me bosom to be wid my ole mammy back up dere in de quarter. It jes lak dis, I wuz jes uh child den en yuh know it uh child happiness to be raise up wid dey mammy'.²³⁸

Whatever 'perks' domestic servitude sometimes brought, then, often paled into insignificance owing to children's isolation. Those nearby their mothers sought ways to continue spending time with them. Hannah Fambro remembered that after she was given to her newly married mistress as a child, she would sneak out of her owners' house and travel one mile to her mother's home, where she would 'stay all night an' sleep wid my mammy, but I run back again befo' daylight so I don' get whipt'.²³⁹ Mothers and their children constantly sought to resist mistresses' attempts at realigning their familial bonds with those of ownership. While the removals of children from their parents were certainly difficult for children, as Wilma Dunaway cautions, 'we should be careful not to anesthetize our research to the long-term impacts of separations upon enslaved women'.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Emma L. Howard, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 211.

²³⁷ Adeline Willis, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4 162-3.

²³⁸ Genia Woodbery, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 220.

²³⁹ Hannah Fambro, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 333. Others' journeys back to mothers were much longer. See Elizabeth, *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman* (Philadelphia, PA, 1863), 3-4, DocSouth.

²⁴⁰ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 81.

Mothers deeply grieved the long-term interventions of their mistresses into their relationships with their children. A former slave of Orange County, North Carolina, Sarah Debro was 'raised' by her mistress. She recalled that:

I was kept at de big house to wait on Mis' Polly, to tote her basket of keys an' such as dat. Whenever she seed a chile down in de quarters dat she wanted to raise be hand, she took dem up to de big house an' trained dem. I wuz to be a house maid. De day she took me my mammy cried kaze she knew I would never be 'lowed to live at de cabin wid her no more.²⁴¹

Sarah's mother's tears, as she was aware in her adulthood at least, reflected her realisation that her mistress was taking her child from her. That Sarah provided her interviewer with the context of her household position - the separation from her mother - is once again significant. This was either a poignant memory of Sarah's, or something that her mother had related to her in later life. Sarah herself seemed to remember Polly without the same bitterness as her mother: she recalled that in the slaveholding household they had clean starched clothes and sheets, and 'even ham to eat' (though Polly 'made us niggers mind an' we had to keep clean').²⁴² Similarly, formerly enslaved in Alabama, Lizzie Hill was raised in the house as a nurse to her owners' children. She also seemed to grow somewhat attached to her mistress, and together with her disdain for field work, when her mother took her 'to work in de field' she persistently returned to her mistress with whom she wanted to stay.²⁴³ Mistresses that provided things that mothers could not, then, were sometimes effective in convincing children of the benefits of their new work positions. The coercive mechanisms of mistresses could be masterfully deployed, and were causes of enduring trauma for enslaved mothers.

Indeed, while enslaved children's understanding of the perks of household service generally gave way quite rapidly, their mothers acutely understood their mistresses' nature, intentions, and what might await their young children in the slaveholding household. Sarah Debro's mother clearly held quite a different opinion of Polly as the woman who took her child from her, as did other women on the plantation. A young Sarah had lamented Polly's distress during the Civil War, for example, and an enslaved woman named Charity had corrected the child that Polly was only 'skeered we's goin' to be sot free'.²⁴⁴ These distinctions between

²⁴¹ Sarah Debro, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 248.

²⁴² Sarah Debro, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 248-9.

²⁴³ Lizzie Hill, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 176. Similarly, see Pete Johnson, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 97.

²⁴⁴ Sarah Debro, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 250.

children's feelings and those of adult enslaved women illuminate some of the ways in which the young age of Federal Writers' Project informants under slavery shaped testimony of maternal exploitation.

For those women who were mothers themselves, or recalled their mothers' memories, their mistresses' removals of their children into the 'big house' were marked by concern and grief. Their resentment was centred not only upon their separation from their children, but the way these women and their families treated vulnerable children. For some mothers, this was because of their children's early introduction to slave labour. One unnamed former slave interviewed in Georgia recalled her mistress 'was very mean to all of us' and 'didn't like me at all'. She explained that '[s]he took my baby child and put her in the house with her to nurse her baby and make fire. And all the while she was in the house with her and she had to sleep on the floor'.²⁴⁵ The mother clearly resented the treatment of her child for labour in this way. Her concerns were likely amplified by her own suffering of physical abuse from her mistress. Formerly enslaved in Montgomery, Alabama, Mattie Brown similarly related her mother's feelings about her sister, a young girl who 'was the regular little nurse girl for mother's mistress'. The child tended a 'sickly and fretful' white baby 'all night long'. Mattie's mother stated her daughter 'was too young to have to do that way', and though she 'said she had good owners', she 'stole' her daughter 'away the first year of the Civil War'.²⁴⁶

Mattie's mother removed her child from her mistress at the earliest opportunity. But many enslaved mothers had little ability to keep their children from their mistresses. Formerly enslaved on a farm near Paris in Monroe County, Missouri, Margaret Nickens was taken by a young mistress, who Margaret explained 'had only one slave to do de cooking and she took me for to be de nurse'. There was little Margaret's mother could do. She 'had to stand dere like I wasn't her's and all she could say was "Be a good girl, Margaret"'.²⁴⁷ Mistresses' labour demands thus intruded into one of the experiences mothers sought most ardently to protect: childhood.

Concerned mothers had good reason. Mistresses were often abusive to enslaved children. Enslaved mothers often whipped their own children, though these were seldom excessive punishments. While whites physically punished their own children, this was generally spankings and even whippings were certainly different both in nature and extent

²⁴⁵ Unnamed informant, 'Mistreatment of Slaves', *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 299.

²⁴⁶ Mattie Brown, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 301.

²⁴⁷ Margaret Nickens, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 263. Similarly, see Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 6.

when given to slave children.²⁴⁸ Enslaved children, however, were frequently punished by mistresses, and punishments could escalate to extreme cruelty. Much like for adults, physical punishments were frequently given both to discipline and to train, but this did not lessen the severity of this violence. Formerly enslaved in Missouri, Mattie Jackson was sold to slaveholders where the mistress was ‘constantly pulling our ears, snapping us with her thimble, rapping us on the head and the sides of it’. Sold aged five to a mistress in Benton, Texas, Fannie Brown remembered in her being taught ‘to spin and weave’ she ‘git many a whippin’ ‘fore [she] could do it good’.²⁴⁹ Children may have been even more frequently physically abused than adults, owing both to mistresses’ ‘training’ approach to children and children’s inability to resist or retaliate with as much physical vigour.

For many children, then, mistresses were formidable figures. Lucy Ruggles observed that when Mrs Holmes, a slaveholder in South Carolina who Ruggles worked for as a governess, ‘gave out clothes to the negroes’, she was holding a yardstick, and ‘when the children were called they screamed and clung to their mothers’. The woman had to entice the children to her with pieces of bread.²⁵⁰ The children on the Holmes plantation were clearly terrified of Mrs Holmes. The violence directed towards children could be routine or sporadic, light or severe, and took the same range that the violence directed towards adults did.

Enslaved children suffered a range of sadistic abuse at the hands of mistresses. They were beaten, pinched, kicked, slapped, and hit with various instruments.²⁵¹ Mistresses ‘justified’ this abuse with the same narrative of its necessity, its deservedness, and its improving effects, but with the added notion of parental responsibility. Dinah Cunningham, for example, was a nurse near Ridgeway, South Carolina, for the Robertson family. She rolled over on the child, Lurany, who ‘make a squeal like she was much hurt and mistress come in a hurry’. Her mistress whipped her with a switch of myrtle bush ‘and us had it ‘round dat room’. The beating was so severe that Dinah still bore the scars over her legs in her old age. Yet, the mistress had informed the child that this was the word of the bible: to ‘spare de rod’ was to ‘spoil de child’.²⁵² The frequency with which mistresses physically abused enslaved children emphasises the primacy of slaveholding women’s own interests in efficient and valuable slave

²⁴⁸ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 40; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 280; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 110.

²⁴⁹ Jackson, *Story of Mattie J. Jackson*, 7; Fannie Brown, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 214; Lila Nichols, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 148.

²⁵⁰ Lucy Ruggles, *Diary*, Nov. 23 1845, 181, DU.

²⁵¹ See, for example, Lizzie Farmer, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 97; Harriett Robinson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 271; Annie Page, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 235; Harriet Casey, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 75; Mary Estes Peters, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 325; Carrie Bradley Logan Bennet, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 150; Alice Davis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, IV, 4, 97; Unnamed informant, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 95; Prince, *History of Mary Prince*, 7; Albert, *House of Bondage*, 30.

²⁵² Dinah Cunningham, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 234-5.

labourers, rather than any identification with their mothers.

Near-pubescent and pubescent children brought additional worries to their mothers: former slaves discussed sexual abuse and rape beginning early in life, ‘at puberty’ or when ‘she was jes’ a small girl’.²⁵³ As one Federal Writers’ Project interviewer wrote, enslaved women were acutely aware of the sexual practices of white men and: ‘The mothers naturally resisted this terrible practice and [the interviewee’s mother] was determined to prevent her child being victimized’.²⁵⁴ Mattie J. Jackson similarly remembered her mothers’ interventions into the abuses of slaveholders. A master who was asked to beat Mattie by her mistress, found that Mattie’s mother ‘interfered’: she could ‘usually defend herself against one man, and both of us would overpower him’.²⁵⁵ Enslaved mothers were watchful of their children and attempted to shield them from the abuses of slavery, and the removal of children into the ‘big house’ often rendered such efforts deeply limited.

Removal from kinship networks placed children at risk of isolation and alienation, and removed them from the protection, socialisation, and resistance that enslaved families and communities fostered.²⁵⁶ Many children ‘raised’ in the house found that they suffered ostracism from the enslaved community or lived in a ‘tug-of-war’ between family and owners.²⁵⁷ Formerly enslaved in Georgia, Henrietta Williams, for example, learned quickly that her acknowledgement of her relations with whites would not gain her any friends. She remembered: ‘I often told the niggers the white folks raised me. The niggers tell me, “Yes, the white folks raise you but the niggers is going to kill you”’.²⁵⁸ Mistresses sought to impart in enslaved child labourers values that were often in direct conflict to those of enslaved mothers, families, and communities. Their attempts to teach ‘manners’ and ‘morality’, their ‘teaching slaves domestic skills’ and ‘raising children’, generally did not overlap with ‘those of slave children’s own families’, as Marli Weiner suggests. Mistresses may have believed their ‘care and concern’ to be ‘appropriate and necessary’, but it was self-interested, abusive, and relied upon the separations of mothers and their children in the spirit of cultivating efficient,

²⁵³ Adah Isabelle Suggs, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 190; Molly Kinsey quoted in Spencer R. Crew, Lonnie G. Bunch, Clement A. Price (eds), *Slave Culture: A Documentary Collection of the Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers Project*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA, 2014), 833.

²⁵⁴ Lauana Creel in interview with Adah Isabelle Suggs, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 190.

²⁵⁵ Jackson, *Story of Mattie J. Jackson*, 12.

²⁵⁶ George Rawick, for example, identified the important role of enslaved communities in protecting and socialising children, and Leslie Schwalm identifies that house slaves ‘were less able to share the risks or benefits of their positions’ and ‘could neither contribute to nor derive benefit from the solidarity among field slaves’. George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, CT, 1972), 90; Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*, 31.

²⁵⁷ King, ‘Rais’ Your Children Up Rite’, 147.

²⁵⁸ Henrietta Williams, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 163.

compliant, and skilled slaves.²⁵⁹ The child was encouraged to align with their slaveholder above their kin.

Household servitude also often did not garner the advantages one might have expected, even for children. Some women who had been enslaved in whites' households as children remembered that sleeping on floors, hunger, and beatings meant '[o]ur days was constant misery to us'.²⁶⁰ Many children lived lives confined to the house and coloured by the unrelenting demands of domestic labour. Born a slave in Alabama, Sarah Douglas was 'raised' by her mistress after the death of her mother. She had 'a hard time' of her life. She slept on the floor, 'on rags' in the winter 'just like a cat', and was fed from a tin on the floor. She was often beaten and whipped by her mistress.²⁶¹ Catherine Slim was enslaved in Virginia and similarly worked in the slaveholding household after her mother's death. She was frequently whipped (and bore the scars) and by ten-years-old 'wuz doin' women's work'. She slept on a 'big bed-comfort' on the floor next to her mistress's bed. Similarly evoking the animalising nature of this treatment, she felt she 'wuz like a petty dog'.²⁶² Martha King was sold aged around five years old as a house girl at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 'just like I was a animal or varmint or something'. She remembered how she was 'allus hungry'.²⁶³ Mistresses thus capitalised upon their ability to 'raise' an enslaved child as a labourer without the interventions of mothers and made the most callous and continued abuses of their power as slaveholding women.

Mistresses' relationships with enslaved children 'raised' in the house thus provide insights into mistresses' insidious, ubiquitous, and often devastating roles in enslaved women's maternal exploitation. Mistresses' positions of relative power were used to disenfranchise enslaved mothers and exploit their children to their own benefit. They took mothers' children from them for the purposes of 'raising' them as skilled and compliant labourers, and these children faced the prospect of abuse, isolation, and heavy labour. These separations were incredibly painful for children and for mothers. That slaveholding women fostered sometimes amicable relations with these children emphasises, in part, white women's mechanisms of coercion and control, and their attempts to enforce the bonds of ownership over the bonds of parenthood through such mechanisms.

Thus, the interpretation that mistresses 'demonstrated their emotional identification with black women by their attentions to slave children' is nullified in its significance in light

²⁵⁹ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 45.

²⁶⁰ Annie Hawkins, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 131.

²⁶¹ Sarah Douglas, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 189.

²⁶² Catherine Slim, *FWP*, Ohio Narratives, XII, 79.

²⁶³ Martha King, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 171.

of the examination of this practice.²⁶⁴ Equally, that some mistresses ‘often well-meaning but almost always intrusive or insensitive [...] really did protect and provide for the children of black mothers’, understates both the extent of mistresses’ roles in mother-child separations, the nature of their interests in slave children, and the effects of their interventions on enslaved mothers.²⁶⁵ Mistresses expressed the differences in mothers’ rights and roles no more clearly than by evoking proprietorial bonds over maternal ones.

Slaveholding mothers were privileged by their economic and social advantages throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood. The conditions slaveholding women brought their children into were preferential to most other southern women, and mistresses also benefited from unprecedented access to health-care, and the enslaved labour that facilitated their parenting, household-maintenance, and lifestyles. Slaveholding women struggled to effectively space births, endured pregnancies and childbirths that were painful in all senses of the word, and their lives were curtailed by the limitations motherhood often brought. They would negotiate the demands of motherhood with the will of their husbands, financial concerns, household responsibilities, and the desire for life beyond the biological. They fretted over the best courses of medical care, and yet were fortunate in their ability to procure professional medical advice, to exert control over the conditions of their childbearing, and to be able to rely upon the support of family and friends. As mothers, slaveholding women balanced their labour responsibilities and their lives more broadly with their responsibilities to their children. They found meaning and importance as mothers and devoted a great deal of time and attention to the proper raising of their children. They worried about their children, and doted upon them in correspondence to family and friends. And, when they were bereaved, an all-too-common experience in the antebellum south, they were deeply grieved by their losses. Motherhood was central to slaveholding women’s identities.

While slaveholding women placed great importance in their roles as mothers, cultural ideals of their undivided devotion to their children were not representative of their experiences. But apparent discrepancies between the cultural emphasis on upper-class white women’s roles as mothers, and the delegation of primary care responsibilities, are not as they may first appear. The relative veneration of upper-class white women’s motherhood and the degradation of enslaved women’s motherhood was articulated every single day in the slaveholding household. Mistresses used their ‘daily contact with and direct managerial authority over slaves’ in ways that would alleviate them from much of the work associated with white women’s roles as

²⁶⁴ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 82.

²⁶⁵ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 235.

mothers and wives.²⁶⁶ The extent of their delegation of their mother-work is clear. Notions of racial difference together with slave-ownership allowed some women to deprive other women access to their children and to prioritise their own. Evidently, slaveholding women's mothering was entirely reliant upon enslaved women's exploitation, and the interrelatedness of mothers' privileges and disadvantages are clear, whether in using enslaved mothers as nurses, or taking their children to work as domestic labourers. That enslaved women were both separated from their children to nurse their owners' children, and their children also taken for house-service, emphasises both the dynamic nature of maternal exploitation and the centrality of white women to it. Despite the systematic nature of these practices, by exploring enslaved mothers' treatment as nurses, and their experience of both nursing and mistresses' removal of their children, the distressing nature of these ubiquitous practices are newly evident.

These everyday practices constituted a system of slavery that disenfranchised enslaved mothers and valued their motherhood primarily in terms of labour; whether commodifying and redirecting enslaved women's mother-work, or using their childbearing as a site of production through which they could find new domestic slaves. Motherhood, that is, was inextricable from the power relations that characterised slavery. That mistresses had any role in mother-child separations should be heralded as the clearest evidence of their racialised views of motherhood together with the palpability of their economic interests in the realm of mothering. Mistresses were not just complicit in enslaved women's maternal exploitation; they were central to it.

²⁶⁶ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 52.

Chapter Three

Mammy: Enslaved Women and Motherhood

[‘Mammy Maria’] had come to love the white family better than her own blood and race.

Susan Dabney Smedes (1887)¹

Sixteen children I’ve had, first and last; and twelve I’ve nursed for my mistress. From the time my first baby was born, I always set my heart upon buying freedom for some of my children. I thought it was of more consequence to them than to me; for I was old, and used to being a slave. But mistress McKinley wouldn’t let me have my children. One after another – one after another – she sold ‘em away from me. Oh, how many times that woman’s broke my heart!

Charity Bowery (1848)²

Susan Dabney Smedes recalled Maria as a doting nurse on the vast Burleigh plantation in Raymond, Mississippi. She loved her ‘white children’ and was known, according to Susan, as a ‘white folk’s servant’.³ Yet, in Susan’s passing comment that she did ‘not think that [Maria’s] own children fared as well’ in regards to Maria’s attention, she spoke to an appropriation of maternal labour that slaveholders practiced on a daily basis.⁴ The routinised redirection of mother-work, however, was just one aspect of enslaved women’s maternal exploitation. Charity Bowery’s discussion of her own experiences of mothering under slavery exemplifies that the very ability for slaveholders to remove enslaved women’s children from them rendered motherhood a site of enduring trauma. Formerly enslaved near Edenton, North Carolina, Charity’s ‘voice choked’ and ‘tears began to flow’ as she explained to her interviewer, Lydia Maria Child, her desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to protect her children from their mistress’s sale.

¹ Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 75.

² Charity Bowery quoted in Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 263.

³ Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 75, 193.

⁴ Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 86.

Permanent separations such as those affected by Charity's mistress and the redirections experienced by women like Maria numbered among slaveholders' spectrum of interventions into slaves' mothering that spanned from the daily usurpations of parental decisions to callous acts of cruelty. As this chapter explores, slaveholding women participated in the full range of these interventions that could begin as early as seeking to influence the conception of an enslaved woman's child and extended long into her child's life. By examining slaveholding women's interactions with enslaved mothers, the limitations of their abilities to engage with enslaved women as fellow mothers are most evident. These interventions were inextricable from their racist perceptions of enslaved mothers and their own identities as mothers and slaveholders. Slaveholding women generally understood enslaved women's mothering as it pertained to themselves: not only as transferable mother-work that they could capitalise upon, but also as an interruption to household labour routines and a source of the production of slave labourers. Thus, while slaveholding mothers and enslaved mothers alike 'defined spheres of control within otherwise oppressive circumstances', slaveholding women took central roles in compromising this 'control' for enslaved mothers, just as their own 'control' as mothers was so reliant upon the exploitation of enslaved women.⁵

While parenting in the antebellum south was shaped by high infant and maternal mortality, enslaved and slaveholding women's opportunities for and experiences of mothering could hardly be more different, as many of these interventions suggest. This chapter places mistresses' interventions into the broader context of mothering under slavery in order to captivate the depth and breadth of enslaved women's maternal exploitation. Enslaved women reared and raised their children in awful conditions: their pregnancies, childbirths, and childrearing were deeply effected by poor housing, endemic disease, and material deprivation in addition to their constant labour as slaves. Family dispersal, unfathomably high levels of abuse, and the slave-trade uniquely affected enslaved families. Despite these conditions, black women sought to exercise control over their mothering and found importance, identity, and affection in their roles as parents. Motherhood was a source of both meaning and exploitation for enslaved women, and an experience that generally bore little similarity to female slaveholders.

Enslaved and slaveholding mothers' testimony does not permit like-for-like comparisons, though. Slaveholding mothers were writing contemporaneously and discussed their feelings about their pregnancies, their arrangements for childbirth, and the the early years

⁵ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 4, 6.

of their children's lives. They thus left uniquely detailed records of their experiences of motherhood. Much of enslaved women's testimony, however, was recorded through (often white) interviewers or editors, and often many decades after their enslavement. They seldom discussed how they felt about pregnancies, and their testimonies are generally brief summaries of years of experiences. It is also important to again emphasise that many Federal Writers' Project informants were also only children during slavery and thus recalled motherhood through the lenses of others. Those sources which speak to enslaved women's experiences of mothering, then, must be centralised alongside a critical approach to and analysis of slaveholding women's sources. These methodological limitations also stress the importance of exploring the structural inequality that so deeply influenced women's mothering. This chapter thus develops from Chapter Two in establishing the extent to which enslavement and slaveholding differentiated motherhood, and further evidences the nature and significance of slaveholding women's interventions.

Motherhood is an institution as well as an individual experience, and it was one that was foundational to the system of slavery. Relative to the development of white upper-class sentimental maternal and domestic ideals, from their earliest encounters with African women in the Americas, white Europeans distinguished African women by 'their sexually and reproductively bound savagery'. Childbirth in particular was used to connect African women to animals.⁶ Rendering motherhood a physical rather than emotional experience, 'controlling images' of black women as hypersexual jezebels were used 'to construct moral and social barriers to justify whites' appropriation of enslaved women's reproductive labor'.⁷ Bondswomen's mothering was thus disassociated from nurturing care and emotional bonding, and instead established as means of producing chattel. This construction of enslaved women's mothering, and the emphasis on enslaved women's suitability for the dual demands of productive and reproductive labour that together formed the ideological and legislative base of slavery, qualified enslaved women as 'slavery's clearest example of raced and gendered hyperexploitation'.⁸

Constructions of enslaved motherhood were characterised by a further duality. On the one side, enslaved mothers' apparent differences from white upper-class mothers were evoked through a dehumanising narrative of their maternal 'callousness, incompetence, and

⁶ Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 49, 105.

⁷ Jennifer Morgan quoted in Kierner, 'Women, Gender, Families, and Households in the Southern Colonies', 654. For further discussion of the 'jezebel' image and its influence, see White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 29-30; Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 22-5, 27-30; West, *Chains of Love*, 118-20; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 29-30.

⁸ Kaplan, 'Love and Violence/Maternity and Death', 96. For discussion of enslaved women's dual exploitation, see White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 69-70, 113-4, 122-3.

ignorance', which 'strongly influenced planter-class notions of black and white motherhood'.⁹ On the other, the emergence of 'mammy' imagery around the turn of the nineteenth century portrayed enslaved mothers as doting caregivers to white children if properly instructed, overseen, and 'civilised' by enlightened white mothers.¹⁰ A detachment between enslaved women and their own infants characterised both representations: enslaved women allegedly lacked the capacity, needs, and desires to mother their own children.

The discourse of maternal difference of course removed slaveholders from any iniquity over their destruction of and capitalisation upon the otherwise sacred infant-mother dyad. Such representations of enslaved mothers also reflected the slaveholder-slave relationships slaveholders sought to contrive: the transference of love, loyalty, and labour from one's own kin to their owners' family. Together, slaveholders characterised enslaved mothers in terms of women's ability to both produce labourers and perform maternal labour (alongside other forms of work), but allowed them ownership over neither their children nor their mother-work. This both shaped women's opportunities and treatment as mothers on a daily basis, and was manifest in the interactions of mistresses and enslaved mothers.

i. Approaching motherhood

Enslaved women generally became mothers at the age of twenty, several years before slaveholding women.¹¹ They could expect to bear a child approximately every twenty four to thirty months. Enslaved women were thus likely to have similar numbers of living children to slaveholding women, but suffered considerably higher rates of mortality in pregnancy and childbirth, and higher levels of still-births and infant mortality.¹² Even the prospect of a woman bringing her child to term was influenced by the adverse conditions incumbent with her enslavement. Slavery also shaped, and often determined, enslaved women's family structures. Enslaved couples endeavoured to raise children together, and to create stable family units in which to raise their children.¹³ They placed a strong emphasis on romantic love in relationships,

⁹ Fett, *Working Cures*, 134-5.

¹⁰ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2008), 19, 6.

¹¹ Estimates of age of enslaved women's first births and the amount of children they bore vary. Most suggest enslaved women began bearing children younger than slaveholding women and bore more children in their lifetimes. James Trussell and Richard Steckel also suggest 'some first born children must have died before being recorded [...] then on average the age of women at first birth will be overstated and the mean of the distribution will be biased upward'. Trussell and Steckel, 'The Age of Slaves at Menarche and Their First Birth', 482. See Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 104-5; Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1976), 50-1; Dunaway, *Women, Work and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 243; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 97; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 125-7.

¹² Dunaway, *Women, Work and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 243; Perrin, 'Resisting Reproduction', 266; Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 177-8.

¹³ Philip D. Morgan, 'The Significance of Kin', in Gad J. Heuman and James Walvin (eds), *The Slavery Reader* (London, 2003), 337.

and rather than enjoying ‘relatively open sexual practices with black men’ or having ‘a relatively easy time finding a mate’, ‘sex was communally sanctioned only for those women who were ready to marry, to have children’.¹⁴ Slaves’ relationships were sometimes sites of abuse, and the pressures of slavery (especially ‘the ‘dual burden of having to labor for owners as well as their own families’) could lead to marital disharmony.¹⁵ Family stability, however, was threatened most by slaveholders. This, of course, uniquely affected enslaved parents, and to suggest slaveholding ‘households were generally more stable than those of slave families’ is a gross oversight to the constant threat sale and hire posed for enslaved families.¹⁶ Whether it was parents, partners, or children sold away: ‘People was always dyin’ frum a broken heart’.¹⁷ Sales were more common on small slaveholdings and the likelihood of single-parented (or non-nuclear) families thus higher.¹⁸ In some areas of rice and sugar cultivation, staggering mortality rates meant death was also a frequent destroyer of families.¹⁹ Slaveholding size, labour type, and region thus greatly influenced family structure and stability.

Enslaved families’ households were often comprised of extended family and fictive kin, and many slaveholders required multiple families to share cabins. Cross-plantation marriages were also fairly common, depending again upon slaveholding size and region.²⁰ Though in these circumstances children typically resided with their mothers, fathers were central to family life and took roles as both protectors and providers. They typically bore the responsibility of visiting their families if ‘abroad’, which was often a high-risk endeavour.²¹ Yet, while enslaved families were always vulnerable to dispersal, and necessarily flexible, around two-thirds of slaves grew up either in a household with both parents, or with their father on a neighbouring (though often quite distant) plantation.²² Wilma Dunaway finds that ‘[a]t least half of all U.S. Southern slave families were permanently headed by two parents’.²³ In circumstances where

¹⁴ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 18-9; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 238. Enslaved couples often had to seek parental consent and adhere to community and ‘cultural rules’. See Hudson, *To Have and to Hold*, 142; Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 47; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 52; Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 178; Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 117-20.

¹⁵ Emily West, ‘Tensions, Tempers, and Temptations: Marital Discord Among Slaves in Antebellum South Carolina’, *American Nineteenth Century History*, 5, 2 (2007), 3. See also West, *Chains of Love*, 60-65; White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 151-3; Jeff Forret, ‘Conflict and the “Slave Community”: Violence among Slaves in Upcountry South Carolina’, *Journal of Southern History*, 74, 3 (2008), 567-70.

¹⁶ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 16.

¹⁷ Susan Hamilton, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 235.

¹⁸ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 271-2. A planter’s multiple residencies could also increase the likelihood of separations, if less permanently. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 160.

¹⁹ Dusiinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 84-5.

²⁰ This is understood to be more likely on smaller slaveholdings. See Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 10; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 54, 56, 61, 63. For further discussion of abroad marriages, see West, *Chains of Love*, 44, 51-2, 221-2; White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 154-5; Forret, ‘Conflict and the “Slave Community”’, 571-3.

²¹ See Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 70-6; West, *Chains of Love*, 57-9.

²² Roughly two-thirds of the ex-slaves grew up in families that were either ‘two-parent consolidated’ or ‘two-parent divided residence’. Stephen Crawford, ‘The Slave Family: A View from the Slave Narratives’, in Claudia Goldin and Hugh Rockoff (eds), *Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History: A Volume to Honor Robert W Fogel* (Chicago, IL, 1992), 332.

²³ Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 63. Both Anne Patton Malone and Betty Wood also find around half enslaved women lived apart from their husbands. Wood, *Women’s Work, Men’s Work*, 43; Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 18.

couple separations in their many forms were high, and enslaved women were subject to gendered expectations within and outside of enslaved communities, it was enslaved mothers who typically assumed primary care responsibilities, though.²⁴

How enslaved women felt about motherhood, however, is often elusive, especially in comparison to slaveholding women's extensive reflections on the trials and pleasures of parenthood. The meaning of motherhood was inevitably shaped by the conditions of slavery, and nineteenth century 'slave narratives' give some insight into this. Formerly enslaved in Edenton, North Carolina, Harriet Jacobs explained her thoughts as an enslaved new mother. After the birth of her son, Jacobs felt a 'mixture of love and pain'. She 'found a solace in his smiles', and 'loved to watch his infant slumbers', but 'could never forget that he was a slave'.²⁵ Harriet had 'suffered alone' but now faced the prospect that her 'little one was to be treated as a slave'.²⁶ The grief over her children's enslavement was clear: as she held her infant daughter in her arms, Harriet 'thought how well it would be for her if she never waked up'.²⁷

Enslaved mothers' experiences, Bethany Veney wrote, simply could not be imagined by their mistresses. 'My dear white lady', she wrote, 'in your pleasant home made joyous by the tender love of husband and children all your own, you can never understand the slave mother's emotions as she clasps her new-born child'. For Bethany, formerly enslaved in Virginia, these emotions centred upon the prospect that her child could be taken 'at any moment' and the sexual abuse she felt awaited her daughter: 'from her own experience she sees its almost certain doom is to minister to the unbridled lust of the slave-owner'. She 'would have been glad if we could have died together there and then'.²⁸ Harriet shared in Bethany's feeling. 'Slavery is terrible for men', she wrote, but 'it is far more terrible for women'.²⁹

While 'abolitionist writers' certainly 'spoke passionately of the evils the slave system visited on the mother-child tie', formerly enslaved women's bitterly complex feelings about parenthood were rooted in the realities of raising children as slaves.³⁰ Their comments reflected mothers' understanding of their children's life-long servitude and the likelihood of abuse and separation. They also discussed the day-to-day realities of mothering under slavery that made motherhood emotionally distressing. Harriet Jacobs, for example, explained the pain of toiling to the sounds of her infant daughter 'crying that weary cry which makes a mother's heart

²⁴ Stevenson, 'Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity among Antebellum Virginia Slave Women', 179-181; King, "'Rais' Your Children Up Rite'", 147.

²⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 96.

²⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 131.

²⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 133. Similarly, see Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 199.

²⁸ Bethany Veney, *The Narrative of Bethany Veney, A Slave Woman* (Worcester, MA, 1889), 26, DocSouth.

²⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 119.

³⁰ Jodi Vandenburg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: An American History* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2014), 33.

bleed’.³¹ Working-day separations were entirely routine under slavery, and the normalcy of these practices of maternal exploitation clearly did not diminish their severity for mothers. Celia Robinson, born enslaved on a plantation in Louisburg, North Carolina, explained how these systemised interventions into enslaved women’s mothering could render parenthood an unbearable prospect:

Mother tole me de overseer would come ter her when she had a young child an’ tell her ter go home and suckle dat thing, and she better be back in de field at work in 15 minutes. Mother said she knowed she could not go home and suckle dat child and git back in 15 minutes so she would go somewhere an’ sit down and pray de child would die.³²

The daily demands of parenthood emphasised to enslaved women that slaveholders’ interests in their mothering were in the production of a valuable child and not in any mother-child bond. Enslaved women bore their children in the knowledge that their owners would capitalise, in some way or another, on their childbearing. Former slaves discussed their mothers’ roles as ‘breeder[s]’ and the value of ‘good breedin’ ‘omans’.³³ Slaveholders treated enslaved women’s childbearing ‘jes’ lack a cow bringin’ in a calf’ that made enslaved women ‘mo’ val’ble to her Ole Marster’.³⁴ The very language of slavery expressed the (de)valuation of enslaved women’s mothering upon which the system was reliant: contracts, affidavits, and bills of sales and hire always sold enslaved women with the provision that her ‘future increase’ was included.³⁵ This language reflected the formalised limitations of enslaved women’s abilities to assume control over, responsibility for, and to protect their children; emphasising slaveholding society’s evaluation of slave mothers as ‘mere conduits through which slaveholders received a steady labor supply’ or simply a ‘source of cheap labour’.³⁶

Some women thus seized reproduction as a means of resisting their slaveholders. Enslaved women used contraception and abortifacients extensively, including chewing cotton

³¹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 132.

³² Celia Robinson, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 219.

³³ Ellen Cragin, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 44; Lina Hunter, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 260-1. See also Frances A. Kemble in Catherine Clinton (ed.), *Fanny Kemble’s Journals* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 117.

³⁴ Martha Jackson, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 222.

³⁵ See, for example, Bill of Sale/Mortgage, South Carolina, July 3 1843; Bill of Sale, William Brumfield to Richard Jones, Pittsylvania County, Nov. 18 1812; Bill of Sale, Columbus County, April 19 1831; Bill of Sale, J. John McNeal, Jan. 3 1828; Bill of Sale, Benjamin Grandstaff, Shendrah County, Virginia; Bill of Sale, Obeaiah Farmer, Halifax County, Dec. 18 1838, *African American Miscellany*, DU.

³⁶ Wilma King, “‘Suffer With Them Till Death’: Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America”, in Gaspar and Hine (eds), *More than Chattel*, 147-9.

root, a traditional West African practice.³⁷ For some enslaved women, this was ‘a form of resistance to slavery’ that could be used to deprive slaveholders of their control over enslaved women and their treatment of enslaved women’s children as chattel.³⁸ Formerly enslaved in Mississippi and Texas, Mary Gaffney ‘hate the man’ her master forced her to marry in his efforts ‘to get rich’. She eventually ‘let that negro have his way’ but ‘still I cheated Maser’ and ‘never did have any slaves to grow’ until after freedom, covertly chewing cotton ‘all the time’.³⁹ For other mothers, methods of contraception and abortion simply enabled them to control the role of motherhood in their lives by limiting the frequency of their childbearing. Anna Lee recalled enslaved women ‘got to chewing cotton roots to keep from giving birth to babies’ so extensively that ‘[i]f slavery had lasted much longer they would not have been any slaves [...] we had done quit breeding’.⁴⁰ Enslaved mothers’ decisions over the frequency and conditions of their childbearing were expressions of choice, control, and bodily autonomy.

Some enslaved women, however, rejected motherhood outright, and committed infanticide. Few enslaved women seemed to have resorted to such measures.⁴¹ These incidences, however, cement the sense of desperation many mothers felt faced with the prospects of raising a child under slavery. One enslaved woman felt so distressed by the constant sale of her infant children in Texas that she:

“[...] just decided I’m not going to let old Master sell this baby; he just ain’t going to do it.” She got up and give it something out of a bottle and purty soon it was dead. ‘Course didn’t nobody tell on her or he’d of beat her nearly to death.⁴²

Yet, for those enslaved women who chose not to bear or raise their children, beyond the possible emotional burden of these decisions, the consequences could be dire. Reproduction was the lifeblood of slavery. Formerly enslaved in Tennessee, Alice Douglass described how ‘you better have them white folks some babies iffen you didn’t wanta be sold’.⁴³ Those ‘past

³⁷ Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 114; Perrin, ‘Resisting Reproduction’, 255-9; Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in 19th Century America*, 52; Hausman, *Mother’s Milk*, 248-9; King, “‘Suffer With Them Till Death’”, 160; Sharon Ann Holt, ‘Symbol, Memory, and Service: Resistance and Family Formation in Nineteenth-Century African America’, in Larry E. Hudson (ed.), *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester, NY, 1994), 204; Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 96-105.

³⁸ Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in 19th Century America*, 53.

³⁹ Mary Gaffney, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 5, 4, 1453.

⁴⁰ Anna Lee, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 6, 5, 2284.

⁴¹ For discussion of infanticide under slavery, see Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 256-7; White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman?*, 87-8; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 323-4. Historians suggest Sudden Infant Death Syndrome was likely responsible for many infants’ deaths. See White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman?*, 88-9; Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana, IL, 2002), 122-7.

⁴² Lou Smith, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 302.

⁴³ Alice Douglass, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 73.

their breedin' times' were especially vulnerable to sale.⁴⁴ Thus, though this was a role and an experience enslaved women chose, it was also coerced by slaveholders who sought to define the very meaning of motherhood and the nature of the mother-child bond. Motherhood under slavery was certainly 'an imbricated nexus of love and violence', or, 'devastatingly complex'.⁴⁵

The differences between slaveholding and enslaved women's motherhoods were thus evident from the outset in very stability of their family structure, the meaning accorded to motherhood and the attendant treatment of mothers and their children. Slaveholding women, too, sought to exercise their own interests over both the meanings and the conditions of enslaved women's pregnancies. While Marie Jenkins Schwartz emphasises that the ways in which 'slaveholders expected to appropriate and exploit the reproductive lives of enslaved women' is an 'aspect of slavery that has been all too often ignored', white women's roles have been especially devoid of scholarly attention.⁴⁶ Slaveholding women took central roles in enslaved people's relationships as 'matchmakers', intermediaries, and 'as part of a implicit system of control and domination', and these roles can be explored further both in terms of their range and motivations and the insights these interventions provide into slaveholding women's approach to slaves' mothering in particular.⁴⁷

Slaveholding women intervened in enslaved women's relationships with their partner in a variety of ways. Some slaveholding women made themselves mediators in young enslaved women's courting. Isabella Dorroh, for example, recalled her father asking permission from her mother's mistress, Mary Fair, to 'let 'em marry' in South Carolina.⁴⁸ Caroline Malloy similarly remembered her mistress policing her courting with 'a watchful eye' and strict instruction to stay within 'the boundaries of the plantation' in Georgia.⁴⁹ Her engagement, too, was subjected to the permission of the mistress. Mistresses could also be hostile to the social and courting rituals cultivated within enslaved communities; whether because she 'ain't wanted her niggers ter dance case she am such a good Christian', or, to reiterate Katie Darling's mistress's 'rationale', because she believed that '[n]iggers was made to work for white folks'.⁵⁰

Slaveholding women's involvement in slaves' couplings thus took far more sinister forms than simply seeking to share 'the romantic adventures of black women' and impart the

⁴⁴ Mary Reynolds, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 236.

⁴⁵ Kaplan, 'Love and Violence/Maternity and Death', 96; Rickie Solinger, 'Racializing the Nation, from the Declaration of Independence to the Emancipation Proclamation', in Nancy Ehrenreich (ed.), *The Reproductive Rights Reader: Law, Medicine, and the Construction of Motherhood* (New York, 2008), 263.

⁴⁶ Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 10.

⁴⁷ Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 40, 39. For further discussion of mistresses' roles, see West, *Chains of Love*, 28-9, 66-7.

⁴⁸ Isabella Dorroh, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 326.

⁴⁹ Caroline Malloy, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 4, 2, 413.

⁵⁰ Henrietta McCullers, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 73; Katie Darling, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 279. See also Adaline Johnson, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 55; Sally Banks Chambers, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 215.

‘conventions of genteel nineteenth-century female behavior’.⁵¹ Mistresses sought for enslaved women’s relationships to best serve their own interests. Often, this was by encouraging an enslaved woman to produce a valuable child. Slaveholders incentivised enslaved women’s pregnancies through altered work-loads, increased rations for the pregnant, and rewards for the prolific, as well as practising a great deal of ‘verbal prodding’.⁵² One thirteen-year-old enslaved girl’s mistress was so persistent in encouraging her marriage to a partner her mistress had chosen that she felt ‘like I loved him ‘fore I ever saw him’.⁵³ Encouragement and coercion were inseparable in a context where sale often awaited childless women, and slaves well-understood the possible consequences of one’s failure to respond. William Wells Brown, for example, recognised the necessity of pretense in entertaining his mistress’s wishes for him to marry an enslaved woman named Eliza. He spoke bitterly, however, of the woman’s attempts to make him marry, understanding this as a ‘trap’ laid ‘to make me satisfied with my new home’, and ‘determined never to marry any woman on earth until I should get my liberty’.⁵⁴ Autonomy in the realm of relationships was, like elsewhere, often a constant struggle.

The forbidding of relationships was a similarly common mechanism of mistresses’ control over slaves’ couplings. In 1853, at Glen Ora in Loudon County, Virginia, Elizabeth Noland wrote to her daughter Ella the news that an enslaved woman named Joanna had a ‘fine black son [...] making nine boys’. Elizabeth was not pleased, and thought ‘it is high time for her to stop that business, I am sick of black babies’. She was most ‘afraid’, however, that ‘it will put my maid in the notion’. ‘I have to watch her very closely’, Elizabeth wrote, and ‘I hope she will not play me a trick in my absence’. Her upcoming trip thus troubled her, and Elizabeth found herself ‘totally at a loss to know how to dispose of her while I am away’.⁵⁵ Elizabeth’s comments express the way in which female slaveholders did not simply seek to control slaves’ personal lives, but that their interventions were often directly related to the children their relationships might create. A ‘maid’s’ pregnancy meant time out of work and a cumbersome child that inconvenienced demanding mistresses. For this unnamed enslaved woman, it meant the watchful eye of a mistress who had determined to prevent her from both having a relationship and becoming a mother.

Indeed, mistresses’ interventions into enslaved women’s relationships routinely took the form of restricting the time enslaved couples spent together. Henrietta Wisong, for example,

⁵¹ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 81.

⁵² White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 99-100. See also McMillen, *Southern Women*, 61; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 17-9.

⁵³ Isaac Williams quoted in Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 40.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 87.

⁵⁵ E.W. [Elizabeth] Noland to Ella [Noland Mackenzie], Oct. 11 1853, Ella Noland Mackenzie Papers, SHC.

wrote to Mary Faulkner of Boydville, Virginia, that the conditions of her hiring one of Faulkner's enslaved women was that the woman's husband could not visit in 'a regular habit'.⁵⁶ Relationships could be disruptive to slaves' labour, and though essential for the reproduction of slave labourers, could produce pregnancies that were inconveniently timed, especially for a mistress hiring slaves like Henrietta. Other women were the arbiters of more permanent separations. Formerly enslaved near Winchester, Tennessee, Millie Simpkins remembered being sold by her mistress 'kaze I wuz stubborn'. Sent to the 'slave yard', Millie was sold away from her husband.⁵⁷ The power mistresses held over enslaved women and their relationships, then, was used to both routinely ensure her own interests as well as destructively and maliciously.

Mistresses' interventions were also motivated by a desire to ensure the 'quality' of the children slaves produced as future slave labourers. While Marie Jenkins Schwartz recognises that '[o]ccasionally, owners tried to manipulate slaves' sexual relationships to produce preferred physical traits', mistresses' economic incentives in their interventions into enslaved women's relationships have again been largely overlooked.⁵⁸ Janie Scott, enslaved in Tensaw, Alabama, remembered 'her mother's Master *and* Mistress didn't want her mother to marry Andy, because he was too light in color and light niggers Janie said folks didn't think as strong as a good black one' [emphasis added]. But, Janie married who she chose.⁵⁹ Formerly enslaved in South Carolina, Benjamin Russell, remembered his mistresses as a sympathetic woman but nevertheless similarly recognised that she as well as his master remained 'very particular about the slave girls' because 'the girl must breed good strong serviceable children'.⁶⁰

Mistresses were economically-minded women, and their interests in slave children were often orientated around their labour value, as indicated in their extensive use of child-labour. Thus, the 'quality' of a child that an enslaved woman might bear also shaped their interventions into slaves' social lives, as Laura Norwood's letter to her parents in North Carolina suggests. Laura shared in the ethos of Janie Scott's and Benjamin Russell's mistresses. She described that an enslaved woman, Eliza, 'has a very assiduous suitor'. Laura was concerned: 'report says [he] is gaining ground in her favour, but I don't know whether the case is hopeless yet'. Her concerns were centred on her belief that 'he is not of a good family & they are all a very weakly sickly set'.⁶¹ Laura's desires to control Eliza's relationship,

⁵⁶ Henrietta Wisong to Mary Faulkner, undated, Faulkner Family Papers, VHS.

⁵⁷ Millie Simpkins, *FWP*, Tennessee Narratives, XV, 66.

⁵⁸ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 189.

⁵⁹ Janie Scott, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 337.

⁶⁰ Benjamin Russell, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 51-3.

⁶¹ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], Feb. 11 1840, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

however, were unsuccessful. Eliza married Elias and several months later Laura mentioned Eliza's 'interesting situation' and her imminent confinement.⁶² Laura would capitalise upon Eliza's motherhood anyway, as she later used her as a wet-nurse to her and other family members' children. That both Janie and Eliza disregarded their owners' wishes, however, emphasises their disregard for or resistance to their mistresses' attempts at control, much as William Wells Brown suggested. Enslaved women saw their relationships as meaningful and important experiences in and of themselves, as well as the basis of families. Relationships were a form of resistance whereby, as Rebecca Fraser explains, enslaved people 'fought for degrees of emotional autonomy'.⁶³

While prohibiting and encouraging relationships and reproduction could both serve mistresses' interests, however, enslaved women's mothering could be even more directly manipulated to mistresses' advantages. Former slaves testified that mistresses sought to 'time' their own births with those of slave mothers, a practice advantageous to those mistresses who used enslaved wet-nurses. Mary Jones recounted that her mother 'would have a baby every time my mistress would have one, so that my mother was always the wet nurse to my mistress' in Jefferson County, Mississippi.⁶⁴ Similarly, in Brownsville, Tennessee, Minerva Davis's mother would 'have a baby about the same time her young mistress had one'.⁶⁵ Formerly enslaved in Mississippi, Mattie Logan explained this was as 'a pretty good idea for the Mistress' who could leave the slaveholding without 'having to worry if the babies would be fed or not'.⁶⁶ How mistresses' coordinated women's pregnancies is unclear, but the intervention indicates an awareness that enslaved women's partnerships were subordinate to the interests of their mistresses.

Whether seeking to limit an enslaved woman's time with her husband or seeking to determine her conception, mistresses sought to control enslaved women's motherhood to their own ends, and placed emphasis on enslaved women's value as a labourer and reproducer at different times. Throughout the range of mistresses' interventions into slaves' relationships, mistresses expressed that they identified as enslaved women's owners with vested interest in their exploitation, rather than establishing any solidarity on the basis of their 'shared' gender beyond those 'paternalistic' controls and codes of behaviour.

Mistresses' reinforcement of practices of slave 'breeding', however, were perhaps

⁶² L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to Sarah J. [Jones] Lenoir, March 17 1841, Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], April 6 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁶³ Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina*, 5.

⁶⁴ Mary Jane Jones, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 1243.

⁶⁵ Minerva Davis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 127.

⁶⁶ Mattie Logan, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 187.

surprising to those slaves who sought to appeal to their mistresses' aid. Rose Williams, for example, was forced to live with an enslaved man named Rufus when she was sixteen years old in Bell County, Texas. When Rose complained to her mistress, she simply said: 'Yous am de portly gal and Rufus am de portly man. De massa wants you-uns for to bring forth portly chillen'. Rose eventually had to yield, and the trauma of Rose's experience was made clear in her comment as an elderly woman that: 'After what I does for de massa, I's never wants to truck with any man'.⁶⁷ Formerly enslaved on a large plantation in Warren County, North Carolina, Jacob Manson similarly recalled how a slave girl who 'went to her missus an tole her 'bout her master forcing her to let him have sumthin to do wid her an her missus tole her, "Well go on you belong to him"'.⁶⁸ While these incidences may have been another iteration of mistresses' perspectives of women as slaves rather than fellow women or victims of male dominance, or their deferment to patriarchs, they certainly emphasise mistresses' roles in reinforcing male authority.

Regardless of their motivations, mistresses' interventions into enslaved women's relationships were often agonising. Enslaved women resented their separation from partners, made by mistresses who 'seemed to think that slaves had no right to any family ties of their own'.⁶⁹ Such separations were considered one of the most painful aspects of their enslavement. While mistresses contrived and controlled slaves' relationships, they also denigrated them, describing how '[m]arrying is the amusement of their lives', '[t]hey take life easily', and marriages were 'comical, mirthful, and hilarious'.⁷⁰ Such comments bear striking similarity to some of slavery's most vociferous, vocal, and oft-repeated defenders of the peculiar institution: it was James Henry Hammond who notoriously wrote that '[w]ith regard to the separation of husbands and wives, parents and children [...] Negroes are themselves both perverse and comparatively indifferent about this matter'.⁷¹

Jane Giles, enslaved in Kentucky, expressed her frustration at just such disregard for enslaved couples' marital bonds in a letter to her mistress. Jane, having runaway to New York, expressed her anger at the woman who '[p]arted me and my housbond as tho we had no feeling'. She knew exactly who was responsible for their separation, and that her master 'would not have sent my husbound away had it not been for you'. Giles made a remarkably strong statement to her mistress, castigating her for her racist beliefs that 'because I am coulard You

⁶⁷ Rose Williams, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 177-8.

⁶⁸ Jacob Manson, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 97-8.

⁶⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 59.

⁷⁰ Chesnut, *Diary from Dixie*, 114; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 53.

⁷¹ James Henry Hammond, *Two Letters on Slavery in the United States Addressed to Thomas Clarkson*, esq. (South Carolina, 1845), 19.

sopose that I have not got any feelings'. Instead, she assured her: 'I have feelings thank god as well as you'. Jane reiterated: 'I Loved my housbond as well as you do yours'.⁷² In doing so, she explicitly rejected the racist narratives of womanhood and personhood used to justify such cruelties and instead affirmed both her bond to her husband and her equality to her mistress. Her mistress's inability to empathise with her was, perhaps, all the more painful for Giles because she felt the 'loss' of her mistress and suspected she did too. For women such as Jane, and for those women who appealed to their mistresses' protection from rapists, their mistresses' responses confirmed their conformity to the slaveholding creed rather than any reflecting the benevolence allegedly associated with white femininity.

Of course, as aforementioned, mistresses' inabilities to empathise with enslaved women were often most apparent when they bore multi-racial children. Formerly enslaved women and men interviewed under the auspices of the Federal Writers' Project sometimes discussed the rape of black women by white men, but the extent of this practice is impossible to quantify.⁷³ The likelihood for former slaves and their descendants to discuss such subjects with their prevailingly white interviewers was low, reflected in Andrea Livesey's findings in Louisiana and Texas that 'black interviewers still recorded proportionately more references to sexual abuse and exploitation than white interviewers'.⁷⁴ Though slaveholding women likely suffered sexual violence within their marriages, to suggest that '[l]ike white women, [black women] were sexually assaulted' overlooks the institutionalised and systematic nature of whites' sexual abuse of enslaved women that starkly differentiated their experiences (including sexual slavery, forced breeding, and a slave-trade for sex-work).⁷⁵ The rape of enslaved women by white men was a 'constant threat'.⁷⁶

White women were certainly aware of how common interracial sexual relationships between slaveholding men and enslaved women were. The 'curse of slavery' was the 'violations of moral law' that meant 'mulattoes [were] as common as blackberries', as

⁷² Jane Giles to Mrs William Preston, Feb. 8 1854, Wickliffe-Preston Family Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections and Archives.

⁷³ While it is impossible to ascertain exactly how many enslaved infants were fathered by white men, rough approximations based on the 1860 census record 588,363 'mulattoes' in the U.S., an increase of 45% from the 1850 census. Robert P. McNamara, Maria Tempenis, and Beth Walton, *Crossing the Line: Interracial Couples in the South* (Westport, CT, 1999), 26. For quantifications of interracial sexual relationships based upon testimony of former slaves, see West, *Chains of Love*, 128; Table 11.2 and 11.3 in Crawford, 'The Slave Family', 336-7.

⁷⁴ Livesey, 'Sexual Violence in the Slaveholding Regimes of Louisiana and Texas', 148-9.

⁷⁵ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 242. See, for example, Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,'" "Fancy Maids," and "One-Eyed Men": Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States', *American Historical Review*, 106 (2001), 1619-50; Gregory D. Smithers, *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History* (Gainesville, FL, 2012), 101-26; Brenda E. Stevenson, 'What's Love Got To Do With It? Concubinage and Enslaved Women and Girls', *Journal of African American History*, 98, 1 (2013), 99-125; Wilma King, "'Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things": The Sexual Abuse of African American Girls and Young Women in Slavery and Freedom', *Journal of African American History*, 99, 3 (2014), 173-9.

⁷⁶ Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*, 37. For formerly enslaved people's discussions of sexual violence and relationships that range from group rape to long-term relations, see Mary Estes Peters, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 328-9; Mary Reynolds, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 243; Ben Simpson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 28; Mollie Kinsey, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 4, 2, 373; Hattie Rogers, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 230.

described by Rebecca Latimer Felton.⁷⁷ Mistresses' bemoaning the practice, however, was not a gesture of empathy with black women, but rather white women considered themselves victims who lived among their husbands' enslaved sexual partners. Mistresses did not 'deny the teachings of their own culture' and 'have sympathy for and identify with' enslaved women who were victims of rape.⁷⁸ Instead, they expressed racialised ideas of gender by blaming black women as inviting sexual relationships and directed some of their worst abuse towards these women.

Richard Macks, for example, was 'owned by an old maid' in Maryland. He explained how 'there was a doctor in the neighborhood who bought a girl and installed her on the place for his own use, his wife hearing of it severely beat her'.⁷⁹ Mary Estes Peters similarly recalled of her mother (who herself was 'very reticent about the facts of her birth'):

Almost all her beating and trouble came from her last mistress. That woman sure gave her a lot of trouble [...] they didn't like my mother and me – on account of my color. They would talk about it. They tell their children that when I got big enough, I would think I was as good as they was.⁸⁰

Mary explained how her slaveholders' ire was not only directed towards her mother to punish her for having an interracial relationship, but related their concerns about the status they feared multi-racial slaves might come to claim. The blurring of the colour line, as mistresses' attempts at racialising enslaved women has emphasised, was an intolerable threat to white women's status. Slaveholding women, in short, did not establish subversive solidarity with enslaved women but amplified exploitation into 'double-headed abuse'.⁸¹

While mistresses' abuses of enslaved women and their multi-racial children could be one painful aspect of bearing a child conceived by rape, more broadly, a child may have 'embodied the enslaved mother's sexual degradation and also her degradation as human property'.⁸² For enslaved children, too, their white paternity might lead to detachment and 'negative identity issues'.⁸³ George Fortman related a traumatic story of his conception with 'sorrow and pain' to the 'strangers' of his interviewers. His master had fathered both George

⁷⁷ Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, 93, 79.

⁷⁸ Weiner, 'The Intersection of Race and Gender', 384.

⁷⁹ Richard Macks, *FWP*, Maryland Narratives, VIII, 51, 54.

⁸⁰ Mary Estes Peters, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 327-8.

⁸¹ Gwin, 'Green-Eyed Monsters of the Slaveocracy', 40.

⁸² Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America* (New York, 2005), 33.

⁸³ Anthony S. Parent Jr. and Susan Brown Wallace, 'Childhood and Sexual Identity under Slavery', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3, 3 (1993), 401.

and his mother, and George stated that ‘I am that baby, that child of unsatisfactory birth’.⁸⁴ Elizabeth Keckley was similarly reluctant ‘to dwell upon this subject, for it is one fraught with pain’. She explained, however, that after conceiving her only child through rape, if her child ‘ever suffered any humiliating pangs on account of his birth, he could not blame his mother, for God knows that she did not wish to give him life’.⁸⁵ Yet, enslaved mothers did not reject the children born of rape, formed affectionate relationships with their children, and ‘proactively turned the child born of rape into a symbol of survival’.⁸⁶ Enslaved mothers constantly rejected the devaluation of their children slaveholders sought to impart and constructed their own meaning around their motherhoods.

Ultimately, though, slaveholders’ denigrations of enslaved women’s motherhood, their attempts at control, and their constant manipulations of this experience inevitably shaped both the meaning of women’s mothering, their opportunities to mother, and their experiences of motherhood. The nineteenth century ‘slave narratives’ and Federal Writers’ Project interviews suggest at some of the ways the valuation and treatment of children and the demands of parenting under slavery influenced women’s feelings around parenthood. The interventions of slaveholders into enslaved people’s relationships and their family structure underscores the extent of the implications of slavery on motherhood. Mistresses sought to exercise their own interests over enslaved women’s mothering, and their interests in slave labour are again made clear through their interventions into enslaved women’s coupling, as is the absence of ‘commonality’ or emotional bonds in these apparently gendered experiences. While mistresses’ behaviour emphasised their beliefs in social difference and their self-interest, enslaved women castigated female slaveholders for their inabilities to understand or respond to their similarities.

ii. Pregnancy and health

In pregnancy, expectant mothers would continue to find their experiences of motherhood shaped both by the conditions of their enslavement and the interventions of their owners. While all women suffered maternal and infant health risks, these risks were not shared equally. Slaveholding women’s discussions of miscarriage, still-births, and the deaths of their infants emphasise how dangerous reproduction was in the slaveholding south. Enslaved women,

⁸⁴ George Fortman, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 88. In this case, however, Fortman’s mistress ‘remained my friend’ and ‘was never angry with my mother’.

⁸⁵ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 39.

⁸⁶ Andrea Livesey, ‘Conceived in Violence: Enslaved Mothers and Children Born of Rape in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana’, *Slavery & Abolition* (2017), 38, 2, 386.

however, faced the health risks of the region amplified by frequent incidences of violence, poor diets, poor standards of healthcare, and high levels of disease that rendered maternal and infant health precarious at best. Slave labour was, of course, a principal dividing factor that deeply influenced maternal (and infant) health. This was particularly clear in the decline in slave fertility during ‘the cotton boom years of 1830 to 1860’.⁸⁷ Enslaved women experienced ‘excessive menstrual bleeding and chronic menstrual backache, fallen wombs, and rheumatism’, ‘chronic back-pain, uterine pain and hernias’, and more frequent incidences of puerperal fever and prolapsed uteruses.⁸⁸

Plantation records provide means through which to explore the arduous patterns of enslaved women’s childbearing. On Samuel Smith Downey’s plantation, in Granville County, North Carolina, for example, enslaved women’s childbearing was fraught with infants’ deaths. An enslaved woman named Rachel had eight children between the years of 1849 and 1864, five of whom died before their first birthdays. Another child, Betsey, died aged eleven. Thus it appears that only two of Rachel’s children survived. Such prospects were shared with other women on the plantation. Rose, for example, had eleven children over nineteen years between 1845 and 1864. Five of Rose’s children died before their second birthday, three more children died before they were seven-years-old.⁸⁹ The Newstead plantation, in Washington County, Mississippi, recorded similarly dispassionate lists of women’s miscarriages and infant mortalities that meant they bore many children, yet raised few of them.⁹⁰ Indeed, Rachel and Rose’s experiences were common among enslaved women across the southern states. In the Charleston district of South Carolina, for example, John Ball recorded children born on the Comingtee and Stoke plantations between 1803 and 1820. During this time, 34.87% of the 195 children born to enslaved women on these plantations died before their first birthday.⁹¹

These rates of infant mortality were in fitting with broader patterns in the southern United States: slave infant mortality rates were roughly *double* national averages.⁹² While disease and other problems did indeed face enslaved and slaveholding mothers, they disproportionately affected (and killed) enslaved women and their children. Slave children were *four times* more likely to die from sickle-cell anaemia, tetanus, teething complications,

⁸⁷ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 19.

⁸⁸ Dusiinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 246; Marsha J. Tyson Darling, ‘Burdened Intersections: Black Women and Race, Gender, and Class’, in Julius O. Adekunle and Hettie V. Williams (eds), *Color Struck: Essays on Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* (Lanham, MD, 2010), 387; Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 119-20. For discussion of the effects of physical labour on pregnant women, see Richard Follett, ‘Heat, Sex, and Sugar: Pregnancy and Childbearing in the Slave Quarters’, *Journal of Family History*, 28, 4 (2003), 511, 513, 527.

⁸⁹ ‘List of Slave Births and Deaths’, Samuel Smith Downey Papers, DU.

⁹⁰ Newstead Plantation Records, SHC.

⁹¹ John Ball and Keating Simons Ball Books, 9-24, SHC.

⁹² Table 2 in Steckel, ‘Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States’, 50.

and lockjaw than their 'white contemporaries'.⁹³ In addition to the dangers of heavy labour during pregnancy and inadequate health-care, enslaved women's diet was nutritionally poor, ration quotas did not always account for dependents, and in times of hardship slaves' diets would be compromised further.⁹⁴ Consequently, they had smaller infants, who, in turn, faced much bleaker chances of survival. Infants were likely born under 5.5 pounds, and low birth weights increase the incidences of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.⁹⁵ In fact, as Wilma Dunaway outlined:

Until age fourteen, the mortality rate of slave children was twice that of the white population. A slave infant was 2.2. times more likely to die than a white baby, and white children between five and fourteen survived 1.9 times more than did slave children of the same ages.⁹⁶

Seasonal changes meant the risks posed by disease and the labour demanded of pregnant and nursing slaves could fluctuate over the course of the year, influencing infant mortality rates.⁹⁷ Regional differences also shaped maternal and infant mortality, and in areas of rice cultivation, for example, enslaved infant mortality rates could be staggering. At the Gowrie plantation, this was 90%.⁹⁸

The dire conditions borne of slavery were rendered ever more dangerous to enslaved mothers because of slaveholders' perspectives of their easy ability to bear children.⁹⁹ Overseers, owners, and physicians could all make intimate examinations and treatments of expectant mothers, and the intersection of medicine with the southern political economy meant the 'definition of slave health was permeated by concerns of slaveholder status and wealth'.¹⁰⁰ Under slavery, 'the burden of medical consent' was transferred 'from the enslaved patient to the slaveholding client', affording slaveholders an intermediary position that could result in either neglect or unwelcomed interventions.¹⁰¹ Slaveholder sanctioned medical attention in the pre-natal period tended to be minimal. However, both slaveholding and enslaved women evidenced the visiting of doctors for enslaved women in confinement, childbirth, and to attend enslaved infants.

⁹³ King, *Stolen Childhood*, 10-1.

⁹⁴ Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 41; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 193; Follett, 'Heat, Sex, and Sugar', 522.

⁹⁵ Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 141.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Steckel, 'Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States', 53; Cody, 'Sale and Separation', 68.

⁹⁸ Dusiinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 416, 50-1.

⁹⁹ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 111-2; Darling, 'Burdened Intersections', 396-7.

¹⁰⁰ Fett, *Working Cures*, 18; Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*, 45.

¹⁰¹ Fett, *Working Cures*, 147.

How enslaved women felt about white doctors, however, is harder to ascertain. For example, Helen B. Slade paid for a doctor to deliver an enslaved woman, Dicey's, child in October 1861. The doctor used '[d]elivering child instruments' and was 'drawing off water' from Dicey.¹⁰² Perhaps Dicey had wanted the attention of a doctor. Perhaps she felt violated by the intimate and invasive treatments of a white man. Probably, in keeping with southern medical beliefs of black women's easy childbearing, he negated the care and respect with which other patients were treated. Indeed, Marie Jenkins Schwartz finds 'most physicians learned how to manage childbirth in the slave quarter' and 'practiced on' enslaved women 'thought to have a higher pain threshold'.¹⁰³ What is paramount is the absence of consent that enslaved women faced in these circumstances. Enslaved women who did not want a male physician attending her could have little choice in the matter.

Equally, a woman who wanted medical attention for herself or her infant would have had to convince a slaveholder of the necessity. This in itself was problematic, as overseers and slaveholders showed great suspicion towards women who 'claimed' to be ill. South Carolinian slaveholder Charles Manigault wrote to his brother Louis on the treatment of a woman Nancy, who appeared chronically ill, and expressed a typical approach to enslaved women. He advised Louis that 'even if she does nothing in the field make her go out there - if you think she is feigning'.¹⁰⁴ Only a 'badly managed' woman would miscarry, the writer of one plantation journal argued - 'or she has been to blame herself and should be severely punished for it when she gets well'.¹⁰⁵

Mistresses shared in these scepticisms. Female slaveholders were suspicious and clearly sensitive to the possibilities of slaves' resistance through feigning illness. Laura Norwood, writing to her sister Sade in March 1841, complained that Dinah's illness 'since Christmas' meant she had 'children bothering [her] all the time', though 'there has been no occasion for deceit this time for she has been really sick'.¹⁰⁶ In May the following year, Norwood again suspected Dinah was feigning illness. She noted that Dinah 'has got about again, though still grunting', and expected 'to have her laid up at any moment either with real or pretend disease'. 'She is', Norwood wrote, 'but a poor dependence at best'. That Laura felt 'neither would one hire or sell her in her present condition' certainly did not reflect any

¹⁰² Levi Smithwick Yates Account Book, Oct. 1861, 132, DU.

¹⁰³ Schwartz, *Birthing A Slave*, 144, 162, 166-7. J. Marion Sims, for example, performed repeated experimental surgeries (without anaesthetic) on enslaved women suffering Vesico Vaginal Fistula. See Durrenda Ojanuga, 'The Medical Ethics of the "Father of Gynaecology"', Dr J Marion Sims', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 19, 1 (1993), 28-31; Todd L. Savitt, 'The Use of Blacks for Medical Experimentation and Demonstration in the Old South', *Journal of Southern History*, 48, 3 (1982), 345-7; Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 61-70.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Manigault to Louis Manigault, April 20 1853, Louis Manigault Papers, DU.

¹⁰⁵ Araby Plantation Journal, 205-6, Haller Nutt Papers, DU.

¹⁰⁶ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to Sarah J. [Jones] Lenoir, March 17 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

compassion for Dinah.¹⁰⁷ Dinah had a baby on January 21 1843, so she was in fact in her early stages of pregnancy.¹⁰⁸

Motherhood abated neither Laura's suspicions that Dinah was feigning illness, nor her intentions to have her sold. Several months later, in May, Laura complained that Dinah had not done 'a month's work' and the doctor 'could not perceive any symptoms of disease for the most part' (except her drinking). Laura believed her 'capable now of doing more work than any of them if she chose', but found 'she has been, on the whole, one of our expenses'.¹⁰⁹ By December, Laura again complained of Dinah, who had been 'very gruntish of late'. '[S]he says she is in a family way, which may be so', Laura wrote to her mother: 'at any rate will do for an excuse'.¹¹⁰

Such scepticisms were widely held. Josephine West of Polk County, Georgia, was doctoring enslaved people herself and confessed to her father in 1864 that she was but a 'poor judge of sickness' and could not ascertain 'whether they are really sick' or not.¹¹¹ The ramifications of such beliefs could be the denial of medical attention or 'time off'. Mistresses' roles as household managers and in healthcare gave them some control in this area. Mary Ferrand Henderson, for example, watched closely over her supplies of laudanum, 'for servants waste medicine terrible'.¹¹² Thus, as Sally Brown reflected, 'pain-easin' medicine' was inaccessible to many slaves. Instead, Brown remembered that a rusty axe when placed under the mattress of a woman in childbirth was understood to act as an anodyne.¹¹³ Enslaved women continued to practice their own traditions around childbirth. The burning of after-birth prevented it being picked-up by dogs, which was understood to make the infant sickly in later life.¹¹⁴ A mole's foot was tied around the neck of a newborn baby for 'good health' and 'good luck'.¹¹⁵ Tea was made from the caul and fed to a newborn baby to prevent 'its being able to foretell future events'.¹¹⁶

Some of such practices might have been accommodated by slaveholders. As Fanny Kemble described: 'These simple remedies resorted to by savages, and people as ignorant, are generally approved by experience, and sometimes condescendingly adopted by science'.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁷ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], May 20 1842, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁸ L.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [in letter Jos. C Norwood to Col. Thomas Lenoir], [Jan. 23 1843], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁹ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to S.L. [Selina Louisa] Lenoir, May 24 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹¹⁰ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother/Mrs Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Dec. 6 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹¹¹ Joe [Josephine West] to father [George W. West], Oct. 6 1864, George W. West Papers, DU.

¹¹² Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 10, Jan. 11 1858, 5, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹¹³ Sally Brown, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 9.

¹¹⁴ Mrs Rush, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 4, 2, 649.

¹¹⁵ Rena Clark, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 409.

¹¹⁶ Hagar Brown, *TAS SSI*, North Carolina and South Carolina Narratives, 11, 5, 86.

¹¹⁷ Frances Anne Kemble in Clinton (ed.), *Fanny Kemble's Journals*, 118.

Others were entirely intolerant to any practices they deemed to deviate from their own values. Prince Johnson's mistress in Carroll County, Mississippi, for instance, dismissed charms and herbal medicine as 'superstition' and forbid such practices among slaves who were 'enlightened Christian Presbyterians and as such we must conduct ourselves'.¹¹⁸ Thus not only could medical treatments be curtailed or enforced by slaveholders, but cultural rituals also prohibited.

Mistresses 'summoned physicians on their own [...] and monitored the treatment afforded [slaves]' as well as men.¹¹⁹ But while mistresses might be intermediaries in slaves' healthcare, they seldom took the burden of care-work for the sick, maintaining their supervisory role. Gladys Robertson, for example, described how though 'illness among the darkies were cared from among themselves', this was 'under the watchful eye of the master and mistress' in Kentucky.¹²⁰ As Nan Stewart recalled of her enslavement in West Virginia, 'when de slaves gits sick, deir mammies loked af'er em but de Marse gived de rem'dies'.¹²¹ Mistresses, as aforementioned, '[o]nly occasionally' assisted in slaves' childbirth.¹²² Enslaved women's healthcare was among relatives, friends, and midwives, and often only in emergencies was a doctor called, fostering strong female-centred networks for support throughout their motherhoods. 'Grannies' took central roles in slaves' healthcare, and established respected roles among enslaved and slaveholding communities.¹²³

The autonomy that many enslaved women were able to carve out in the realm of healthcare in pregnancy and childbirth meant a 'community of women thus resisted efforts by men to exert control over this most important aspect of life'.¹²⁴ As slaveholding women's experiences show, however, the remoteness of plantations, and problems 'timing' births, as well as emergencies, rendered it altogether difficult for women to have their chosen company present. For enslaved women, these challenges were of an entirely different nature. Enslaved women's 'immediate community' often 'provided the same support and solace found in elite social networks'.¹²⁵ Yet, enslaved women were often limited to choosing those women around them to support them in childbirth, and for women on smallholdings, their limitations would

¹¹⁸ Prince Johnson, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 1171.

¹¹⁹ Schwartz, *Birthing A Slave*, 49.

¹²⁰ Gladys Robertson, *FWP*, Kentucky Narratives, VII, 85.

¹²¹ Nan Stewart, *FWP*, Ohio Narratives, XII, 90.

¹²² Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 497. For examples of mistresses' roles in slaves' childbirth, see Lucinda Vann, *TAS SSI*, Oklahoma Narratives, 12, 5, 342; Malindy Maxwell, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 59; Henry Clay Moorman, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 138.

¹²³ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 34-5, 144-5. For discussion of 'grannies', see Mollie Malone, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 3, 106; Rebecca Hooks, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 175; Jennie Wormly Gibson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, VIII, 3, 17; Phillip Evans, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 35; Dosia Harris, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 112-3. For discussion of female-centred networks, see Stevenson, 'Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity among Antebellum Virginia Slave Women', 174; King, "'Rais' Your Children Up Rite'", 146; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 119.

¹²⁴ Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 71.

¹²⁵ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 61. Similarly, see McMillen, *Southern Women*, 6-7.

have been great. Family dispersed across the south would rarely (if ever) have been able to assemble for a woman's confinement. Nor would a valuable slave labourer necessarily be readily released from their work if a slaveholder had determined a different birth attendant.

Emphasising women's 'immediate community', however, is one of several areas of childbearing where historians have suggested enslaved women's experiences were shared with mistresses. Others have emphasised that a 'lack of interference by white doctors' advantaged enslaved women and that 'a lack of prenatal care did not significantly differentiate enslaved women from women of the white elite'.¹²⁶ While in many cases this may have been true, enslaved women's vulnerability to medical neglect, racist medical practice, and issues of consent, should not be understated. Nor should the disproportionate health risks enslaved mothers faced in pregnancy be overlooked in constructing such similarities between women's experiences of childbearing. Enslaved women's control over this important and intimate experience was also not simply an inadvertent benefit of slaveholders' negligence, but achieved through negotiating, resisting, and rejecting slaveholders' interventions and ensconcing motherhood as deeply as possible within enslaved communities. Enslaved women repudiated slaveholders' attempts to define this experience, to denigrate it, and to dominate it by cultivating childbearing and childrearing practices among their kinship and friendship networks reliant upon skilled and female-centred medical and experiential knowledge and cultural traditions.

While enslaved mothers and communities clearly had some success here, no more clearly would their limitations for autonomy over the mothering process be evident than in the brutal violence that slaveholders inflicted upon enslaved pregnant women. Despite slaveholders' concern for maintaining the health of pregnant women and their unborn children, they often still physically abused pregnant slaves. Former slaves expressed theirs, and others', absolute horror at the whipping of pregnant women.¹²⁷ Henry Cheatam, formerly enslaved in Clay County, Mississippi, for example, recalled an overseer beating his heavily-pregnant aunt. The man 'dug a roun' hole in de groun' an' put her stummick in it, an' beat an' beat her for a half hour straight till de baby come out right dere in de hole'.¹²⁸ Ellen Cragin, who was also enslaved in Mississippi, remembered a similarly distressing scene:

¹²⁶ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 54. Similarly, see White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 111.

¹²⁷ Irene Coates, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 76-7; Octavia Fontenette, 'Interview with Ex-slave Octavia Fontenette, New Orleans, LA', 1, LWWA; Frances Doby, 'Interview with Ex-Slave Frances Doby in 1940', 1, LWWA; Rebecca Fletcher, 'Interview with Ex-Slave Rebecca Fletcher in 1940', 4, LWWA.

¹²⁸ Henry Cheatam, *TAS SSI*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 90.

I don't know how many times he hit her. I was small. I heard some one say, "They got Clarisay Down, down there!" I went to see. And they had her down. She was stout, and they had dug a hole in the ground to put her belly in. I never did get over that. I'm an old woman, but Tom Polk better not come 'round me now even.¹²⁹

Evidently, this memory and Cragin's emotional response to it had stayed with her for her entire life. The abuse of pregnant women in this way clearly placed her and her infant at great risk. Any restraint slaveholders exercised was related to their economic interests, and sometimes propriety, rather than compassion. Lula Walker explained the rationale in a chilling metaphor: 'If de massa had a good sow that wuz givin' birth to a lot of pigs eve'y year, you don't think he goin' to take a stick an' beat her do you?'¹³⁰ While enslaved women's value as the producers of chattel-children was important, then, it did not elevate her from the oppression, labour, and violence of slavery.

Another key point of differentiation between slaveholding and enslaved women's mothering was, of course, the slave-labour that would systematically compromise all aspects of enslaved women's childrearing and raising. Owners and overseers negotiated their concerns for an enslaved pregnant woman's productivity with their interest in the survival of her unborn child.¹³¹ The extent of this is clear in that one Mississippi slave-breeder achieved a 12% infant mortality rate by reducing slaves' workload, whereas in Coastal Georgia, a rice planter lost 90% of all children born on the plantation.¹³² The 'concessions' granted to pregnant mothers changed with slaveholders' priorities, and '[a] woman of childbearing age needed to mother only two surviving children in order to replenish the slave population'.¹³³

Generally, enslaved pregnant women received some type of amendment to their 'normal' work, though this varied drastically in nature and extent. Plantation manuals advised that alongside 'sucklers' 'pregnant women must be indulged more than others' and expressed that '[n]o lifting, pulling foder, or hard work is expected of pregnant women'.¹³⁴ There was often little consistency in time 'off' given to enslaved women during pregnancy, though. Of course, even where limited amendments were made to the work tasks of enslaved women,

¹²⁹ Ellen Cragin, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 44-5.

¹³⁰ Lula Cottonham Walker, *TAS SSI*, 1, Alabama Narratives, 1, 432.

¹³¹ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 19.

¹³² Christopher Morris, 'The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered', *Journal of American History*, 85, 3 (1998), 982. See also Smithers, *Slave Breeding*, 13.

¹³³ Dusenberre, *Them Dark Days*, 243.

¹³⁴ Ruby Lorraine Radford, 'Slavery by Ruby Lorraine Radford. Compilation Made from Interviews with 30 Slaves and Information from Slavery Laws and Old Newspaper Files', *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 332.

much of the damage was done during the early months of their pregnancy, where slaveholders' scepticisms had damaging effect. Even amended work routines exposed women to health risks that slaveholding women would not be subjected to. Slaveholders relied on the physical indicators of pregnancy, and increasingly 'demanded proof of pregnancy by physical examination before granting concessions'.¹³⁵ 'Concessions' were thus only gained through constant negotiation with and resistance to the demands of slaveholders.

Sometimes, pregnant women were not recorded in 'sick' lists in the weeks approaching their births, but days. Enslaved women often worked almost up to the point of delivery.¹³⁶ Hannah Allen, for example, remembered a woman who 'had a baby out in the field' in Missouri who was very ill because 'she got too hot before the child war born'.¹³⁷ Harriette Benton's mother was also working in the field late in her pregnancy in Georgia. She 'felt kind sick', 'went to de cabin', and gave birth to Harriette before 'Aunt Emma' could arrive.¹³⁸ The risks of childbearing were clear. 'I hearn tell', Rebecca Fletcher explained, 'that when a 'omon was a bornin' a chile, death wen' roun' her bed seven times, a studyin' whether he'd take her or not'.¹³⁹

For many enslaved women, pregnancy and motherhood thus afforded them little shelter from work demands, which slaveholders would negotiate depending upon their labour needs. Forced to labour late into pregnancy, subjected to medical intervention and medical neglect, and vulnerable to violence throughout pregnancy and motherhood, enslaved women's pregnancies again bore little similarities to their slaveholding contemporaries. Most slaveholding women worked throughout their pregnancies, but in their supervisory capacity they were able to delegate heavy, uncomfortable, tiring, cumbersome work to enslaved women. They were able to exercise control over their medical treatment and their pregnancies and childbirth were treated with caution and care. To a greater or lesser extent, they were able to determine the extent of their exertion, their company during confinement, and their need for recovery.

The influence of one's enslavement on all aspects of mothering, then, emphasises the problematic nature of historians' statements that reproductive risks 'were frequent among all early nineteenth-century women despite the generation in which they lived in or their class',

¹³⁵ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 46; Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 28.

¹³⁶ Katherine Kemi Bankole, *Slavery and Medicine: Enslavement and Medical Practices in Antebellum Louisiana* (London, 1998), 57; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 19.

¹³⁷ Hannah Allen, *TAS SSI*, Missouri Narratives, 2, 139. Similarly, see James Lucas, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 1330; Edward DeBuiew, 'Interview with Ex-slave Edward Debuiew, McDonoghville, LA', 1, LWPA.

¹³⁸ Harriette Benton, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 50.

¹³⁹ Rebecca Fletcher, 'Interview with Ex-Slave Rebecca Fletcher in 1940', 4, LWPA.

that childbirth was ‘dangerous’ ‘regardless of race’, or that ‘slave children, like all youngsters, were highly susceptible to common infectious diseases’.¹⁴⁰ Slavery amplified all these issues for enslaved mothers and children, and made the very likelihood of an enslaved child’s survival deeply different to their white counterparts, and these interpretations risk constructing misleading equivalencies in the nature of women’s childbearing. Sally McMillen suggests enslaved women may have even been privileged as mothers. Low birth weights, she argues, was in ‘one sense’ a ‘positive’, because small babies were ‘easier to deliver’.¹⁴¹ According to McMillen, enslaved women were in ‘one respect’ ‘healthier than pregnant white women’, because ‘they were less likely to suffer from malaria’.¹⁴² While these claims are in and of themselves highly contentious, placing emphasis on these aspects of reproduction misrepresents the structural inequality, brutal violence, and racist exploitation that truly stratified motherhood under slavery.

iii. Childbirth and recovery

At the instance of childbirth, enslaved women generally gave birth in slave quarters, or on larger plantations, in slave hospitals.¹⁴³ Domestic slaves seem to have given birth in similar arrangements as field slaves rather than in the ‘big house’. The presence of female kin and companions at childbirth were important, and as aforementioned, doctors were often only summoned in cases of complications and emergency.¹⁴⁴ The conditions that enslaved women brought their children into were a stark comparison to the nurseries plantation mistresses did. Even purpose-built slave hospitals that might have multiple stories and glazed windows lacked basic amenities including ‘bedsteads, mattresses, or pillows’, chairs with backs, and often had ‘chilling drafts’.¹⁴⁵ It renders a poignant comparison to a mistress Polk in North Carolina, suckling her child in a ‘Dimmity Bed Gown and Changeable Silk Coat, and in a common Windsor Chair’.¹⁴⁶

Though slaveholders’ homes seldom represented the mansions familiarised by

¹⁴⁰ Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 101; Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 115, 11.

¹⁴¹ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 70; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 94.

¹⁴² McMillen also suggests enslaved women had a ‘lower maternal mortality rate’, a calculation based upon the reporting of one journal, for one year (1855), in one state (Kentucky). McMillen, *Southern Women*, 70; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 94. While Todd Savitt also notes that ‘[i]f the 1850 mortality census can be trusted, the death rate from complications of pregnancy was slightly lower in slaves than in whites’ he also details some of the many issues with census data that relied upon ‘its fieldworkers to inquire of each household head whether any deaths had occurred in his or her family unit during the preceding twelve months’, which render its reliability highly dubious. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 117, 136.

¹⁴³ For examples of hospitals, see Hunton Love, ‘Interview with Ex-slave Hunton Love in 1941’, 2, LWPA; Catherine Cornelius, ‘Interview with Ex-slave Catherine Cornelius in the 1940s’, 2, LWPA.

¹⁴⁴ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 19-20, 34-5.

¹⁴⁵ Dusiinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 262-3.

¹⁴⁶ Eliza Eagles Haywood to Jane Williams, March 8 1802, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

postbellum literary and film representations, and Mrs Polk was among the privileged even of slaveholders, their homes were generally built and furnished to a standard wholly different to slaves' lodgings. Slaves' housing was typically log cabins where an entire (or multiple) family would live in one room, with dirt floors and self-fashioned straw mattresses.¹⁴⁷ Even these conditions could represent some privilege: some '[t]hree-quarters of all Appalachian slaves lived on dirt floors or outdoors on the ground'.¹⁴⁸ Despite the efforts of enslaved families to improve and control their material conditions, enslaved women often brought their children into shacks that 'lets de flies in durin' de summah, an' de col' in durin' de wintah'.¹⁴⁹ South Carolinian planter Charles Manigault's overseer, K. Washington Skinner, provided a more detailed description of the households enslaved infants were born and raised in: the ground beneath slaves' houses was 'soft & wet' from 'water oozing through the bank', and these conditions created 'effluvia', 'which is certainly poisonous'.¹⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, the Manigaults' slaves were blighted by diarrhoea, fevers, cholera, or more generally, 'disease and pain'.¹⁵¹ In the winter, they were also subjected to 'cold piercing wind', and were 'coughing, blowing, sneezing, and shivering'.¹⁵² Louis Manigault added that the slaves 'think this is a very unhealthy place'.¹⁵³

Slave cabins, even in the words of slaveholders, were 'miserable'.¹⁵⁴ Quarters for slaves were also overcrowded, creating not only unpleasant living conditions but aiding the spread of diseases. These poor living conditions generally affected enslaved peoples' health as they increased the incidences of 'respiratory illness in the winter' and 'intestinal diseases in the summer'.¹⁵⁵ The ramifications for maternal and infant health were especially serious. Puerperal fever in particular was 'borne of infections during or after childbirth', and was thus much more likely to affect enslaved women 'because of the difficulties slave midwives must have faced keeping the environment clean'.¹⁵⁶ Keeping materials for dressings, diapers, and swaddling, clean, fresh, and dry was next to impossible when slave labour curtailed the time necessary for such activities: 'water was contaminated, weekly laundry was done in the creeks, and fabric

¹⁴⁷ For various descriptions of slaves' housing, see Sara Colquitt, *TAS SS1*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 99; Sally Murphy, *TAS SS1*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 266; Sol Webb, *TAS SS1*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 440; Frank Ziegler, *TAS SS1*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 464; Harriette Benton, *TAS SS1*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 50; Sallie Blakely, *TAS SS1*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 64; Belle Caruthers, *TAS SS1*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 364-5; Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 25-6. See also Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 149-51; Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 51; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 89.

¹⁴⁸ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 94.

¹⁴⁹ Margrett Nillin, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 8, 7, 2921.

¹⁵⁰ K. Washington Skinner to Charles Manigault, July 12 1857, Louis Manigault Papers, DU.

¹⁵¹ K. Washington Skinner to Charles Manigault, May 23 1852, K. Washington Skinner to Charles Manigault, July 31 1852, Louis Manigault to Charles Manigault, Nov. 22 1852, K. Washington Skinner to Charles Manigault, Oct. 13 1852, Louis Manigault Papers, DU.

¹⁵² K. Washington Skinner to Charles Manigault, Nov. 13 1851, Louis Manigault Papers, DU.

¹⁵³ Louis Manigault to Charles Manigault, April 19 1853, Louis Manigault Papers, DU.

¹⁵⁴ A.M.K. [Anna Matilda King] to husband [Thomas Butler King], June 20 1849, T. Butler King Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁵ R.T. Archer to Ann Maria Archer, Jan. 9 1855, Archer Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁵⁶ Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 119-20.

and rags were too precious to be discarded'.¹⁵⁷ Poor sanitation and the improper disposal of rubbish, faeces, and dead animals, meant rats as well as all manner of diseases were absolutely rife.¹⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, then, enslaved children were disproportionately victims of most infant diseases, including fevers, measles, tuberculosis, worms, and whooping cough.¹⁵⁹ Of course, this simply emphasises that one of enslaved women's principal roles as mothers was simply attempting to ensure the survival of their children in the most dire conditions.

While slaveholders certainly sought for the survival of slave infants, their immediate priorities often centred upon an enslaved mother's return to work. Having birthed their children, enslaved women's treatment during post-natal recovery showed great variation owing to the demands of slave labour, the whims of slaveholders, and the health of individual mothers and children. Ryer Emmanuel, for example, remembered that in South Carolina, new mothers were allowed 'a month till she mended in de body way' before she would return to work and relinquish childcare to an 'old woman in de yard'.¹⁶⁰ Other former slaves, however, remembered the inadequacy of recovery time and the arduous nature of working as a new mother. On smaller slaveholdings women would often be pressured back to work during recommend periods of recovery. Hattie Matthews recalled from her mother and grandmother who were enslaved in Missouri that 'whenever a negro slave had a baby she had to work rite on'.¹⁶¹ The ramifications could be serious. Lizzie Williams, formerly enslaved in Mississippi, recalled that her mother 'had to wash stain' in sleep an' snow knee deep' only three days after the birth of her child, which 'made her sick an she almost died'.¹⁶²

Slaveholders' interventions into enslaved mothers' confinements were wide-ranging and extensive both preceding and following childbirth. Enslaved families sought to protect mothers and their children wherever possible. In Arkansas, for example, Peter Brown recalled his mother 'hard to work when she wasn't able'. His father 'stole her out' and she 'had a baby out there in a canebrake'.¹⁶³ Brown's parents' outright refusal to accept the labour enforced on the heavily pregnant woman led to her better treatment in successive pregnancies. This was, however, likely related as much to her value as a 'fast breeder'. As Peter evidenced, though, the birth of a child was often the beginning of new negotiations of power. Some mistresses, for instance, greeted the birth of an enslaved child with the gift of a layette. For enslaved mothers,

¹⁵⁷ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 43, 49. See also Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 88.

¹⁵⁸ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 93-4. Sanitation was particularly poor as enslaved people did not have access to latrines. Waste disposal posed great health risks. See Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 59-61; Hudson, *To Have and to Hold*, 115-6.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 219; King, "'Suffer With Them Till Death'", 150.

¹⁶⁰ Ryer Emmanuel, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 13.

¹⁶¹ Hattie Matthews, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 249.

¹⁶² Lizzie Williams, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 10, 5, 2336.

¹⁶³ Peter Brown, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 311.

who had ‘neither the time nor the resources’, these were sometimes happily received, though such acts ‘added legitimacy to [slaveholders’] claims to be in charge of slave children’ and mistresses ‘expected to influence the way mothers cared for their newborns in exchange’.¹⁶⁴

Rather than empathising with new mothers and sharing in their experiences, though, mistresses’ engagement with expectant and new mothers largely emphasised the proprietorial nature of their relationships. Much like their interventions into enslaved women’s couplings, mistresses’ interactions with enslaved mothers embodied their labour interests. Mistresses typically gave little discussion to enslaved women’s mothering, but their comments often centred upon the absence of enslaved women from work. Frustrated by the disruptions enslaved women’s reproduction could cause their households seeking to minimise this as best possible, mistresses often saw motherhood as secondary to their slave labour upon which they depended. Mary Ferrand Henderson, for example, expressed her annoyance that Ann had ‘only sewed one day’ for her hire-mistress before she had to return to the household to give birth in October 1858.¹⁶⁵ She added the following month after the birth Ann’s child that: ‘Ann is sick - poor prospect of my work being finished’.¹⁶⁶ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher also expressed her annoyance at the ‘unavoidable inconvenience’ of Sarah’s confinement. She found ‘my greatest trials in the domestic department always occurred at the most unpropitious time’. Lucy was particularly embittered because Sarah ‘was so surly & ill-tempered that it was almost impossible to get along with her in addition to the trouble she imposed upon me’.¹⁶⁷ Beyond simply disturbing an enslaved woman’s ‘normal’ work routine, then, parturition could create additional work for slaveholding women in the form of nursing and domestic labour.

Enslaved women’s mothering, that is, was typically understood only as it pertained to slaveholding women’s own lives, and often their own mothering. Thus expectant mother Laura Norwood felt burdened by her ‘domestic servant’s’ parturition because Eliza would be confined ‘just about the time I shall need her most’, she informed her sister in 1841.¹⁶⁸ Mary Ker of Natchez, Mississippi, felt similarly inconvenienced by the birth of Henny’s baby in 1855. Mary wrote that she missed Henny ‘very much’ and that ‘she and her baby are doing very well - but it will be two weeks yet before I can put her to work’.¹⁶⁹ Of course, Henny was only missed owing to her labour, and she and her child are only mentioned in relation to

¹⁶⁴ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 54-5.

¹⁶⁵ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 11, Oct. 12 1858, 75, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁶ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 11, Nov. 14 1858, 97, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁷ Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Diary, undated, 97, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

¹⁶⁸ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to Sarah J. [Jones] Lenoir, March 17 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁹ Mary Ker to Mary [Susan] Ker, Oct. 9 1855, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC.

Henny's return to work, much like Laura's comments of Eliza, Mary's comments of Ann, and Lucy's comments of Sarah.

A pregnant Fanny Lawrence, of St Mary's Parish, Louisiana, was more fortuitous in 1849. She was 'glad' that Hannah's parturition was shortly forthcoming so 'that she will be able to attend here when her services are required'.¹⁷⁰ Fanny remarked that Hannah's sickness would be 'somewhat strange after so long an interval': that Hannah had not had a child for some time was clearly favourable to Fanny, who relied upon Hannah's slave labour. Though these women were in daily contact with one another, mistresses generally took very little interest in enslaved women's childbearing beyond how it related to themselves.

Though it is difficult to ascertain women's confinement times, considering the complaints of slaveholding women of the imposition that enslaved women's childbearing caused them, it stands to reason that enslaved mothers' confinements were kept as short as possible, and heavily pregnant or recovering slaves were often expected to continue working in some capacity. Tanfer Emin Tunc suggests that mistresses were preoccupied with trying to improve conditions but 'masters had the final word on workload, increased food allotments, and prenatal care'.¹⁷¹ In the household, though, white women's control of labour assignment and their management of food supplies and healthcare meant they certainly had the ability to influence enslaved women's treatment during pregnancy. Their attitudes, however, were shaped by their own interests in domestic labour and they do not appear to have been any more considerate to women's needs. The often structured if entirely flexible recovery times for agricultural labourers were not necessarily shared in the realm of household labour, where the 'lighter' nature of this work and mistresses' demands for specific labourers may have meant they commonly curtailed slaves' recovery.

Indeed, though Fanny remarked Hannah's childbirth was expected 'in a week or so', she was still running errands for Fanny.¹⁷² Mary remarked on October 9 1855 that Henny had two weeks remaining of her confinement, but by October 15, mentioned that Henny was 'ready to go to town'.¹⁷³ Thus, female slaveholders likely made the same negotiations that masters did in considering a woman's long-term health and the survival of her child by adhering to defined recovery times but then routinely intervening in these as they saw fit. Hannah Jones's memory of her grandmother's experience expressed how mistresses' labour demands and lack of

¹⁷⁰ Frances E. [Fanny] Lawrence to Henry E. Lawrence, Nov. 21 1849, F.E.L [Fanny Lawrence] to [Henry E. Lawrence], ['late Nov. or early Dec.'] 1849, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷¹ Tunc, 'The Mistress, the Midwife, and the Medical Doctor', 404.

¹⁷² F.E.L [Frances E. Lawrence] to [Henry E. Lawrence], ['late Nov. or early Dec.'] 1849, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷³ Mary [Baker] Ker to Mary [Susan Ker], Oct. 9 1855, Mary Susan Ker Papers, SHC

empathy could make recovery time almost non-existent. When Hannah's grandmother, enslaved in Missouri, was returned to work just three days after giving birth, 'she was so sick and weak' that her sewing was 'crooked'. The '[o]ld Miss ordered de overseer to take her out and beat her 'bout it'.¹⁷⁴

While white women's interests in enslaved women's childbearing were often centred upon the absence of these women from work, the prospect of large amounts of enslaved children was also something mistresses expressed concerns about, as their interventions into slaves' couplings also suggest. Mary Badger Hale, for example, explained to her sister in Fayetteville, North Carolina, that the confinement of two of her slaves meant she had to nurse her own child in 1863. Mary felt that '[...] darky babies do not add to the comfort of the white family'.¹⁷⁵ Children also created new demands upon adult slave labourers that could be problematic on smaller slaveholdings. Perhaps this is what undergirded Laura Norwood's feeling that 'the idea of having a possey of little negroes about me is the most dismal of all'. Adeline was 'very little behind Eliza' in her 'maternal anticipations' in 1842, and Laura had 'suspected as much several months since as was frequently told by others that it was certainly the case, but I still tried to hope that it might prove otherwise'.¹⁷⁶ In 1844, she again complained of the imposition of enslaved children:

We have now four women and six negro children younger than Mary, rather an appalling prospect for I should think it almost impossible to make them earn their victuals and clothes.¹⁷⁷

Laura's attitude to enslaved women's childbearing was thus directly related to the limited contributions of the very youngest enslaved children: they took more than they provided.

While Laura was reviled by the prospect of a 'possey of little negroes', she also mentioned to her mother the 'prosperous' nature of her 'family', and in doing so, inadvertently articulated another way in which slaveholding mothers understood enslaved motherhood: property.¹⁷⁸ It was a sentiment expressed most coldly by Mira Alexander from her household in Woodford County, Kentucky, upon finding on her arrival the 'blessed news' that 'Old Izzy' had given birth in 1849:

¹⁷⁴ Hannah Jones, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 215.

¹⁷⁵ M.B. [Mary Badger] Hale to sister, Aug. 9 1863, Badger Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁶ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], May 20 1842, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁷ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother [Selina Lenoir] [addressed Col. Thomas Lenoir], Oct. 16 1844, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁸ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], May 20 1842, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

I should have much preferred animals of another kind such as chickens, ducks, etc of which there are none, no butter or anything else except a plenty of lazy good for nothing negroes to support which I am too weary of [...]¹⁷⁹

Though mistresses often saw enslaved women's motherhood from a highly personal frame of reference and thus discussed motherhood in relation to use-value rather than pecuniary-value, that slave children were chattel was clear. Ryer Emmanuel recalled how her South Carolinian mistress would take company 'to the door to see the black children in the yard' and exhibit her 'pretty crop of little niggers' to them. 'De lady', Ryer recalled, 'she look so please like'.¹⁸⁰

Enslaved women's childbearing brought wealth by increasing the size of a slaveholder's estate, but also provided mistresses in particular a 'pool' of 'labourers' from which to select likely servants, as Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset evidenced in the mid-summer of 1845. An enslaved mother named Harriett had taken her baby from her home at the DeRosset family's rice plantation in Brunswick, North Carolina, to see her mother at Eliza's household. Eliza, a mother-of-nine, informed her own fifteen-year-old daughter Catherine who was at St. Mary's School in Raleigh, that she had made a decision:

Harriett came from the plantation today to see her mother she has one of the finest infants I ever saw and I think as soon as it is old enough I will take it from her.¹⁸¹

She unwittingly evoked a poignant scene in the gathering of a mother and a grandmother around a child that their slaveholder had already decided would be removed from their care. Eliza saw Harriett's 'fine' infant as a slave labourer, and she would only take the child when 'old enough' to serve its purpose. She thus saw Harriett's mothering primarily in the production of a slave labourer. The bonds of ownership, of course, superseded the bonds of motherhood.

In addition to slaveholding women's commodification and re-direction of enslaved women's mother-work in nursing, then, motherhood as an interruption to and site of production were additional ways in which mistresses related slaves' mothering to labour. Their use and abuse of child-labour emphasises just how personal their interests were in enslaved children.

¹⁷⁹ Mira M. Alexander to Agatha [Marshall Logan], May 29 1849, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁰ Ryer Emmanuel, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 12.

¹⁸¹ Mother [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset] to Catherine D. DeRosset, July 27 [1845], DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

Whether a labour interruption, an unwelcome dependency, or the creation of a valuable new slave, mistresses understood enslaved women's motherhood as it affected them, and as they could utilise it. Motherhood was embedded within the dynamics of ownership and appropriation that shaped women's relationships.

Beyond discussing enslaved women's mothering in terms of labour, the little attention slaveholding women gave to the birth of enslaved children tended to be in cases of illness or death of mother or child. In many white women's diaries and letters, the births of slave-children were non-events and recorded much like overseers, simply stating: 'Jane's child born'.¹⁸² Even in cases where white women were engaged in nursing slave children who died, as Virginian slaveholder Sally Lyons Taliaferro was, they often showed a notable lack of empathy. Taliaferro simply noted at the death of Jane's baby that the child had 'expired' in June 1862.¹⁸³ The following day, she wrote: 'Could not go to church. Minding the children all day, servants at the funeral'.¹⁸⁴ Mary Ferrand Henderson made a remarkably similar comment when she expressed her 'disappointment' that the use of her carriage to bury an enslaved woman, Henrietta's, baby, meant she could not go out.¹⁸⁵ Though Mahala Roach attended the funeral of one enslaved woman's baby, for another, 'the fourth baby which we have lost in twelve months', she displayed a typical slaveholders approach when she concluded 'there must be bad management somewhere – but I can't tell where' in 1858.¹⁸⁶ Such instances render the divisions between mistresses and slaves quite clear. Enslaved women's maternal losses were 'management' issues and inconveniences.

Julia White, formerly enslaved in Little Rock, Arkansas, provided a rare insight into how enslaved women experienced mistresses' disregard of their bereavements. She explained:

I was little, but can still see them. One of my mother's babies died and Master went to Little Rock on a horse and carried back a little coffin under his arm. The mistress had brought mother a big washing. She was working under the cover of the well-house and tears was running down her face. When master came back, he said: "How come you are working today, Angeline, when your baby is dead?" She showed him the big pile of clothes she had to wash, as mistress said. He said "There is plenty of help on this place what can wash. You come on in

¹⁸² Sally Lyons Taliaferro, Diary, March 13 1861, William Booth Taliaferro Papers, SHC.

¹⁸³ Sally Lyons Taliaferro, Diary, June 28 1862, William Booth Taliaferro Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁴ Sally Lyons Taliaferro, Diary, June 29 1862, William Booth Taliaferro Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁵ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 11, Oct. 12 1858, 75, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁶ Mahala Roach Eggleston, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 52, Sep. [5] 1858, 136, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, SHC.

and sit by your little baby, and don't do no more work till after the funeral"¹⁸⁷

The bereaved enslaved mother was clearly in anguish and her mistress simply sought to maintain the usual routines of work. Despite understanding the perils of bearing children in the south as frequently bereaved mothers themselves, slaveholding women showed little sympathy for bereaved enslaved mothers.

Instead, they often presumed enslaved women to have killed their own babies. In Virginia, for example, Margaret Nourse commented upon a friend who was struggling with a female slave: a 'big tupsico woman' who she suggested had committed 'infanticide almost before her eyes'.¹⁸⁸ In 1851, Susan Dupuy Watkins similarly speculated if the death of an enslaved woman named Lucindy's baby was accidental or if that infant was 'smothered'.¹⁸⁹ Mary Jeffreys Bethell held the same suspicions over the death of Cinda's baby.¹⁹⁰ Whether these enslaved women were using motherhood as means of resisting slavery, or these were unfounded suspicions, mistresses' scepticisms best represent their inability to empathise with enslaved mothers and the extent to which motherhood was inextricable from the power relations in women's relationships.

Slaveholders' instances of empathy and a recognition of enslaved women as mothers can, of course, be found, but they were rare and never the norm. A woman named Anne, for instance, wrote to North Carolinian slaveholder Sophie Manly describing a bereaved slave mother named Maria as 'so distressed, & pained so much' by her loss in 1856.¹⁹¹ At the Retreat plantation in St Simons Island, Georgia, Anna Matilda Page King similarly recognised at the death of an enslaved child that Clementine was 'so fond a mother' in 1854. King's sympathy for Clementine was likely shaped by her affection for the slave that had 'show such tender feeling for me'.¹⁹² While such remarks were scarce and typically reserved for favoured slave mothers or children, some women suggested their principles were not simply reserved for key slaves and stated that the death of 'the prettiest baby (white or black)' was a sad affair. Gertrude Thomas, for example, asserted that she could 'sympathise with my sex, whether white or black'.¹⁹³ For Carolyn Newton Curry, while Gertrude's 'views vary at times', her 'attitude regarding slave women and their plight does not change'. She emphasises Gertrude's

¹⁸⁷ Julia A. White, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 111.

¹⁸⁸ Margaret Tillotson Kemble Nourse, *Diary*, [Oct. 1862], VHS.

¹⁸⁹ Susan Dupuy Watkins to Jane Watkins Edmunds, Oct. 10 1851, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁹⁰ Mary Jeffreys Bethell, *Diary* [typed transcription], June 6 1860, 47, SHC.

¹⁹¹ Anne to Sophie Manly, [Sep. 1 1856], Manly Family Papers, SHC. Similarly, see Margaret Tillotson Kemble Nourse, *Diary*, July [24] 1862, VHS.

¹⁹² A.M. [Anna Matilda] King to husband [Thomas Butler King], July 12 1854, T. Butler King papers, DU.

¹⁹³ Anne to Sophie Manly, [Sep. 1 1856], Manly Family Papers, SHC; Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *Diary*, Aug. 18 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

‘sentiments that Southern women were all abolitionists at heart’.¹⁹⁴ Yet, Gertrude may have remarked of the ills of slavery but she did not work to alleviate them, or even to change her own behaviour, less still to challenge the system. Indeed, she did not show any attempt at empathising with the bereaved enslaved wet-nurses she moved into her home to breastfeed her children.

Any gestures of sympathy occurred within proprietorial relationships centred upon exploitation: an exploitation often on the basis of mistresses’ own or slaves’ mothering. Divisions of race and class simply trumped any gendered identification. Though mistresses unflinchingly and consciously believed ‘that one race is inherently superior to all others’, Adrienne Rich’s definition of ‘white solipsism’ as a ‘tunnel-vision’ that engages with ‘non-white experience’ only in ‘spasmodic, impotent guilt-reflexes, which have little or no long-term, continuing momentum or political usefulness’, otherwise encapsulates these fleeting recognitions of slaves’ maternal lives.¹⁹⁵ To ‘empathise’ implies slaveholding women understood and shared the feelings of enslaved mothers, and is thus surely incompatible with the apparently inescapable ‘idea that black infants were property’.¹⁹⁶ Rather, that white women could recognise - acknowledge the existence and validity of - enslaved women’s maternal feelings, only magnifies the cruelty of their interventions in black women’s mothering (whether whether through benign yet damaging social custom, self-interest, or malice). The distinction between empathy and recognition is thus an important one. Mistresses’ racism, too, should not be understated. Several years after Elizabeth Noland’s attempts to prevent her ‘maid’ from becoming pregnant, for example, she again remarked upon the ‘increase of black population in Glen Ora’. ‘The sight of an infant darky’, she wrote, ‘turns my stomach’.¹⁹⁷

While mistresses sometimes acknowledged enslaved women’s maternal feelings, more commonly, slaveholding women denigrated black women’s mothering. Far from recognising an universal experience, mistresses characterised slave mothers from the racist perspectives of their alleged ‘callousness, incompetence, and ignorance’.¹⁹⁸ White women described enslaved women as generally cold mothers. North Carolinian Eliza DeRosset, for example, remarked in 1842 that Lucy, an enslaved mother, was ‘not very kind even to her own children in sickness’.¹⁹⁹ One woman expressed her desire to hire out a slave woman, Alice, in town, but

¹⁹⁴ Carolyn Newton Curry, *Suffer and Grow Strong: The Life of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1834-1907* (Macon, GA, 2014), 68, 89.

¹⁹⁵ Adrienne Rich, ‘Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia’, in Adrienne Rich (ed.) *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (London, 1979), 306.

¹⁹⁶ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 90.

¹⁹⁷ E.W. [Elizabeth] Noland to Ella [Noland Mackenzie], April 9 1859, Ella Noland Mackenzie Papers, SHC.

¹⁹⁸ Fett, *Working Cures*, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Wife [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset] to Dr. A.J. DeRosset, Sep. 15 1842, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

felt ‘afraid she might neglect her child [...] the child is worth more than her hire’. She passed on instructions to the woman hiring Alice in 1851: ‘have her whipped whenever she deserves it’.²⁰⁰ These interpretations of slave mothers’ inadequacies and carelessness emboldened (and were undoubtedly used to justify) mistresses’ various interventions into slaves’ mothering. Mistresses such as Elizabeth Perry were thus able to reason that a slave mother such as Eliza was ‘such a bad example to her children, they would do much better without her’.²⁰¹ Of course, such comments further evidence the utter disregard mistresses had for the bonds enslaved mothers shared with their children.

Even Fanny Kemble, who was in many respects a sympathetic commentator during her brief stay on the Butler plantations in the Georgia sea islands, animalised slave mothers who ‘lay like brute beasts’, apparently ‘unvisited by any of those Divine influences which may ennoble the dispensations of pain and illness’. Enslaved parenthood, she described, ‘becomes mere breeding, bearing, suckling, and there an end’.²⁰² While Kemble hoped that slave mothers might be taught improvement, this was essentially a metonym for the emulation of white women’s mothering practices. Rogene Scott Bailey, another visitor to the south teaching on a plantation in Cheneyville, Louisiana, similarly remarked of an exceptional enslaved mother who seemed to have achieved ‘the affection of a white woman for her child’ and was ‘very much like a white person in all except her skin’.²⁰³ Poor mothering skills were not simply individual character traits, but inherently racial, and thus even when individual enslaved women achieved ‘improvement’, reversion to savagery was a recurrent danger in the eyes of female slaveholders. For example, when South Carolinian slaveholder Mary Boykin Chesnut encountered in 1864 an enslaved woman named Molly whipping a nurse who she believed to have injured her child, Chesnut seemed to recognise the maternal instinct of the ‘enraged lioness’ that led her to seek retribution, but nonetheless reflected: ‘It takes these half-Africans but a moment to go back to their naked savage animal nature’. Even ‘instincts’, that is, were racially encoded for slaveholders.²⁰⁴

Thus, despite ‘sharing’ the pains of parturition, health risks, and frequent bereavement, the majority of slaveholding women were simply unable to extend their understandings of motherhood to include enslaved women. Mary Ferrand Henderson, for example, was deeply

²⁰⁰ E to cousin, Sep. 6 1851, Hughes Family Papers, SHC.

²⁰¹ Elizabeth Frances Perry, Diary, March 11 1844, SHC.

²⁰² Frances Anne Kemble in Clinton (ed.), *Fanny Kemble’s Journals*, 105, 117. As William Dusinger outlines, Kemble was an ‘unconventional mistress’ and her ‘intercourse with the slaves resembled nothing they had previously experienced from a white person’. Dusinger, *Them Dark Days*, 221, 232.

²⁰³ Genie [Rogene A. Scott Bailey] to mother [Hannah Scott Warren], March 14 1859, Scott Family Papers, SHC.

²⁰⁴ Chesnut, *Diary from Dixie*, 325.

grieved by the loss of several of her young children to fatal illnesses yet continued to grow her family. However, upon finding an enslaved woman's baby 'continues sick with worms' in 1857, Henderson simply could not 'imagine why little negroes have so many [babies]'.²⁰⁵ Henderson clearly could not apply her own reasoning to enslaved mothers. Though Henderson professed her own losses made her saddened 'to witness the sickness of even a little servant', her sadness at the death of a slave was a 'regret to lose' such 'a nice smart little servant' rather than an emotional bereavement.²⁰⁶

Mistresses, then, did not view 'slave women as sharing an outlook to the world similar to their own' or make 'an emotional identification with them'.²⁰⁷ Certainly they were capable of recognising enslaved women's maternal feelings. But, they saw motherhood through the lens of slavery: in terms of race, in terms of their labour interests, and enmeshed in the power dynamics of their interpersonal relationships. Slaveholding women's roles in re-directed mothering, mother-child separations, and their capitalisation upon enslaved women's mother-work were dependent upon a broadly accepted understanding of their respective maternal roles. In each of these interactions, they articulated the hierarchies of motherhood. Mistresses, for domestic slaves in particular, sought to control their conceptions or couplings, enforced labour throughout pregnancy, understood enslaved motherhood principally in relation to their own lives. For enslaved women, motherhood was a fight to claim the very meaning of parturition, parenthood, and personhood. They did so in a context where the day-to-day responsibilities of parenting evidently entailed navigating not only slaveholders' interventions but the most dire conditions.

iv. Childcare, labour, and mother-work

While slave labour facilitated slaveholding women's mothering, it systematically separated enslaved mothers from their children. Separations operated on a number of levels, from separations during the working day, to the permanent severance of natal relationships. For most enslaved mothers, having resumed their enslaved labour, children were given to a designated nurse during the working day. This was generally a more junior or elderly slave to facilitate the use of adult 'prime' slave labourers elsewhere. Childcare arrangements varied dependent upon regional differences in labour demands and organisation. Daniel Pargas, for example,

²⁰⁵ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 8, Jan. 20 1857, 10, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

²⁰⁶ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 3, Aug. 15 1855, 5-6, Aug. 17 1855, 7, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

²⁰⁷ Weiner, 'The Intersection of Race and Gender', 381.

identifies that the cultivation of mixed grains and a challenging agricultural economy among Northern Virginia's small slaveholdings meant women's confinement times were often incredibly short and visits back to feed their babies were prohibited.²⁰⁸ Despite the absence of formal nurseries on smallholdings, as Wilma Dunaway identifies, 'elderly or infirm slaves were put in charge of loosely structured and informal child care'.²⁰⁹ Though more formalised and routinised on larger plantations, structured separations of mothers and children were shared across the south. In areas such as South Carolina, 74% of the enslaved population resided on plantations with over one hundred slaves cultivating crops such as rice, thus formal slave 'nursery' arrangements were common. Conditions in such regions were more conducive to ill health and infant mortality, but mothers appear to have longer and more consistent periods of confinement and more control over childcare under the task system.²¹⁰

Separations for the work-day, though, were habitual.²¹¹ Here, some enslaved women who worked as domestic 'servants' might have had more flexibility. Marie Jenkins Schwartz notes that house servants 'usually kept their children at their work stations', and though 'house servants were not regarded as a hereditary caste', Emily West finds that skilled house slaves 'were more likely to have children who would move into senior positions'.²¹² Ella Kelly's mother, for example, worked as a cook when enslaved near Monticello, South Carolina. As a young child, Ella was 'too little to work' and able to be 'at her [Mother's] apron strings all de time'.²¹³ Though Kelly's seems a fond remembrance, it also underscores the reasons mistresses avoided allowing mothers to keep their children with them, though. With the knowledge of white women's perceptions of enslaved children as a burdensome interruption to adult slaves' labour, and the clear provisions for childcare made elsewhere, this was likely more prevalent on smallholdings without other arrangements. Domestic slaves' children were often given to another caretaker or placed into a communal nursing arrangement. Whites' chores and whites' children were supposed to come first.

Most enslaved mothers' children were placed into the care of a nurse where they would be permitted to intermittently return to in order to nourish infants throughout the period of

²⁰⁸ Pargas, 'From the Cradle to the Fields', 481.

²⁰⁹ Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 70.

²¹⁰ Pargas, 'From the Cradle to the Fields', 485-7.

²¹¹ The following examples include various locations and size of slaveholdings. Work-day separations characterised all these childcare arrangements; Dave Harper, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 164; William Dunwoody, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 227-8; Margaret Bryant, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 146; Jephtha Choice, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 218; Mollie Malone, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 3, 104.

²¹² Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 64; West, *Chains of Love*, 102, 104.

²¹³ Ella Kelly, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 3, 81.

breastfeeding.²¹⁴ Those who used enslaved nurses had to face the knowledge that overburdened nurses were limited in their abilities to protect and care for children. Supervision of children was notoriously poor as elderly or juvenile nurses were inundated by their responsibilities. Nurses also often had to perform work such as spinning while caring for infants. ‘The cries of these little ones, who were cut off almost entirely from motherly care and protection’, Louis Hughes remembered, ‘were heart-rending’.²¹⁵

Despite the ubiquity of these work-day separations, former slaves remembered their separations from their mothers. Jessie Rowell, for example, remembered watching for her mother to come home from working on a plantation near Heidelberg, Mississippi. She added: ‘I was always glad to see her’.²¹⁶ Annie Gail similarly remembered that as a child enslaved near Greenville, Alabama, she used to watch her mother working ‘for somehow I wuz feared she would get away from me’.²¹⁷ Quite understandably, then, field and house slaves alike sometimes attempted to carry their children with them. Mary Johnson’s mother, for instance, ‘have me wrap up in a blanket and strop on her back’ when working in Virginia.²¹⁸ Also formerly enslaved in Virginia, Sarah Colquitt remembered that she too ‘usta take my littlest baby wid me’ when working in the fields ‘to almost plumb dark’.²¹⁹ This could enable more frequent breastfeeding, as Henry Clay suggested. Henry’s mother only ‘quit work’ for three days in bearing her child, and worked with her baby tied to her back. ‘When it get hungry’, he informed his interviewer, ‘she just slip it around in front and feed it and go right on picking or hoeing while it have its ninny’.²²⁰ Children placed on the edges of fields could also sometimes be snuck extra feeds under watchful overseers.²²¹ Though this arrangement could surely be physically exhausting for some mothers, it could be preferable to leaving children in the care of others.²²² Leaving children near to one’s place of work outdoors was often a dangerous arrangement because of the risks posed by snake-bites, scorpion-stings, insect-bites, exposure, and disease-ridden mosquitoes to infants.²²³

Even for those slaves labouring within the household, having one’s child close by did not necessarily solve problems of appropriate supervision or care, though. Mattie J. Jackson’s

²¹⁴ See, for example, Callie Williams, *TAS SSI*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 449; Mary Childs, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 199; Maggie Williams, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 4, 2, 640; Polly Turner Cancer, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 350. Enslaved women’s infant-feeding practices are discussed at length in Chapter Four.

²¹⁵ Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 43-4.

²¹⁶ Jessie Rowell, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 375.

²¹⁷ Annie Gail, *FWP*, Florida Narratives, III, 375.

²¹⁸ Mary Johnson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 2, 219.

²¹⁹ Sarah Colquitt, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 287.

²²⁰ Henry Clay, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XII, 110.

²²¹ July Ann Halfen, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 899.

²²² See, for example, Sarah Frances Shaw Graves, *TAS SSI*, Missouri Narratives, X, 138.

²²³ Wood, *Women’s Work, Men’s Work*, 20; King, “‘Suffer With Them Till Death’”, 153.

mother, for example, was able to keep her child with her when enslaved in St Louis, Missouri. She was forced to keep her infant in a box in the corner of the kitchen, because ‘[i]f permitted to creep around the floor her mistress thought it would take too much time to attend to him. He was two years old and never walked’.²²⁴ Formerly enslaved women’s memories of their children who died under such conditions were painful ones. One enslaved woman, Charlotte Brooks, recalled that her children had died ‘for want of attention’. She consoled herself with the knowledge that ‘they were better off with my blessed Jesus than with me’. It gave limited solace. Her interviewer, Octavia V. Rogers Albert, could ‘never forget how her eyes were filled with tears when she would speak of all her children’.²²⁵

Other mothers were forced to leave their children behind while they went to work, which often ended in tragic disaster. Lizzie Daugherty’s mother, for example, was ‘compelled’ to clean a vacant house by her mistress, and had to leave her children behind. On her return, she found her house had burned down and her children were dead. Though the interviewer remarked that the Daughertys did not seem to hold the mistress responsible, ‘Mrs. Daugherty said that her mother felt as if her very heart had been crushed and for weeks and weeks she felt as if she just couldn’t speak to anyone’.²²⁶ Joanna Thompsom Isom recalled such separations in a song, which was evidently means of articulating some of enslaved mothers’ most painful sentiments about parenting under slavery:

Little black sheep, where’s yo’ lam’
 Way yonder in de meado’
 The bees an’ de butterflies
 A-peckin’ out hiz eyes
 The poor little black sheep
 Cry Ma-a-a-my²²⁷

Of course, the limitations enslaved mothers faced even ensuring their children were supervised, clean, and fed, emphasises the extent to which slavery disenfranchised slave mothers. It also provides another stark comparison to slaveholding women, who were able to exercise such control over their childcare arrangements, despite their sense of burden under their responsibilities and their dissatisfaction with nurses. Instead, enslaved mothers’ days were

²²⁴ Jackson, *Story of Mattie J. Jackson*, 9.

²²⁵ Albert, *House of Bondage*, 14-5.

²²⁶ Lizzie Daugherty, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 65.

²²⁷ Joanna Thompsom Isom, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 1097.

characterised by slave labour, which for domestic slaves was ensuring white children were properly cared for often while worrying about their own absent infants.

Enslaved mothers who were able to return to their quarters after their slave labour, whether in the house or the field, would often find their day's work not yet completed. Mother-work for one's own family was meaningful work.²²⁸ Enslaved women's 'second shift' entailed cooking, cleaning, the production of household goods and clothing. Some mothers endeavoured to keep gardens that thus provided extra food.²²⁹ While this was fulfilling family-orientated labour, though, it was also exhausting. Nancy Boudry must have summarised many women's exhaustion when her interviewer remarked that her 'plantation days', or, enslavement, 'were colored to a somber hue by overwork, childbearing, poor food and long working hours' in Columbia County, Georgia.²³⁰ As Carrie Hudson remembered: 'When dey come in f'um de fields at night, dem slaves was glad to just go to sleep and rest'.²³¹

Mothers, though, had to collect, feed, and care for their children. Dicey Thomas, formerly enslaved in Alabama and Arkansas, related just how demanding these dual burdens were on women. She remembered that after leaving her child with a nurse and beginning labour, an enslaved woman:

[...] would come back and nurse the child around about twice [...] Then you wouldn't see her any more till dark that night. Long as you could see you had to stay in the field [...] Then the mother would go and get the children and bring them home. She would cook for supper and feed them. She'd have to go somewhere and get them. Maybe the children would be asleep before she would get all that done. Then she would have to wake them up and feed them. After the children had been fed, the mother would cook the next day's breakfast and she would cook the next day's dinner and put it in the pail so that everything would be ready when the riding boss would come around. Cause when he came, it meant move.²³²

²²⁸ Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, 12; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 4, 29-30. Slaveholders, however, benefitted from this labour. See Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 150; Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 14.

²²⁹ See Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work*, 12; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 166-8; West, *Chains of Love*, 90-2, 99. Tasking systems in the deep south could allow more flexibility for occupations such as gardening, and Wilma Dunaway suggests that 'small plantations engaged in much more micro-management of slave behavior'. See Hudson, *To Have and to Hold*, 9-10; Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 170.

²³⁰ Nancy Boudry, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 113.

²³¹ Carrie Hudson, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 214.

²³² Dicey Thomas, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 290-2.

Dicey's description of this arduous routine emphasises just how challenging and demanding the practicalities of parenting under slavery could be. Furthermore, some women were also given additional work by slaveholders to their day's labour. Spinning and weaving were particularly popular tasks to be assigned in the evenings. Formerly enslaved in Mississippi, Sarah Felder, for example, remembered how 'Miss Vickey niver lowed de women ter rest' and women were 'busy wid de cards, an' spinnin' an' de looms' at night and in inclement weather.²³³ Robert Falls similarly explained how his mother 'was a hard worker [...] She had to be. Old Mistress see to that'. The mistress sat by the spinning wheel, counting its turns, and 'they couldnt fool her none neither'. So, as Robert described: 'My mother worked until ten o'clock almost every night because her part was to "spend so many cuts" a day, and she couldnt get through no sooner'.²³⁴ Mistresses capitalised upon enslaved women's gendered labour whether they were domestic slaves or not. Again, there are clear contrasts to be drawn between slaveholding and enslaved women's mothering. Enslaved women had to adapt their childcare and mother-work to accommodate the constant demands of slave labour. This slave labour often afforded white women with those very same gendered labours.

Despite this hyperexploitation, enslaved mothers of course did not accept slaveholders' equation of their motherhood with labour, nor as a source of economic production. While white mothers preoccupied themselves with educating their children, instilling morals, familial and cultural values, enslaved mothers were not dissimilar, if their messages, and their means and opportunities to impart them, were distinctly different. Enslaved mothers laboured to educate their children in skilled labour and work ethic, manners and morals, and religion.²³⁵ Instilling a sense of personal, familial, and cultural identity was all the more important for mothers who recognised they raised their children in a system that sought to erase these values, and 'mothers captured an ideological terrain over which masters and mistresses had little control'.²³⁶ Mothers taught strategies for survival and emphasised the 'importance of the slave community'.²³⁷

Teaching children to resist their slaveholders was thus often an important part of socialising children.²³⁸ Delia Hill, for example, recalled her mother 'done smoked 'nough of us up side down, not to tell dem white folks nothin'' in direct contradiction to her mistress's instruction that 'I want all my niggers to tell de truth'.²³⁹ L.R. Ferebee similarly followed in his

²³³ Sarah Felder, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 716.

²³⁴ Robert Falls, *FWP*, Tennessee Narratives, XV, 14.

²³⁵ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 196-200, 206-7, 212-6; Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 124-6.

²³⁶ Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, 208.

²³⁷ Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 254.

²³⁸ See Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, 189-91.

²³⁹ Delia Hill, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 182.

mother's footsteps in resisting his mistress, as one of 'the old blue hen's chickens'.²⁴⁰ Of course, this also emphasises that in mistresses' early removals of likely domestic servants from their parents, they hoped to impart distinctly different values and loyalties in enslaved children. Whether teaching children deference or defiance, enslaved mothers were seeking to protect their children. Some shouldered the burden of work, like Angeline Jones recalled. Her mother 'didn't see as hard times as grandma had' because '[g]randma shielded her in the work part a whole heap'.²⁴¹ Others placed themselves between their child and the whip: when J.T. Tims's mistress ordered him to be whipped by a man named William (though he 'hadn't done nothin'), his mother 'come out with a big carving knife and told him, "That's my child and if you hit him, I'll kill you"'.²⁴²

For all enslaved mothers' efforts to shield their children from the abuses of slavery, mistresses' interventions into their parenting were frequent, extensive, and painful. In the most everyday interactions, mistresses sought to exert their control over enslaved women's mothering. Female slaveholders disciplined enslaved children, including preventing a mother from punishing her own child, or administering an excessively cruel punishment. Formerly enslaved in Homer, Louisiana, Jane Montgomery recalled how her mistress determined to '[l]et ever[y] bitch whip her own chillun'. She was certainly a minority.²⁴³ Others 'make mammy do de lashin'', presumably to maintain their own relationships with enslaved children.²⁴⁴ It was one way among many that mistresses casually sought to regulate enslaved women's mothering.

Mistresses routinely superseded enslaved mothers' maternal authority with their own authority as *de facto* owners. This included choosing how a child was cared for and by whom in sickness. On Weston Farm near Warrenton, Virginia, for example, Margaret Tillotson Kemble Nourse could not reconcile an enslaved mother's apparent devotion to her child with her neglecting 'the powders' she had been instructed to treat the infant's croup with in 1862. Of course, the baby's mother perhaps eschewed this treatment for another; but this was a decision that was Margaret's.²⁴⁵ At the Buchoi plantation in Wilmington, North Carolina, Rebecca Moore's annoyance that an enslaved mother had exercised parental autonomy was more acute. She informed her mother that 'Phebes poor little Becky died before the day we got here', and expressed her frustration that her instructions were not followed: 'you know she

²⁴⁰ Ferebee, *Brief History of the Slave Life of Rev. L. R. Ferebee*, 8.

²⁴¹ Angeline Jones, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 134.

²⁴² J.T. Tims, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 336-7.

²⁴³ Jane Montgomery, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 228.

²⁴⁴ Adeline Johnson, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 3, 36.

²⁴⁵ Margaret Tillotson Kemble Nourse, *Diary*, July [c.23] 1862, VHS.

carried it, and left it with Nancy, without my permission'.²⁴⁶ Katy Simpson Smith's assertion that motherhood 'allowed women of all classes and colors to raise sons and daughters according to their own principles' is, therefore, not borne out by the evidence.²⁴⁷ Mistresses' interventions were not always intended malevolently and were often simply manifestations of a slaveholder's belief in her rightful role.

The exercise of mistresses' power did not need to be violent, forceful, or overtly malicious, to be deeply felt, though. Mistresses even revoked parents' naming of their child. Naming was 'one of the most important activities in the newborn baby's household' as a rite that reinforced 'family networks' and expressed 'cultural continuity'.²⁴⁸ Mistresses themselves placed great importance on the naming of their own children, hence the high levels of necronymic naming. Yet, this simple yet significant act of identification and belonging could be denied. David Goodman Gullins, for example, remembered that his '[m]istress had a lot of company' when his brother was born, and 'wanted to name the new baby for their best friends'.²⁴⁹ Trivialising this important parental act was common. Other mistresses allowed their children to name infant slaves, hence how 'Queen Elizabeth' gained her distinctive title. Another child was named the emblematic 'Dixie' by her mistress.²⁵⁰ Some women came to detest the symbolic value of their name. Lizzie McCloud's mistress Lizzie was 'mean as the devil' and she was 'scared to death of the white folks'. 'Wouldn't half feed us', she explained, 'and they went and named me after her'.²⁵¹ Formerly enslaved in Arkansas, Sarah Wilson, explicated how some mothers felt about these acts. Her mistress named her 'Annie':

[...] and Mammy was afraid to change it until old Mistress died, then she change it. She hate old Mistress and that name too [...] If I went when she called "Annie" my mammy would beat me for answering to that name, and if I didn't go old Mistress would beat me for that. That made me hate both of them [...]²⁵²

Sarah's mother's sentiment was likely shared by many mothers denied the decision of their child's name.

²⁴⁶ R.C. Moore to Jane Williams, Nov. 23 1815, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

²⁴⁷ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 2.

²⁴⁸ King, *Stolen Childhood*, 6; Kleinberg, *Women in the United States*, 47; Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 231.

²⁴⁹ David Goodman Gullins, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 80-1.

²⁵⁰ Queen Elizabeth Bunt, *TAS SSI*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 125; Edmondson, 'Diary of Belle Edmondson', 52.

²⁵¹ Lizzie McCloud, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 4.

²⁵² Sarah Wilson, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 345-7.

Whether frivolous, callous, or possessive, these were expressions of power that extended mistresses' proprietary rights over enslaved women's maternal ones in the first days of a child's life. It was a pattern of conflict that would extend throughout the life of a child. Slaveholders' further attempted to determine family connections by prohibiting the use of 'terms of endearment' or 'the same terms as whites used with their parents'.²⁵³ The intricacies of naming and address were thus strategies in asserting, denying, and distorting both status and familial bonds. No wonder enslaved mothers, like Harriet Jacobs, longed 'to be entirely free to act a mother's part towards my children'.²⁵⁴ Enslaved women deeply resented their mistresses' attempted revocations of all their parental decisions and children would be a life-long site of contestation, or, as Caroline Hunter stated: 'During slavery it seemed lak yo' chillun b'long to ev'ybody but you'.²⁵⁵

Of course, nowhere else were mistresses' exercises of control and possession more evident nor more devastating than in their decisions to effect permanent mother-child separations. Their use of enslaved children as domestic labourers was certainly one of the more common and female-centred of such circumstances, but it was one of many. While these practices reflected slaveholding women's interests in slave labour and a disregard for mother-child bonds, mistresses also used separations as forms of coercion and simply as an act of cruelty. One woman, for example, felt her mistress sold her oldest child because 'she didn't like me' and 'just did that to hurt me' and Sally Brown remembered 'Mistress Mitchell' as a cruel woman who just 'took delight in sellin' slaves'.²⁵⁶ Henry Doyle's mistress, Miss Neely, repeatedly threatened his mother that 'she was going to sell me and put me in her pocket'. For his mother, already bereaved of (at least) one child, the constant concern 'mighty near break her heart'.²⁵⁷ Miss Neely's threats were clearly intended to shape Henry's mother's behaviour. Slaveholding women were thus well-aware of the power enslaved children could give them over their mothers, and used children as means of exerting control. Indeed, Charity Bowery, though manumitted from slavery herself, found her North Carolinian mistress used her maternal affections as means of manipulation. Having sold the majority of Charity's children, Mistress McKinley denied Charity's attempts to buy her one remaining son, Richard. Instead,

²⁵³ Parent Jr. and Wallace, 'Childhood and Sexual Identity under Slavery', 381.

²⁵⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 256.

²⁵⁵ Caroline Hunter quoted in Charles L. Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips (eds), *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville, VA, 1976), 149-50.

²⁵⁶ Unnamed informant, 'Compilation Richmond County Ex-Slave Interviews, Mistreatment of Slaves', *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 299; Sally Brown, *TAS SS1*, Georgia Narratives, 3, 1, 94-5.

²⁵⁷ Henry Doyle, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 206.

she took advantage of Charity's desire 'to keep the right side of her, in hopes she'd let me have my boy'. Much to Charity's despair, McKinley (the 'divil') sold Richard anyway.²⁵⁸

The slaveholders' frequently-touted notion of a family 'black and white' held no meaning for slave mothers who saw their natal ties severed, and enslaved women again acutely felt the hypocrisy of mistresses' denials of their filial bonds. Martha King, for example, amidst the separation of white families in the Civil War wondered 'why all dem white folks didn't think of that when they sold mothers away from their chillun'. After all, Martha remembered how she 'had to be sold away from my mother'.²⁵⁹ It was another way in which formerly enslaved women articulated their frustrations at the inconsistencies and exploitations concealed within the narrative of slavery's colour-blind familiarity.

The war certainly provided new opportunities for challenges to mistresses, and on the precipice of bondage and freedom, enslaved women staked their most overt claims to the bonds of motherhood over the bonds of ownership. Annie Burton, formerly enslaved on a plantation near Clayton, Alabama, recalled one such incidence. Annie was raised by her mistress after her mother ran away. Even when her mother came and 'demanded' her children 'at the end of the year 1865', her mistress refused and 'threatened to set the dogs on my mother'. Annie's mother 'refused to give us up', and together with Annie's sister, stole her children back.²⁶⁰

At the end of the Civil War, Sarah Debro's mother also came to claim her from mistress Polly, who as previously discussed, had 'raised' Sarah in the house. Sarah 'wanted to stay wid Mis' Polly'. She clung to her skirts as her '[m]ammy caught hold of me'. Polly told Sarah's mother to '[l]et her stay wid me':

But Mammy shook her head. "You took her away from me and' didn' pay no mind to my cryin', so now I'se takin' her back home. We's free now, Mis' Polly, we ain't gwine be slaves no more to nobody." She dragged me away.²⁶¹

Mothers' long-held resentments of mistresses' disregards for and disturbances to their bonds with their children, their 'no mind to my cryin'', culminated in them taking their children. For enslaved mothers, then, while 'wartime flight was the first step in transforming the meaning of reproduction in their lives', it was often preceded by these significant moments of

²⁵⁸ Charity Bowery in Lydia Maria Child, 'Charity Bowery, Interviewed 1847-1848', in Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 261-7.

²⁵⁹ Martha King, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 171.

²⁶⁰ Burton, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days*, 11-2.

²⁶¹ Sarah Debro, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 251-2.

reclaiming.²⁶² Enslaved mothers left white mothers angry, sometimes surprised, and having to ‘do the house cleaning’ with ‘many children to work for’.²⁶³ Yet, the response of young Sarah only emphasises the bitter complexities of mothering under slavery. Sarah ‘was never hungry til we waz free’ and ‘wanted to go back to Mis’ Polly’ and the plantation house. Her ‘[m]ammy beat me an’ made me go to bed’.²⁶⁴ One can only imagine how Sarah’s mother felt that Sarah did not wish to leave with her, and protested to return to Polly.

While mistresses’ interventions into enslaved women’s motherhood were extensive, they were also not the only force of mother-child separations. The threat of sale was another omnipresent aspect of enslaved women’s maternal exploitation.²⁶⁵ Lula Chamber, once enslaved in Galatin County, Kentucky, explained that her mother was ‘sold off’ when Lula was so young that she did not have any memories of her at all. Instead, she ‘growed up in the house’. She explained, apparently on the provocation of the interviewer, that: ‘I can’t tell you any pleasure I had in my early days honey, cause I didn’t have none’.²⁶⁶ Both Snovey Jackson and Hattie Clayton were similarly separated from their mothers (by mistresses) and never knew their parents.²⁶⁷ Some infants were separated from their mothers at such a young age they ‘wasn’t weaned yet’ or were sold ‘from their mammy’s breast’.²⁶⁸

For those children who did remember their mothers, these separations were devastatingly confusing and painful. Former Mississippian slave Henri Necaïse, became preoccupied with finding his mother. The little boy ‘used to go to de fate, a huntin’ for my mammy’, who had been sold. He ‘got many a whuppin for it’.²⁶⁹ This aspect of slavery was understood as one of its most deplorable and dehumanising characteristics. Mothers and children were separated ‘like stock’ or as ‘they sell calves’.²⁷⁰ Elige Davidson emphasised the purposefulness of this: children were ‘taken ‘way from the mammy [...] so they wouldn’t git ‘tached to they mammy or pappy’.²⁷¹

In any comparison of enslaved and slaveholding women’s mothering, the fact that so many enslaved women were not able to raise their children, and that so many children grew-up without knowing their mothers, must be centralised. It seems an obvious point, but because

²⁶² Leslie A. Schwalm, ‘US Slavery, Civil War, and the Emancipation of Enslaved Mothers’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 38, 2 (2017), 393.

²⁶³ Kate D. Foster, *Diary*, July 25 1863, 10, July 28 1863, 11, DU.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Some states prohibited the sale of children: in Louisiana, for example, law prohibited the importation of children aged ten years or less without their mother. Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, ‘The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21, 3 (1991), 454. This was, however, not consistent across the south.

²⁶⁶ Lula Chambers, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, X, 80-1.

²⁶⁷ Snovey Jackson, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 305; Hattie Clayton, *FWP*, Alabama Narratives, I, 76.

²⁶⁸ Gracie Mitchell, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 107; Reeves Tucker, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 4, 116.

²⁶⁹ Henri Necaïse, *TAS SSL*, Mississippi Narratives, 9, 4, 1623.

²⁷⁰ Charity Austin, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 1, 59.

²⁷¹ Elige Davison, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 299.

of the extent of similarisation, it is one worth belabouring. Some women had every single one of their children sold from them.²⁷² Enslaved mothers lived with the constant threat of their children being taken from them permanently, a psychological torment that ‘caused some women to descend into madness’ or become ‘chronically depressed’.²⁷³

Formerly enslaved women’s discussion of these separations evoke the sheer grief and devastation experienced through this form of maternal loss that uniquely faced enslaved mothers. Adelaide J. Vaughn recalled the story of a woman she lived with during their enslavement named Diana Wagner. Diana’s mistress instructed her to ‘[c]ome on, Diana, I want you to go with me down the road a piece’, only to find:

[...] They were putting them up on a block and selling them just like cattle. She had a little nursing baby at home and she broke away from her mistress and them and said, “I can’t go off and leave my baby.” And they had to git some men and throw her down and hold her to keep her²⁷⁴

Wagner’s sentiment that ‘I can’t go off and leave my baby’ and her struggle to fight for her child speaks to a trauma so many enslaved mothers were subjected to yet often powerless to stop. Their final moments with their children were marked by such protestations, and sometimes, simply hope for children to remember their mother. Catherine Scales remembered an enslaved woman who sat with her ‘three children between her knees’. They were to be sold the following morning. She sang to her children a song:

²⁷² Easter Brown, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 126.

²⁷³ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 36; Painter, *Southern History Across the Color Line*, 24.

²⁷⁴ Adelaide J. Vaughn, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 9.

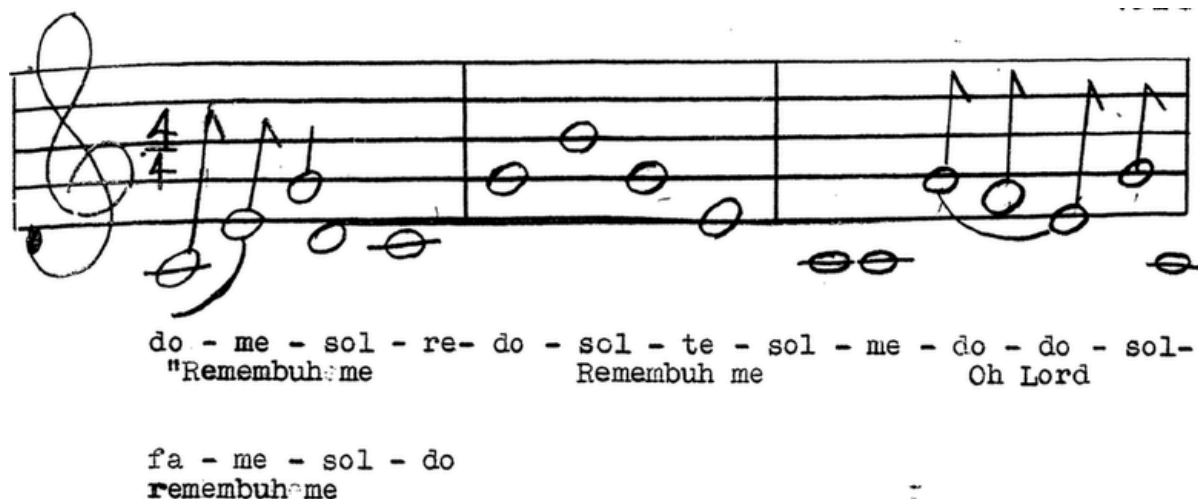


Image I: 'Remembuh me'.²⁷⁵

Enslaved women's maternal exploitation was far-reaching and deeply traumatic, daily and life-altering, at the base of slavery's structure and manifest in mothers' interactions with slaveholders. Enslaved women became mothers understanding that their children were valued as economic commodities. The prospects for their children's survival were especially dire, and they bore their children aware of the servitude that awaited them and all the abuses incumbent with their enslavement. Enslaved mothers sought to control the conditions of their mothering, in part by abortive and contraceptive practices. They performed slave labour throughout their pregnancies that damaged their bodies and their unborn children, and would bear their children in poverty unparalleled in the south. Despite the cultivation of strong female networks during this time, and the maintaining of traditional medicinal practices in the realm of childbearing, one cannot shy away from the absence of choice, the limited material resources, and constant intrusions of slaveholders that shaped slaves' childbearing.

The juxtaposition of slaveholding and enslaved women's mothering is a stark contrast. Slaveholding women did not suffer the same institutional and systematic sexual violence that enslaved women did. They were less likely to lose the father of their children to death, and of course, never to sale or hire. Slaveholding women benefitted from better health care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the lives of their infants. They benefitted from social and economic privilege that enabled them to demonstrate choice over such health care, and the mobility to surround themselves with female kin from far and wide. Slaveholding women never suffered in the knowledge that they could be sold or hired from their children, and determined their own

²⁷⁵ Catherine Scales, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 248-9.

childcare arrangements. They were able to delegate both domestic labour and mother-work during pregnancy and motherhood. These privileges were directly and indirectly reliant upon the slave labour of enslaved women in particular.

Enslaved women chose to become mothers. They nurtured their children, socialised them, cared for them, and formed close and enduring bonds with their kin. Enslaved families were flexible and durable organisations through which enslaved mothers and fathers raised children with the support of networks of extended family and fictive kin. A meaningful and socially important experience for women, family life was often the most fulfilling part of enslaved women's lives that also allowed them to resist slaveholders' dehumanisation and defeminisation of them. Their struggles to parent, to provide, to protect their children, however, were often struggles against the will and authority, possession and power of other women.

White women played instrumental roles in the exploitation of black women as mothers. They did so in multitudinous ways: from intervening into the organisation of enslaved families, to enforcing the slave labour of pregnant and mothering slaves, to the separation of enslaved children and mothers. They gave enslaved women's children away as wedding presents, they sold them as punishment, and they violently abused them in their households. They chose names, medical treatment, and routinely superseded mothers' authority. Yet, they also capitalised upon enslaved women's own mother-work, their maternal bodies, and their children, in their own mothering. This was the complexity of mothering under slavery and the racialisation of reproductive labour that positioned this experience at the very centre of the power relations between women. Maternal difference was articulated through each and every one of these interactions.

Mistresses not only denigrated the mother-child bond but constantly sought to manipulate slaves' mothering to reflect their own interests. Thus, an enslaved child might be welcome as an increase to a slaveholder's estate, or an enslaved woman might be hounded by a mistress eager to prevent an indispensable domestic from becoming a mother that could detract from her labour. It was slaveholding women who - much like slaveholding men - exercised their own emphasis on an enslaved woman's role as a mother or a labourer as they deemed fit. Children became the centre of a power struggle between women whereby the bonds of ownership and motherhood were in constant conflict.

That '[d]espite all of the differences [...] pregnancy itself offered at least the potential for a recognition of commonalities between women', and the possibility to remove 'the divisions of race' then, overlooks that motherhood was a site where white women routinely

emphasised rather than elided women's differences.²⁷⁶ Motherhood was not abstracted from the patterns of commodification and re-direction, abuse and conflict, racism and exploitation, that characterised women's relationships. Nor did motherhood generally 'elevate' enslaved women from their mistresses' recognition of them and their children as slaves, as labourers, as property. White women simply did not largely 'identify with these slave women on the basis of their common experiences with pregnancy and childbirth', or 'question both the conventional morality and customary practices' of society.²⁷⁷ Their prevailing influence was in reinforcing and rearticulating and actually extending the racial and socio-economic values and practices of slaveholding society in the realm of motherhood, where mistresses' interventions were emboldened by narratives of their superiority, their civilising influence, and their gendered responsibilities. While some of their interventions may not have been malevolently intended (and many were), they represented mistresses' perceived social superiority, their racism, their proprietary rights, and their attempts at control and power over enslaved mothers. The enslaved mother so enduringly historicised as a 'mammy', then, endured some of slavery's greatest trials.

²⁷⁶ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 55.

²⁷⁷ Weiner, 'Mistresses, Morality, and the Dilemmas of Slaveholding', 278.

Chapter Four

Infant-Feeding and Inequality

When the baby was sick Ma concluded I better have a wet nurse as I did not give nourishment enough [...] One of the women at the plantation had just lost her baby a week old, and Pa kindly offered us the use of her. I am very much pleased with the arrangement tho I disliked having to resort to it very much at first.

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas (1858)¹

In 1858, Georgian plantation mistress Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas was apparently presented with an infant-feeding problem. Her solution is revealing. Though apparently unable to feed her child herself, Gertrude was able to use her position as a slaveholder to coerce an enslaved woman to do so instead. This unnamed woman was owned by Gertrude's father, Clanton Thomas, who was one of the wealthiest planters in the state. She was bereaved of her own one-week-old child, yet Gertrude made no expression of sympathy for the mother. Instead, she removed the enslaved woman from her home at Clanton's plantation, to her own household in order to breastfeed the Thomas's child. It was a series of actions that commonly constituted the practice of enslaved wet-nursing: the decision to use a wet-nurse, the procurement of a suitable wet-nurse, and the movement of this woman to a slaveholding household where she would perform an intimate and confining form of emotional and bodily labour. Slaveholding, as Gertrude's comments epitomise, facilitated white women's capitalisation upon enslaved women's motherhood, their bodies, and their bereavement.

Infant-feeding was, in keeping with broader patterns in mothering and mother-work, both characterised by inequality and a site of slaveholders' casual and habitual interventions. Unlike some practices of intra-gendered exploitation, though, enslaved wet-nursing in particular was reliant on both a slaveholding women's motherhood and enslaved woman's motherhood. It thus forms a lens through which to explore enslaved women's maternal exploitation and slaveholding women's roles in this where the interdependencies of women's privileges and disadvantages were marked. In using enslaved women as wet-nurses for their children, female slaveholders made further interventions into enslaved women's mothering that both

¹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Dec. 26 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

commodified their mother-work and re-directed it to their own families.

The following two chapters explore women's infant-feeding practices and the nature of enslaved wet-nursing. This chapter considers the extent to which enslavement and slaveholding shaped women's infant-feeding. The demands of slave labour systematically curtailed enslaved women's ability to decide how or when they would feed their children and lowered the quality of their breastmilk. Alternatives to breastfeeding were limited and supplementary and weaning foods were low in nutritional value. Whites, however, emphasised the suitability of black women for reproductive and productive labour, relative to an understanding of white upper-class women's physical frailty that characterised their breastfeeding a fatiguing and enervating labour. These ideas intersected with slaveholding mothers' reliance upon enslaved women's mother-work in raising their children and facilitating their lifestyles in enslaved wet-nursing.

Slaveholding women's infant-feeding forms another predictably stark comparison to enslaved women's mothering. Socio-cultural ideas of the importance of white upper-class women's maternal breastfeeding influenced but did not impede slaveholding women's choices over their infant-feeding. Slaveholding mothers struggled with many aspects of breastfeeding but were able to procure medical advice and assistance as well as alternative means of feeding their children. Like their mothering more broadly, their exercise of agency, their choices, and their pragmatism were largely dependent upon or facilitated by the exploitation of other women. This chapter thus concludes by exploring the spectrum of reasons for enslaved wet-nursing. Some women could not feed their children; other women chose not to feed their children. It was also a practice that took many forms; from a short-term labour, to a life-time of reproductive outsourcing. As Chapter Five explores, the nature of this practice, enslaved women's experiences of this work, and the relationships between enslaved wet-nurses and their mistresses, situate it firmly within enslaved women's maternal exploitation.

While enslaved wet-nursing has rarely been a significant topic of discussion for historians of slavery, approaches to this practice have generally understated both its extent and its exploitative nature. Sally McMillen's 1985 article 'Mothers' Sacred Duty' has remained the reference point for slaveholding women's apparent rejection of wet-nursing.² McMillen argues mistresses were committed to breastfeeding as their 'sacred occupation' and an 'accepted rite of motherhood', emphasising mistresses' 'widespread' and 'almost silent' acceptance of

² McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 33-56. See, for example, Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 96; Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 100; Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 34-5; Margaret Yalom, *The History of the Breast* (London, 1998), 123. It is worth noting, however, that early histories of the south did indeed mention quite casually the practice of enslaved wet-nursing. See Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Chicago, IL, 1931), 5; Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1937), 252, DocSouth; Jessie W. Parkhurst, 'The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household', *Journal of Negro History*, 23, 3 (1938), 349, 355, 352.

‘traditional patterns of childrearing’.³ She concludes that ‘most white women breast-fed their own babies’ and only ‘poor health’ ‘another pregnancy’ or ‘insufficient supply of milk prevented breast feeding’.⁴

That a wet-nurse was a second choice for mothers is an interpretation more broadly shared, and historians have suggested ‘only ill health or insufficient milk led women to use wet nurses’ and that wet-nursing was ‘the preferred practice [...] when the mother could not breastfeed the child’.⁵ Janet Golden’s study of wet-nursing practices in the United States suggests the health ramifications of alternative feeding methods at the time increased the likelihood for mothers to use wet-nurses. The emergent authority of the medical institution was in interaction with women’s personal choices and practices, though. This was a form of labour that existed in marketplaces across the United States and a practice shaped by regional variation and the fluctuating availability of wet-nurses.⁶ Women were able to engage in these markets as their personal proclivity, economic status, and the availability of wet-nurses dictated. Golden thus suggests that ‘the line between needing a wet-nurse and wanting one easily blurred’.⁷

While Golden explores the practice far beyond the slaveholding south, McMillen finds through the study of seventy-three southern white families’ correspondence that ‘[a]pproximately 20 percent used a wet nurse, and 10 percent hand-fed their infants’.⁸ Enslaved wet-nursing is a practice nearly impossible to quantify, though. Testimony from white women, formerly enslaved people, and postbellum sources alike, commonly use ‘nurse’ to refer to both breastfeeding and childcare more broadly. Of course, the paucity of contemporaneous sources authored by enslaved women, and the young age of Federal Writers’ Project informants during slavery, compound these methodological issues. Accordingly, it is also difficult to ascertain from these sources how this practice matured and ultimately declined over time, especially considering the limited availability and coverage of antebellum advert-carrying newspapers.⁹ Changes to the practice were likely in keeping with wet-nursing practice more broadly in the

³ McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 332, 334-5, 338.

⁴ McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 336-7, 348-9.

⁵ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 35; Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 67.

⁶ See Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 3-6.

⁷ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 45.

⁸ McMillen does not include Federal Writers’ Project testimony, and concludes from selected volumes of the narratives (North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina) that ‘few slaves mentioned their role as wet nurse’. The subsequent digitisation of the resources renders a more systematic search possible and has thus yielded more testimony (together with the utilisation of other forms of testimony). McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 336. Wilma Dunaway, however, also finds 20% of affluent women in the Appalachian mountain south relied on wet-nurses and one-fifth of Appalachian slave women worked as wet-nurses. Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 139-40.

⁹ Newspaper advertisements considered for this study provide little additional means of establishing the progression and ultimate decline of the practice. This sample size is too limited to make generalisations, and the digital records for advert-carrying antebellum newspapers are only held across certain states, for certain newspapers, for certain years, and within those years not all issues are available. Adverts often appear to be repeated. And, of course, enslaved mothers may well have been hired or bought as wet-nurses without being explicitly advertised as such, as Chapter Five goes on to discuss. The methodology and sources for examining the newspaper advertisements are listed in section iii of the Introduction and the specific newspapers considered can be found in the Bibliography.

U.S., whereby newspaper advertisements ‘rose in number in the middle third of the nineteenth century and then experienced a rapid decline’, a decline attributed to ‘[a]dvances in artificial feeding’, ‘shifting cultural beliefs’, and ‘changes to women’s work and lifestyle’.¹⁰

McMillen’s calculations, however, can be read much more concretely. Even if ‘only’ one fifth of slaveholding women used a wet nurse:

[...] using an estimated figure of 350,000 slaveholders in 1850 as a benchmark (the majority of whom were men) and assuming these slaveholders had wives (of whom one-fifth used a wet nurse) suggests some 70,000 wet nurses across the antebellum South.¹¹

This indicates a hugely significant number of women were coerced into this labour; forced to ‘share’ their breastmilk, separated from their own child to wet-nurse a white infant, or bereaved of their own infants.

Neither McMillen nor Golden focus upon the ways in which enslaved wet-nursing was dependent upon these exploitative arrangements or the experiences of enslaved women themselves. Contemporary scholarship, however, emphasises the more abusive aspects of enslaved wet-nursing, characterising this practice as indicative of the ‘spatial closeness and racial distance between black and white women’.¹² While Chapter Five extends this approach in focusing upon the nature of this practice, women’s experiences of it, and the insights it gives into women’s relationships, enslaved wet-nursing must also be situated in the context of the deep structural inequalities that shaped women’s infant-feeding practices and choices. By exploring both the structural and social aspects of maternal exploitation in the realm of infant-feeding, infant-feeding and enslaved wet-nursing can together be understood as illustrative of the broader dynamics of mothering and mother-work under slavery.

i. Infant-feeding under slavery

Historians have outlined the ways in which slaveholders controlled enslaved women’s breastfeeding, but emphasise that their interests in maintaining both slave labour routines and the health of slave infants meant they ‘preferred daytime arrangements for slave infant care

¹⁰ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 179, 26, 156.

¹¹ West with Knight, ‘Mother’s Milk’, 44. Vera Lynn Kennedy commented that ‘only’ one fifth of slaveholding women used enslaved wet-nurses. See Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 103.

¹² West with Knight, ‘Mother’s Milk’, 50.

that kept mothers and infants close to one another'. However, that slaveholders sought to avoid the apparent 'necessity' that infant-care would decrease a 'mother's productivity' should not be understated.¹³ As Wilma Dunaway outlines, whites' interventions in enslaved women's infant-feeding was part of their efforts 'to capture most extensively the labor of mothers and their offspring'.¹⁴ Exploring the range of these interventions, which included several means of avoiding the need for working-day feeds altogether, emphasises the ways in which both slaveholding men and women prioritised enslaved mothers as labourers, and offers means for examining the implications of these interventions alongside the many disadvantages enslaved mothers faced in their infant-feeding.

For enslaved mothers, breastfeeding was the predominant and preferred means of infant-feeding. Enslaved mothers were typically given several times during the working day in which they were allowed to return to infants to suckle them, before returning to work. Plantation manuals suggested that 'suckling' mothers were, like heavily pregnant women, to be 'indulged more than others':

Sucklers are to be allowed time to visit their children, morning, noon and evening, until they are eight months old, and twice a day from thence until they are twelve months old - they are to be kept working near their children.¹⁵

These routinised infant-feeding arrangements were of course in the interest of infant survival, as was a mother and child's close proximity during this period. Despite 'sucklers' relative work privileges, though, there is no mistaking either the absence of mothers' choices or the demanding nature of these routines. Situations such as that recounted by Celia Robinson where a mother was whipped for not nourishing her child and returning to work quickly enough were not uncommon.¹⁶ Joe Clinton similarly recalled women's suffering under this reproduction-labour routine on Clover Hill Plantation in Coahoma County, Mississippi: a young woman named Jessie, having returned to the house 'to let day baby suck', was given 'a hard lashin'' by the overseer for taking 'too long'.¹⁷ Enslaved mothers were constantly forced to negotiate the demands placed upon them by their slaveholders with their needs and desires to mother

¹³ Marie Jenkins Schwartz, "'At Noon, Oh How I Ran'": Breastfeeding and Weaning on Plantation and Farm in Antebellum Virginia and Alabama', in Morton (ed.), *Discovering the Women in Slavery*, 243, 250.

¹⁴ Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum South*, 255.

¹⁵ Ruby Lorraine Radford, 'Slavery by Ruby Lorraine Radford. Compilation Made from Interviews with 30 Slaves and Information from Slavery Laws and Old Newspaper Files', *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 4, 332.

¹⁶ Celia Robinson, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, I, 2, 218-9.

¹⁷ Joe Clinton, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 32.

their children. Slaveholders were always clear to emphasise that motherhood was a productive process, rather than the creation of a bond or relationship that would impede slave labour, and this was most evident in the realm of infant-feeding.

For infants, who require feeding ten times-a-day for the first six months of their lives, this intervention into ‘natural’ breastfeeding routines already deprived enslaved infants.¹⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Three, some enslaved women could circumvent this by either carrying their children on their bodies while they worked, or placing them unattended but close-by in order to facilitate more frequent breastfeeding. Such arrangements were generally under the watchful eyes of slaveholders and overseers, and practiced within demanding routines of manual labour, though. While the regularity of enslaved women’s breastfeeding was seriously restricted, the quality of their milk was also compromised by poor diets and their heavy labour. Enslaved mothers were not guaranteed any improvement in their diets during breastfeeding, yet breastfeeding relies upon ‘improved nutritional and caloric inputs’ as it requires ‘approximately 750 kilocalories per day’. Undernourished women produce both ‘nutritionally inferior milk and less of it’.¹⁹ Hard physical labour also reduced milk supplies, and so enslaved children often consumed neither enough milk nor milk that was adequately nourishing.²⁰

The relative infrequency of enslaved women’s breastfeeding was not only detrimental to their child and a physically draining aspect of mother-work, but could also be painful and uncomfortable for women producing milk that was not expressed regularly enough. Formerly enslaved in the aptly-named Dismal Swamp in the coastal plain region of Virginia and North Carolina, Moses Grandy explained how enslaved mothers suffered from their inability to express their milk. He described how women ‘suffered much from their breasts becoming full of milk’, and simply could not ‘keep up with the other hands’. The result, he explained, were beatings so intense ‘that blood and milk flew mingled from their breasts’.²¹

While the flagellation of lactating women is one of the most evocative images of slavery’s brutality, and one that formerly enslaved African Americans described as deeply distressing for enslaved people, it was not the only form of violence enslaved mothers were subjected to. Rose, an enslaved woman in South Carolina, tried to use the fact she was breastfeeding her infant to resist the demands of a master who had ‘turned a wishful eye on’ her and demanded her to ‘come to him as he wanted her’. She also told him her ‘husband will be coming’. Neither strategy worked. The man ‘cut her naked back all over’ and John Andrew

¹⁸ Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 253.

¹⁹ Follett, ‘Heat, Sex, and Sugar’, 529.

²⁰ Kleinberg, *Women in the United States*, 47; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 35; King, *Stolen Childhood*, 9.

²¹ Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy; Late a Slave in the United States of America* (London, 1843), 28, DocSouth.

Jackson related that ‘the further particulars are too revolting to tell’.²² Motherhood, once again, did not elevate enslaved women from the abuse of slaveholders.

While many enslaved mothers made these often hurried and always intermittent visits back to their babies, some had their children brought to them to suckle. Hector Godbold recalled how his job was carrying a baby ‘cross the swamp every four hour en let my mamma come dere en suckled dat child’ during their enslavement in South Carolina.²³ For some, as Becky Hawkins remembered, this was because a ‘sickly’ child required more than the typical allowance of feeding ‘but three times a day’. In Pulaski County, Alabama, she was taken ‘to the fence’ so her mother could nurse her.²⁴ Such arrangements also allowed the burden of the trip to be taken by a less able worker, though. Willie Wallace, for example, recalled how in Green County, Alabama, his ‘crippled’ father ‘used to carry the children out to the field to be suckled’.²⁵ Thus, for many enslaved mothers, their reprise from slave labour to perform infant-feeding was almost non-existent. Arrangements centred upon minimising a woman’s time out of labour and once again emphasises the extent to which slaveholders’ prioritised enslaved women as labourers.

Indeed, some slaveholders entirely prohibited enslaved mothers’ breastfeeding their children during the working day. They did so by designating the ‘nurse’ in charge of infant care the duty of suckling infants separated from their mothers, which ensured infants were still nourished. Clara Brim described how on a plantation in Louisiana where ‘dey was a big bunch of dem chilluns’, they had ‘a nuss woman what would give de li’l ones breast’ nuss when dey mammies was out wukkin’.²⁶ Gus Johnson similarly recalled how in Sunnyside, Texas: ‘Some de mammies what suckle de chillen takes care of all de chillen durin’ de daytime and at night dey own mammies come in from de field and take dem’.²⁷ By enforcing these practices, rather than readily agreeing ‘to work routines that allowed new mothers at least some time to breastfeed their children’, slaveholders contrived systems that negated the necessity for disruptive infant-feeding altogether.²⁸ Breastfeeding large numbers of children can only be imagined in terms of its incredible physical demands upon enslaved women. Some communal mothering practices, then, were certainly coercive. Of course, for those mothers unable to feed

²² Jackson, *Experience of a Slave in South Carolina*, 12-3.

²³ Hector Godbold, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 144.

²⁴ Becky Hawkins, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 209.

²⁵ Willie Wallace, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 42.

²⁶ Clara Brim, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 2, 1, 429.

²⁷ Gus Johnson, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 2, 208-9.

²⁸ Marie Jenkins Schwartz, “‘At Noon, Oh How I Ran’: Breastfeeding and Weaning on Plantation and Farm in Antebellum Virginia and Alabama”, in Morton (ed.), *Discovering the Women in Slavery*, 241.

their children whatsoever during the working day, these severe limitations to their breastfeeding were also physically challenging, as Moses Grandy's comments suggested.

Such systematised wet-nursing practices appear to have been more typical on larger plantations. It meant that for many enslaved mothers, breastfeeding was restricted to authorised free-time. As Jephtha Choice remembered of a plantation in Henderson, Texas, through using 'nigger women who did not work in the field' to wet-nurse, it was only 'in the evenin' their mammies were let to see [their children]'.²⁹ Whether a mother saw infant-feeding as an act of bonding, a means of relieving her overladen breasts, important for her child's survival, a combination or none of these things, her choices over when and how to feed her child were often incredibly limited. Slaveholders established breastfeeding as a form of transferrable labour like other aspects of enslaved women's mothering. They not only re-directed enslaved women's breastfeeding to their own children, but regulated and systematised infant-feeding, demanding control over practices within enslaved communities. How these practices affected relationships between enslaved individuals is open to speculation.

Despite the routinised separations of mothers and nursing children, variations in labour organisation and slaveholding size had some influence on women's opportunities for infant-feeding. For slaves who worked under the task system, for example, mothers 'enjoyed more flexibility in deciding when to feed their infants', as with childcare more broadly.³⁰ It is difficult to ascertain how and when domestic slaves practiced infant-feeding. For domestic slaves, some mothers' ability to have their children near them during their working hours probably made their breastfeeding easier and more regular. White women, as domestic managers, seldom commented on their domestic slaves' feeding arrangements (even for their wet-nurses). However, considering mistresses' emphasis on the uninterrupted labour of domestic slaves and their strong feelings about the impositions slave children presented, those who were able to 'keep' domestic slaves' nursing children in the same childcare arrangements as field slaves were strongly likely to do so. For enslaved mothers who laboured in the household, separation from suckling infants may have extended far beyond the typical 'working day' owing to their labour at night-times and weekends.

Mistresses do not appear to have shown any special consideration for nursing mothers, and considering their tendency to share in the practices and attitudes of male slaveholders, were likely to approach slaves' infant-feeding similarly. The routine interventions slaveholding women made into enslaved women's parenting decisions included their infant-feeding. Fannie

²⁹ Jephtha Choice, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 3, 2, 709.

³⁰ Schwartz, "'At Noon, Oh How I Ran'", 247.

Clemons explained that her mother, who worked in the field on a plantation in Farmerville, Louisiana, was not allowed by her mistress to return to the house to nurse the infant Fannie. In order to feed her child, Fannie's mother 'would slip up under the house and crawl through a hole in the floor. She took and pulled a plank up so she could slip through'.³¹ Her mistress clearly did not identify with the enslaved mother's desire to feed her child as necessary or desirable. Rather, she sought to enforce the mother-child separation.

Louis Hughes' mistress was similarly unsympathetic to nursing mothers on their plantation in Pontotoc, Mississippi. He recalled that his wife and the mother of his twin babies, Matilda, was subjected to the intentionally excessive labour demands of their mistress. Hurrying between cooking, washing, ironing, and feeding her infants, she 'was almost run to death with work'. The Hughes' infants grew unwell 'for want of proper care', and a doctor advised that Matilda's breastmilk 'was so heated by her constant and excessive labors as to be unwholesome'. It was a common belief around breastfeeding that slaveholders seemed to adhere to and abandon as they deemed necessary. Matilda certainly had not enough 'time to cool before ministering them'. Hughes described how 'it was impossible for their mother to give them [the care they needed] while performing the almost endless labor required of her, under threats of cruel beatings'.³² Slaveholding women did not extend their own infant-feeding practices or choices to enslaved mothers and instead emphasised breastfeeding mothers as labourers.

Indeed, when enslaved mothers were confronted with the physical problems with breastfeeding that slaveholding mothers so frequently discussed, many of which were surely exacerbated by hot and heavy slave labour and medical inattention, any remedy to common breastfeeding problems had to be resolved among the resources and skills of the enslaved community. Otherwise, access to a doctor was subject to the intermediary of the slaveholder. Here, as with medical care more generally, either inattention or invasive treatments could be deeply problematic. Their choices for alternatives were severely circumscribed in comparison to slaveholding mothers. Enslaved mothers had limited ability to procure bottles for breastfeeding. The systematised nature of breastfeeding underscores just how difficult hand-feeding would have been for working mothers. Enslaved mothers simply did not have the same time, available labour, or resources to easily procure animal milk, express the milk freshly for each feed, to boil milk, or chill milk (and subsequently retrieve it for each feed). These were all important aspects of hand-feeding practice to try to ensure its safety for infants, because

³¹ Fannie Clemons, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 28.

³² Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 96.

inadequate methods of sterilisation, pasteurisation, and milk-cooling rendered bottle-feeding considered a ‘death warrant’.³³ The difficulties enslaved mothers must have faced in keeping bottles clean, and milk properly prepared and cooled, surely made it all the more dangerous. Bottle-feeding may have been more feasible in the evenings and weekends. However, the extent to which one’s enslavement curtailed not only one’s opportunities for infant-feeding but one’s access to the material (and social) resources required to pursue alternatives to breastfeeding is quite clear.

Enslaved mothers did not have easy access to goods to assist with infant-feeding that slaveholding mothers did, either. It is timely to recall the slaveholder George Watson, who was able to buy a ‘sucking bottle’ for his and his wife’s baby.³⁴ Rubber nipples, which facilitated easier bottle-feeding, were also available by the late 1830s.³⁵ Items could also be purchased to ease infants’ teething troubles. Enslaved mothers, on the other hand, had little options but to improvise. Joe Barnes remembered enslaved women in Tyler County, Texas, tied bacon to babies for them to suck.³⁶ Others improvised devices to ease teething by ‘put a string of coppers around our necks to help us teeth on’.³⁷ The risks of choking, especially considering the limited supervision of children, were high. There is nothing to say that the bottles, rubber nipples, or teething rings that whites had began to use were desired by enslaved mothers, and enslaved women evidently cultivated their own childrearing practices and traditions. Yet the differences mothers faced in their infant-feeding in terms of their time, their resources, and their choices are self-evident.

It was often slaveholders who determined how an enslaved infant was to be fed, whether by necessity or by choice. In the event of a mother’s death, for example, slaveholders often had enslaved children bottle-fed. Dan Thomas, for instance, explained that in Memphis, Tennessee: ‘Mah mammy d’ed soon attter I wuz bawn, en de Missis had me raised on a bottle’.³⁸ Susan Forrest informed her interviewer that her mother was raised on a ‘suck bottle’ after her own mother’s death.³⁹ This seems to have been most commonly resorted to when another enslaved woman was not able to wet-nurse the child, as Giles Smith explained. Giles was given away to his master’s daughter when he was so young he was still not yet weaned. He explained

³³ Rima D. Apple, *Mothers and Medicine: A Social History of Infant Feeding, 1890–1950* (Madison, WI, 1987), 4. See also Yalom, *History of the Breast*, 9.

³⁴ George Watson to Ann Watson, Aug. 19 1824, Sep. 23 1824, Watson Family Papers, VHS.

³⁵ Stevenson, *Life in Black & White*, 109.

³⁶ Joe Barnes, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 46.

³⁷ Emma Jones, *TAS SS1*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 226.

³⁸ Dan Thomas, *FWP*, Tennessee Narratives, XV, 74.

³⁹ Susan Forrest, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 4, 3, 1378.

that because '[d]ere was no cullud women on de Missy's place dat could nurse me, so dat's why deys nurs me on de bottle'.⁴⁰

The strong networks of co-mothering that supported enslaved women's parenting could be crucial when women were faced with infant-feeding problems, and in these circumstances, enslaved mothers relied most heavily upon other enslaved women. Henry Baker, for example, recalled that on a plantation in Alabama after the death of his mother when he was just two-weeks-old, 'dey wuz a woman what nurse me til' I could eat an' git about'. When Charlie Davenport's mother died in Mississippi, he too benefitted from the compassion that other enslaved women showed to such children. He was given to a 'granny nurse', and '[a]ny woman what had a baby 'bout my age would wet nurse me'. Charlie thus grew up 'in de quarters en wuz ez well and happy ez any other chile'.⁴¹

While casual wet-nursing was undoubtedly an aspect of enslaved women's 'camaraderie', at times it must have also been a challenging form of additional bodily and emotional labour.⁴² Enslaved children were not always embraced. Indeed, after the death of Henry Baker's mother in Alabama, he benefitted from the attention of an enslaved woman as his wet-nurse, then spent a short time living with his slaveholders before being returned to the quarters. He found that as a young child:

I had ter go fum house ter house an' beg um ter let lil' Henry come in. And honey, do yo' know, some of 'em 'ould holler at me fo' I c'u'd git ter de steps, 'doncha come in here; no room in here fer yo'.⁴³

Whether Henry's rejection was related to his spell in the slaveholding home or he was simply seen as another mouth to feed, his experience is an important reminder not to romanticise the communal aspects of mothering under slavery. Wet-nursing could be an act of generosity for a child or their debilitated or deceased mother. However, this was also a pragmatism born of necessity. For many enslaved women, whether demanded to nourish an enslaved infant by a slaveholder, or required to do so by a fellow slave, breastfeeding could constitute an additional task to their relentless slave labour. But, in cases of need, compassion usually prevailed.

At other times, slaveholding women themselves took roles in feeding enslaved women's infants. In some cases, this was owing to the death of an enslaved mother. In

⁴⁰ Giles Smith, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 9, 8, 3602.

⁴¹ Charlie Davenport, *TAS SS1*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 558.

⁴² West with Knight, 'Mother's Milk', 62.

⁴³ Henry Baker in 'The Bakers', *TAS SS1*, Alabama Narratives, 1, 32. See also Emily Dixon, *TAS SS1*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 621.

Mississippi, for example, when an enslaved woman named Mary Eliza died, her mistress Anne Elizabeth Poindexter nursed the baby with a (presumably enslaved) woman named Mildred.⁴⁴ Anne declared she would ‘do all I can for them’ but also complained that ‘I do little else but nurse just now [...] We shall be very much behind hand with our winter work’.⁴⁵ In cases where an enslaved infant would otherwise perish, slaveholding women could clearly prevent the loss of a child. In Dallas County, Alabama, Mack Brantley’s mistress ‘suckled’ him alongside her own baby when his mother died.⁴⁶ Similarly, Molly Hudgens’s father, born a slave in Tennessee, was suckled by his mistress alongside her own child because ‘[h]is mother died when he was three months old’.⁴⁷

These may have been gestures of kindness, but there were also clear economic incentives in protecting the life and the health of an enslaved child. Moreover, while allowing for the possibilities that mistresses’ husbands may have pressured them into these acts, slaveholding women were able to choose to perform this labour and were not removed from their homes and families to the households of violent and abusive oppressors to do so. Some former slaves described this practice of cross-racial nursing as casual. Sim Greeley simply noted that ‘Miss Viny Cannon suckled me and her son Henry at de same time’ near Newberry, South Carolina.⁴⁸ Formerly enslaved in Linn County, Tennessee, Clayton Holbert and a slaveholding child were nursed by both his mother and his mistress. He said: ‘They didn’t think anything about it’.⁴⁹ This rarely appears to be an act of shared mothering, though.

Certainly, ‘[s]haring maternal nourishment between white women and black infants’ was not ‘one way some southern mothers rose above racial prejudice’.⁵⁰ White women generally performed this labour to facilitate enslaved mothers’ labour elsewhere, and mistresses did not simply become ‘involved in deciding the best solution to the problem of feeding infants’ when ‘mothers died in childbirth’ or were ‘unavailable’.⁵¹ As Bessie Lawsom explained, her mistress nursed her alongside her own baby only because ‘they needed her [mother] to work in the crop so bad’ in Georgia. Bessie was also a ‘sickly’ baby, perhaps making weaning or animal milk undesirable alternatives.⁵² Eva Martin also explained how her mistress only nursed her mother’s children ‘so mammy ain’t lose no time outer de fiel’, and

⁴⁴ Ann Elizabeth Poindexter to Eliza Holladay, Dec. 8 1840, Holladay Family Papers, VHS.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Mack Brantley, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 241.

⁴⁷ Molly Hudgens, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 345.

⁴⁸ Sim Greeley, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 190.

⁴⁹ Clayton Holbert, *TAS SS2*, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Washington Narratives, 1, 287.

⁵⁰ McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 354.

⁵¹ Schwartz, “‘At Noon, Oh How I Ran’”, 248.

⁵² Bessie Lawsom, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 244.

Lizzie Barnett was nursed ‘from her [mistress’s] breast when my mammy was working in the field’ near Nashville, Tennessee.⁵³ It was a practice likely more prevalent on smaller slaveholdings where there were neither communal enslaved wet-nurses nor apparently the opportunity for mothers to leave the field. That formerly enslaved women remembered the economic motivation in these arrangements is significant, as it was surely related to them by their mothers, forced to give up their babies to their mistresses to perform manual labour. Rather than understanding breastfeeding as ‘sacred’, then, these slaveholders’ decisions reflected that breastfeeding was a labour that was organised to best suit the needs of a slaveholding family.

Mistresses’ wet-nursing enslaved infants was an additional way in which slaveholding women intervened in enslaved women’s mothering, and additional way that slaveholders eradicated the need for disruptive working-day feeds. The coerced relinquishing of an enslaved woman’s maternal duties was often resented, as Rube Montgomery’s comments to a Federal Writers’ Project interviewer might suggest. Rube’s ‘white folks’ only owned him, his mother, and another man on a slaveholding in Choctaw County, Mississippi. Born in October, Rube explained how ‘my old Miss made Mammy wean me in March an’ she (Old Miss) suckled me. I was jus’ two weeks older ‘n her child’. That Rube’s mother was *made* to give her five-month-old child to her mistress is telling. With only a few slaves, Rube’s owners facilitated the uninterrupted labour of the new mother as her owners deemed necessary.⁵⁴ The necessities of running successful slaveholdings took pre-eminence, and enslaved women’s infant-feeding practice were routinely intervened into to ensure that.

While the comments of Federal Writers’ Project interviewees suggest at enslaved mothers’ feelings about the interventions into their infant-feeding practices, women’s experiences are often elusive and open to various interpretive possibilities. When Katherine Clay’s mother ran away from their plantation in West Point, Mississippi, for example, her mistress nursed her baby. Perhaps Katherine’s mother appreciated the surrogate feeding: when she returned, her ‘breast was way out’, so she was unlikely to be able to feed the infant herself with ease. However, her mother’s feelings surely changed when her mistress ‘kept that baby’.⁵⁵ Peter Wheeler was similarly kept by his slaveholders after being breastfed by his mistress. His mistress’s infant, born ‘the same time’ as Peter, died, and so she ‘sent to Dinah my mother, and got me to nuss her’. After the infant Peter was weaned, Dinah asked for her baby back but was

⁵³ Eva Martin, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 7, 6, 2583; Lizzie Barnett, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 113.

⁵⁴ Rube Montgomery, *TAS SS1*, Mississippi Narratives, 9, 4, 1561.

⁵⁵ Katherine Clay, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 13.

told ‘I mean to bring him up myself’ and so Peter ‘lived in master’s family almost jist like his own children’.⁵⁶ For some enslaved mothers, then, a white woman’s decision to breastfeed her child was the beginning of much longer-term interventions. White women’s decisions to breastfeed enslaved children accentuated their sense of ownership over these children.

Slaveholders’ interventions into slaves’ breastfeeding, then, were extensive. The regularity of slaves’ breastfeeding was limited and a slaveholder (male or female) might usurp a mother’s role in infant-feeding altogether. Enslaved mothers were also forced to wean their infants early, which was common when the demands of labour outweighed interests in infant health. Slaves were generally permitted to breastfeed their children for around six months before weaning or the introduction of supplementary feeds (though this shows considerable variation between six-twelve months).⁵⁷ While white mothers ‘preferred not to wean their children between December and February because of the cold, nor between July and September because of the heat’, enslaved women struggled to exercise such control.⁵⁸

For field slaves in particular, the seasonal demands of agricultural labour meant some of these periods identified as highly dangerous for weaning were precisely when work demands were at their most extreme. Tobacco, grain, and cotton, for example, were all harvested between August and October and during harvest season ‘everyone was forced to labor up to sixteen hours at a time’.⁵⁹ Slaveholders thus likely enforced weaning preceding or during these periods. That owners understood breastfeeding as an unwelcome intervention into work patterns was vividly illustrated in those acts of violence inflicted upon mothers too slow in nourishing their children, in the breastfeeding of babies at field-fences, and the prohibiting of working-day feeds by enforcing alternative infant-feeding arrangements. The horrible costs of these forced prioritisations of slave labour over adequate infant-feeding are surely exemplified in that the deaths of infants peaked in harvest season.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Peter Wheeler and Charles Edwards Lester (ed.), *Chains and Freedom: Or, The Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler, a Colored Man Yet Living. A Slave in Chains, a Sailor on the Deep, and a Sinner at the Cross* (New York, 1839), 22, DocSouth.

⁵⁷ This is considerably shorter than patterns of feeding in the Caribbean, where women would breastfeed up to three or four years without supplementary feeds, possibly owing to the prevalence of traditional west African practices. See Grazyna Jasienska, *The Fragile Wisdom: An Evolutionary View of Women’s Biology and Health* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 199; Steckel, ‘Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States’, 57. Historians have also suggested extended feeding may have been used to better space births. See King, “‘Suffer With Them Till Death’”, 149; hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman?*, 37; Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 138.

⁵⁸ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 156. The nature of weaning practices is subject to debate. Marie Jenkins Schwartz suggests ‘weaning occurred incrementally for slave infants’, whose mothers’ breastfeeding became less frequent around their infants’ eighth month of life. While Wilma Dunaway also identifies the use of supplementary foods in the weaning of slaves, she contends that (in the Mountain South, at least) ‘slave weaning was usually abrupt’. Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 67-9; Schwartz, “‘At Noon, Oh How I Ran’”, 249; Dunaway, *Women, Work and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 256.

⁵⁹ Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 191.

⁶⁰ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 73; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 144.

Whites, on the other hand, were commonly inclined to nurse for over one year.⁶¹ Though both enslaved and slaveholding women's weaning practices showed variation, the lack of choice enslaved women faced should not be understated. For those forced to wean their children, night-time may have been their only opportunity to continue breastfeeding. The early weaning that was enforced upon enslaved women bears little comparison to white women's experiences, though pressures of husbands and demands of labour also likely impinged on their autonomy here. Considering the use of slave labour among farmers and yeomen to alleviate women from field work, though, slave labour was highly likely used to minimise the need for early weaning across the slaveholding class.

The prematurity with which enslaved infants were weaned is exemplified in the practice of 'chewing'. Former slaves' discussion of adults chewing food for enslaved infants suggests these children were weaned so early that they were physically unable to consume solid food at the times they were introduced. Bess Mathis, for example, remembered that in De Sota County, Mississippi: 'The women chewed for their children after they weaned em'.⁶² Alex Woods's mistress 'chewed our food for us when we wus small' on their plantation between Durham and Hillsboro, North Carolina. He explained that: 'De babies wus fed wid sugar tits, and the food missus chewed. Deir suckled mothers suckled dem at dinner, an' den stayed in de field till night'.⁶³ Risks of choking, and digestive problems, were thus likely to be high. Indeed, Louis Hughes recalled the over-consumption of common weaning foods such as cabbage 'liquor' or buttermilk resulted in 'colic'. Food that was 'too heavy' and 'improper' together with the '[e]xcessive heat' resulted in cholera infantum that killed many infants it affected.⁶⁴

Pot liquor and buttermilk were among several common foods used to supplement feeds and in weaning children, including 'bread and milk' or 'mush and milk', 'boil pea soup', 'gruel' 'en suck bottle'.⁶⁵ They were not only introduced prematurely, but also lacked nutritional value. Charlie Richardson, formerly enslaved in Warrensburg, Missouri, explained to a Federal Writers' Project interviewer what infants' 'weigh milk' consisted of. He described that: 'It's the poorest kind of poor milk. It ain't even milk. It's what is left behin[d], when the milk is gone'.⁶⁶ Contemporary research suggests that 'whey' contains just one-fifth of the protein of milk. This by-product from the production of cheese has high nutritional value in its condensed

⁶¹ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 156; Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 35; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 98.

⁶² Bess Mathis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 53.

⁶³ Alex Woods, *FWP*, North Carolina Narratives, XI, 2, 418-9.

⁶⁴ Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 45.

⁶⁵ William L. Dunwoody, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 227-8; Ryer Emmanuel, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2 13; George Owens, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 167.

⁶⁶ Charlie Richardson, *FWP*, Missouri Narratives, II, X, 293.

or concentrated forms, but in its liquid form, was '[o]nce regarded mainly as an animal feed product' and must be pasteurised for safe human consumption.⁶⁷ High infant mortality in weaning periods, then, is clearly explained. Slaveholders exacted systems of infant nutrition rarely considered for white children, who do not appear to have been fed with whey milk, but gradually replaced feeds with solids.⁶⁸ The differences between enslaved children and their slaveholding contemporaries were further evident in the very means of infant-feeding: enslaved children were fed from communal troughs or bowls that 'looked jus' lak pig troughs' and made children feel 'just like us was pigs'.⁶⁹ These animalising similes were shared across breeding practices, the separations of infants from mothers, in slaveholders' treatment of children, and in the realm of infant-feeding, emphasising the ways in which slaveowners dehumanised enslaved African Americans through their many interventions into the bearing and raising of children.

Slaveholders various means of controlling enslaved women's breastfeeding had a palpable impact on infant health, to say nothing of how enslaved mothers experienced forced separations from nursing infants, forced weaning, and the knowledge of poorly-fed and often unsupervised infants left in the heat. The attenuation of breast-feeding or use of supplementary feeds in early infancy increased the mortality of enslaved infants.⁷⁰ Between the ages of one and eleven months infant mortality rates were as high as 162 per thousand.⁷¹ Importantly, Wilma Dunaway finds that slaveholding women were aware of the detrimental effect of early weaning on infant health.⁷² It is essential to emphasise, then, that for those enslaved mothers who were demanded to wet-nurse white children in addition to their own, had to wean their children early, or introduce supplements, the detriment to their own children's health was very likely and a decision made by slaveholders with full understanding of the risks. Infant-feeding practices, then, reveal the nature, extent, and cost of enslavement on one's parenting and the very prospects of a woman's child's survival. It was into these circumstances that slaveholding women further problematised enslaved women's mothering by seeking to benefit from their ability to breastfeed.

⁶⁷ Gregory D. Miller, Judith K. Jarvis and Lois D. McBean, *Handbook of Dairy Foods and Nutrition*, ed. 3 (Boca Raton, FL, 2007), 33-4, 39, 40-1.

⁶⁸ Dunaway, *Women, Work and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 256.

⁶⁹ Ryer Emmanuel, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 2, 13; Lina Hunter, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 2, 255.

⁷⁰ Herbert C. Covey and Dwight Eissnach also note the 'high frequency of lactose intolerance among blacks of West African origin', which might be explained by the fact that bovine milk was not a typical part of diets (though this would have reduced over the generations). This means enslaved children might have been even more vulnerable to illness from early weaning or supplementary feeding with animal milk. Herbert C. Covey and Dwight Eissnach, *What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narratives* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2009), 135-6.

⁷¹ Steckel, 'Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States', 50; Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 144.

⁷² Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 255; Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 14.

ii. Slaveholding women and infant-feeding

Differences in slaveholding and enslaved women's infant-feeding are to such an extent that most aspects of enslaved women's infant-feeding simply do not bear comparison with slaveholding women. This is emphasised in the very nature of the different literatures white Americans produced that pertained to white upper-class women and enslaved women's infant-feeding: domestic and medical literature heralded a privileged white woman's maternal role and debated how it should be best performed and protected, and plantation manuals dictated how to best manage sucklers, breeders, and wenches. Though most slaveholding women performed household-based labour, they were largely able to decide when to feed their children, and were obviously not subjected to the kind of coercive, systematised, and abusive arrangements that their slaves were. Thus, exploring slaveholding women's infant-feeding centres upon issues of women's choice, their ability to procure alternatives, and their reasons for doing so. All of these areas demonstrate the privileges white women experienced as slaveholding mothers and many of these privileges were reliant upon the exploitation of enslaved women.

Slaveholding mothers tended to breastfeed their children. It was a practice firmly encouraged. In the eighteenth century, maternal breastfeeding was represented as the moral obligation of 'good' mothers who did not entrust this important role to another woman.⁷³ In the nineteenth century, the growing authority of the medical institution and medicalisation of discourses of women's reproduction meant long-standing appeals to the divine and natural nature of breastfeeding took the added authority of 'health'. The flourishing of the prescriptive literature market gave increased exposure to such ideas, and this advice belonged to a much broader encouragement of women's embracement of their maternal roles.⁷⁴

An exploration of this literature offers the means to both understand ideals of white upper-class women's mothering and the agency they exercised within them more acutely. Nineteenth century medical literature directed at women altogether emphasised breastfeeding as natural and enjoyable, and beneficial for both mother and child. Thomas Ewell's 1817 *Letters to Ladies* stated that suckling was part of 'the feelings of nature', as well as a 'pleasure'. If this was unconvincing, he warned that the neglect of a woman's duty would have terrible effect on her constitution.⁷⁵ Edward H. Dixon similarly emphasised that to neglect

⁷³ Hausman, *Mother's Milk*, 8-10; Bankole, *Slavery and Medicine*, 57-8; Doyle, "'The Highest Pleasure of Which Woman's Nature Is Capable'", 958.

⁷⁴ Apple, 'Constructing Mothers', 166; Morantz-Sanchez, 'Making Women Modern', 490-1, 500.

⁷⁵ Thomas Ewell, *Letters to Ladies Detailing Important Information Concerning Themselves and Infants* (Philadelphia, PA, 1817), 249, DU.

breastfeeding was ‘likely to lay the foundation of the most serious diseases’.⁷⁶ Not only did breastfeeding promote maternal health but infant health, too. Frances Byerly Parks, for example, asserted that infant health was ‘promoted’ and even ‘sometimes established’ by maternal breastfeeding in *Domestic Duties* (1828).⁷⁷ Breastmilk was the child’s ‘natural and only proper food’ and thus the ‘best food for Infants’.⁷⁸ Smith and Vaughn’s impassioned promotion of breastfeeding in their 1801 *Female Monitor* suggested that a child’s beauty even depended on their mother’s breastmilk. Mothers who did not breastfeed, they added, were ‘victims to prevailing customs’ and cruel women.⁷⁹

The castigation of mothers who did not breastfeed went hand-in-hand with its exaltation. Dixon’s 1848 *Woman and her Diseases*, for instance, advocated breastfeeding as necessary and beneficial but also suggested to choose otherwise was to commit the ‘crime’ of indolence and pride.⁸⁰ A wet-nurse was a ‘selfish indulgence’.⁸¹ Scientific and religious arguments thus remained intertwined long into the antebellum era: breastfeeding was not only the will of the physician, it was the will of the ‘Creator’.⁸² The political nature of this discourse was quite unmistakable. *The Weekly Comet* of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for example, described wet-nurses as the ‘principle aide-de-camp’ in allowing woman to leave ‘her sphere’ and ‘go into the battlefield’ of the public world in 1855.⁸³

For all the concern over women’s abandonment of breastfeeding, though, it remained the prevalent means of infant-feeding. Mothers who breastfed typically did so for eight to twelve months, though supplementary feeds were often introduced earlier.⁸⁴ Unlike enslaved mothers, slaveholding women exercised a great deal of choice over when they weaned their children, health issues and husbands’ demands notwithstanding. Some slaveholding mothers

Nora Doyle in particular outlines the emphasis on the construction of breastfeeding as pleasurable. See, Doyle, “‘The Highest Pleasure of Which Woman’s Nature Is Capable’”, 958-73.

⁷⁶ Edward H. Dixon, *Woman and her Diseases, from the Cradle to the Grave; Adapted Exclusively to her Instruction in the Physiology of her System and all the Diseases of her Critical Periods* (New York, 1848), 237, DU.

⁷⁷ Frances Byerly Parks, *Domestic Duties; or, Instructions to Young Married Ladies, on the Management of their Households, and the Regulation of their Conduct in the Various Relations and Duties of Married Life* (New York, 1828), 287, DU.

⁷⁸ Parks, *Domestic Duties*, 283; Hugh Smith and John Vaughan, *The Female Monitor, Consisting of a Series of Letters to Married Women on Nursing and the Management of Children* (Wilmington, DE, 1801), 61. See also James Ewell, *The Planter’s and Mariner’s Medical Companion: Treating, According to the Most Successful Practice, I. The Diseases Common to Warm Climates and on Ship Board. II. Common Cases in Surgery, as Fractures, Dislocations, &c. &c. III. The Complaints Peculiar to Women and Children. To Which are Subjoined, a Dispensatory, Shewing how to Prepare and Administer Family Medicines, and a Glossary, giving an Explanation of Technical Terms* (Baltimore, MD, 1813), 265-6; Anonymous, *The Mother’s Guide in Physical Education; or Prevention Better than Cure* (Greenfield, MA, 1846), 12, DU.

⁷⁹ Smith and Vaughan, *Female Monitor*, 67-8.

⁸⁰ Dixon, *Woman and her Diseases*, 237.

⁸¹ Thomas Webster and Mrs Parks, *An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy: Comprising Subjects Concerned with the Interests of Every Individual; such as the Construction of Domestic Edifices; Furniture; Carriages; and Instruments of Domestic Use. Also, Animal and Vegetable Substances used as Food, and the Methods of Preserving and Preparing them by Cooking; Receipts, Etc Materials Employed in Dress and the Toilet; Business of the Laundry; Preservation of Health; Domestic Medicines; &c., &c.* (New York, 1848), 1157, DU.

⁸² Anne Macvicar Grant, *Sketches of Intellectual Education: and Hints on Domestic Economy, Addressed to Mothers: with an Appendix, Containing an Essay on the Instruction of the Poor: Two Volumes in One* (Baltimore, MD, 1813), 33, DU; Smith and Vaughan, *Female Monitor*, 71.

⁸³ *The Weekly Comet*, Baton Rouge, LA, Feb. 18 1855, 10, EANO.

⁸⁴ Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 255.

found their roles quite enjoyable. S.E. Lenoir continued to breastfeed a child who was ‘large enough to talk of horse racing’, she wrote in 1825.⁸⁵ For some mothers, prolonged breastfeeding may have been used as means of family limitation because of the diminutive effects of lactation on fertility (though historians commonly ‘mistake the significance of breastfeeding as a woman’s contraceptive’).⁸⁶ Yet, some women simply enjoyed this role.⁸⁷ Annie Gwyn, for example, informed her sister in 1844 that she considered it a ‘great blessing and a priviledge to be able to suckle my babe’.⁸⁸ She was grateful to ‘have plenty of milk’ for the child after the ‘trouble we had to raise my little Sally with the bottle’.⁸⁹

Many mothers were undoubtedly as pleased to be relieved of the complications insufficient milk supplies could bring. Medical literature acknowledged low milk supplies were one of the many problems women encountered breastfeeding. From the ‘extreme suffering’ that could arise from ‘tenderness of the nipple’, to ‘ulcers’, to ‘cancer of the breast’, breastfeeding could be a problematic and painful experience.⁹⁰ Advice for home remedies and the treatment of ailments associated with infant-feeding thus ranged from those intended to stimulate milk production, to relieve sore nipples, and to assuage inflammation of the breast or mammitis.⁹¹ Of course, these were issues understood to affect women who were already of ‘delicate’ constitution.⁹² Both upper-class white women’s weakness and the physically and mentally trying nature of breastfeeding were mainstays of medical and prescriptive literature, and ‘[s]ome women no doubt applied the diagnosis [of frailty and enervation] to themselves and found a ready-made excuse to avoid nursing’.⁹³ Far beyond their reproductive health, white women considered themselves greatly afflicted by a range of ailments, seemed to feel constantly in ill health, and confined themselves with anything from a ‘sore toe’ to a ‘horrible cold’.⁹⁴ Women discussed nursing as a draining activity, especially those who considered themselves weak.⁹⁵

⁸⁵ S.E. Lenoir to Martha Elena Bouchelle, Dec. 25 1835, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁸⁶ Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in 19th Century America*, 48. As discussed in Chapter Two, this was but one (and an ineffective one at that) means of family limitation for one who did not want to or were not able to breastfeed. For discussion of the use of breastfeeding as contraception, see Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 24; McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 348.

⁸⁷ See McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 333, 343-4.

⁸⁸ Annie [Mary Ann Gwyn] to Sarah J. [Jones] Lenoir, March 11 1844, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Dixon, *Woman and her Diseases*, 221, 233-5; John King, *Women: Their Diseases and Their Treatment* (Cincinnati, OH, 1858), 304-7.

⁹¹ Ewell, *Letters to Ladies*, 224-5; Ewell, *Planter’s and Mariner’s Medical Companion*, 258-9; Dixon, *Woman and her Diseases*, 234-5.

⁹² Dixon, *Woman and her Diseases*, 237.

⁹³ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 47. See also Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 54; Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 45, 49; Lewis and Lockridge, “‘Sally Has Been Sick’”, 13; Julia C. Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972), 56.

⁹⁴ Unsigned to Margaret Mordecai, Feb. 9 1840, Jennie to Margaret Devereux, Feb. 7 1844, Devereux Family Papers, DU.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Sarah Watson Johnson to Eliza Holladay, Sep. 9 1863, Holladay Family Papers, VHS; Ella Ann Simpson to Angelina Selden Edrington, Feb. 17 1860, Ella Ann Simpson to Elizabeth Hawkins Edrington, March 11 1860, Edrington Family Papers, VHS; Ann Raney Thomas, ‘The History of Her Life’, 1, Ann Raney Thomas Coleman Papers, DU; Maria Dyer Davies Wightman, Diary, July 20 1853, 333, April 4 1855, 319, DU.

Though white women's concerns over their fragile health seem hyperbolic, these feelings and the acknowledgement of the very real issues mothers faced in infant-feeding in this literature are important in understanding women's possible trepidation around breastfeeding, and the common issues that meant women needed to or wished to alleviate themselves of this mother-work.⁹⁶ Breastfeeding was not only physically trying for many women, it was also an arduous and time-consuming task. As Frances Byerly Parkes wrote, many women found suckling 'troublesome and irksome, and as depriving them of that freedom'. She suggested that unless able to 'give herself up in a great measure to the performance of her duty', a woman may as well 'leave the maternal office to be supplied by a hired nurse' who would be able to 'devote herself entirely to [breastfeeding]'.⁹⁷ Parkes's suggestion, facetious as it was, likely appealed to many women.

Prescriptive and medical literature, however, certainly cautioned women of the dangers of a wet-nurse. Concerns often focused around their potentially poor moral characters and health.⁹⁸ Physicians warned of the possibility that diseases such as syphilis could be transmitted through breastmilk.⁹⁹ Some slaveholding women, like North Carolinian Laura Norwood, seemed to share in these concerns. Having believed their child's wet-nurse was suffering with rheumatism, in 1845 a physician 'pronounced the disease to be quite a different affair'. The Norcoms sent 'off the nurse immediately'; a 'narrow escape'.¹⁰⁰ Concerns over wet-nurses' health and the quality of their breast-milk meant prospective nurses could be physically examined for their suitability for such labour.¹⁰¹ Of course, this suggests that intimate and objectifying practices may have preceded the act of wet-nursing, as well as slaveholders' scrupulous vigilance over wet-nurses for fear of any sexual activity or inebriety that might be detriment to their health and their breastmilk.

Slaveholding women, however, negotiated medical advice both with their own beliefs and with the realities of raising infants in the sickly south. It was broadly believed, for example, that infants should be fed the milk of wet-nurses that had given birth at a similar time to the infant's biological mother.¹⁰² White women showed some awareness of this, but it did not appear a primary concern when considering candidates for wet-nurses. Common claims such

⁹⁶ McMillen, for example, principally considers prescriptive literature in terms of its encouragement of breastfeeding for healthy mothers. McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 339-40.

⁹⁷ Parkes, *Domestic Duties*, 287; Webster and Parkes, *Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy*, 1162.

⁹⁸ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 39; McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 345; Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 97.

⁹⁹ John Kost, *Domestic Medicine: A Treatise on the Practice of Medicine, Adapted to the Reformed System, Comprising a Materia Medica* (Cincinnati, OH, 1868), 264.

¹⁰⁰ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother/Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], May 1 1845, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰¹ Parkes, *Domestic Duties*, 297; Webster and Parkes, *Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy*, 1161.

¹⁰² Parkes, *Domestic Duties*, 292; Ewell, *Planter's and Mariner's Medical Companion*, 266.

as the transmission of character through breastmilk were also rejected by southerners.¹⁰³ Concerns over the character of a wet-nurse, though, appear to have been more significant. Wet-nurses, whites believed, could have tempers, be irritable, lazy, and irresponsible.¹⁰⁴ According to Dixon, ‘all practical physicians’ understood that ‘mental emotions’ could ‘derange’ the secretion of milk and nursing women should have ‘serenity of mind’.¹⁰⁵ Slaveholders’ concerns over the characters of nurses, however, seemed to largely centre upon the fact that wet-nurses were entrusted to a physically intimate role of care with infants and thus had to be trustworthy.

Jane Williams’s letter to her daughter Eliza Haywood, in Raleigh, North Carolina, detailed such concerns over an enslaved wet-nurse named Cate in 1812. Jane expressed common apprehensions over negligent nurses such as ‘sleepy’ Cate, Hasty (who was ‘no safe guard’), and the ‘many a fall’ her grandchild might incur as result of their short-comings. It was Cate, the enslaved wet-nurse, though, who Jane feared was ‘intemperate’ and cautioned ‘neither must yer little one be left with her alone’.¹⁰⁶ Eliza apparently did not share in her mother’s anxieties and she continued to use enslaved wet-nurses over the following years. Popular ideas around infant-feeding practice may have been influential, but they were not determinant of practice.

Indeed, despite the multi-faceted emphasis on women’s maternal breastfeeding, if a woman chose or felt the need for a wet-nurse, medical and prescriptive literature (and later family physicians) ‘stood ready to advise in the selection and day-to-day management of wet nurses’.¹⁰⁷ Parkes’s argument that maternal breastfeeding was preferable but ‘if they cannot do it, the assistance of a healthy substitute should be procured’ was quite typical.¹⁰⁸ Others recommended a wet-nurse for ‘temporary’ use if a woman was struggling with feeding.¹⁰⁹ Physicians shared in concerns over the risks of common alternatives to breastmilk, and suggested this too was ‘a strong reason why wet-nurses should be got if possible’.¹¹⁰ Even the most aggressive appeals for women to breastfeed their children outlined those instances where wet-nursing was acceptable. Despite declaring that a woman’s rejection of breastfeeding was against both god and nature, for example, Smith and Vaughn’s 1801 tract relented there were occasions where wet-nurses were ‘wretched necessities’.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Grant, *Sketches of Intellectual Education*, 61.

¹⁰⁵ Dixon, *Woman and her Diseases*, 235.

¹⁰⁶ Jane Williams to Eliza Eagles Haywood, March 18 1812, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁷ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Webster and Parkes, *Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy*, 1161.

¹⁰⁹ Parkes, *Domestic Duties*, 285; King, *Women*, 310.

¹¹⁰ Ewell, *Letters to Ladies*, 243-4.

¹¹¹ Smith and Vaughan, *Female Monitor*, 71.

Accepting wet-nurses as alternatives to maternal breastfeeding allowed white women to justify the delegation of infant-feeding in keeping with medical advice. The sentimental maternal ideal was certainly a salient and influential ‘cultural script’ that sought to regulate women’s behaviour and for their conformity, but women’s agency within this should not be overlooked.¹¹² Constructions of whites’ feminine frailty (and the relative reproductive robustness of black women), wet-nurses as ‘options’, and the recognition of the many difficulties women experienced with breastfeeding intersected with slave-ownership to provide women with choices to them that enabled them to eschew breastfeeding without violating social convention. And, though ‘women’s bodies and their bodily functions [...] are seen to have little, if anything, to do with reason, choice, and autonomy’, some women simply chose not to breastfeed.¹¹³

In this emotive and authoritative prescriptive literature, women were equally discouraged from relying upon nurses for childcare more generally. Parkes, for example, urged that ‘[t]he habits of a nurse-maid have an undisputed effect on the health of an infant’ and emphasised the ‘physical and moral education’ that began ‘with the first breath of life’.¹¹⁴ Ewell, too, castigated women who allowed their children to be cared for by ‘ignorant nurses’ and not ‘directed by themselves’.¹¹⁵ However, slaveholding mothers indisputably delegated the bulk of childcare to enslaved women and children. The same incongruences, then, could surely exist with breastfeeding rhetoric. Why otherwise would physicians and writers appeal for women to reject the ‘fashion of transferring the duties of mother to the wet nurse’?¹¹⁶

The emphasis on maternal breastfeeding, then, did not mean breastfeeding was necessarily embraced as a ‘mother’s particular privilege’.¹¹⁷ Rather, some of the cleavages between maternal ideals as manifest in this type of literature and women’s practices are clear. This further problematises claims such as Sally McMillen’s that ‘[m]otherhood and its attendant duties were highly prized during the antebellum years’.¹¹⁸ Motherhood was certainly prized, but its ‘attendant duties’ were customarily delegated to enslaved women, and the distinctions between motherhood and mother-work were quite clear. Slaveholding women largely determined what constituted these different roles. Thus, wet-nursing should not be

¹¹² Doyle, “‘The Highest Pleasure of Which Woman’s Nature Is Capable’”, 972-3.

¹¹³ Rhonda Shaw, ‘Performing Breastfeeding: Embodiment, Ethics and the Maternal Subject’, *Feminist Review*, 78 (2004), 100.

¹¹⁴ Parkes, *Domestic Duties*, 48. Similarly, see James M. Garnett, *Lectures on Female Education, Comprising the First and Second Series of a Course Delivered to Mrs. Garnett’s Pupils, at Elm-Wood, Essex County, Virginia. By James M. Garnett. To Which is Annexed, the Gossip’s Manual* (Richmond, VA, 1825), 20-1, DU.

¹¹⁵ Ewell, *Letters to Ladies*, 243.

¹¹⁶ New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal (1853), quoted in McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 339-40.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 101; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 96.

¹¹⁸ McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 342.

equated with a woman's lack of feeling for her child, either.¹¹⁹ An upper-class white mother's role was emotional nurturing and 'lovingly, but firmly, rearing children to assume their rightful place in society'. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has argued: 'Nursing did not constitute the primary aspect of that obligation'.¹²⁰

Slaveholding mothers routinely used slave labour to alleviate themselves of the tiring and arduous aspects of motherhood, which breastfeeding could certainly be. Their proclivity to outsource their breastfeeding was also influenced by the risks often associated with bottle-feeding. As Frances Byerley Parkes described, hand-rearing was 'a lottery in which there are many hundred blanks for one prize'.¹²¹ For some, however, it was a necessity. When W.F. Withers' wife gave birth some two months prematurely, 'nature seemed to refuse her office' and so Withers and his wife raised the baby 'by hand', he informed slaveholder Clement Claiborne Clay in 1839.¹²² For many, it was likely the only option available if a wet-nurse could not be procured. If a mistress could not source a suitable enslaved woman from among her own slaves or those owned by family or friends, a wet-nurse could be an expensive commodity. While mistresses of large slaveholdings like Gertrude Thomas appeared to be easily able to procure enslaved wet-nurses, less affluent slaveholders found their choices more limited. As Laura Norwood remarked, a wet-nurse was an 'expense' (though one the Norwoods afforded).¹²³ Others simply rejected conventional wisdom that discouraged bottle-feeding. In 1805, Jane Williams informed her daughter she was 'convinced' 'that the Gruel and Milk prepared for the Sucking-Bottle is extremely nourishing and an admirable Substitute for Breast Milk'.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, she also offered her daughter the services of an enslaved wet-nurse.

Though not a common recourse, bottle-feeding was an alternative to breastfeeding. Systems designed for milk-cooling mitigated some of the risks that warm animal milk posed children. George Owens explained how:

Dey had a big safe what dey put de milk and butter in to keep it fresh. Dere was trough aid water in it and Dey set de milk and butter in it in de summer time. Dey had a peg of wood in a hole at de en', and when dey want to change de

¹¹⁹ Jane Turner Censer, for example, suggests that North Carolinian parents were '[s]o fond of their babies' that they did not 'often install wet-nurses in their own households'. Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 34.

¹²⁰ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 280.

¹²¹ Parkes, *Domestic Duties*, 288.

¹²² W.F. Withers to Clement Claibourne Clay, Aug. 21 1839, C.C. Clay Papers, DU.

¹²³ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], [Aug. 8 1839], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹²⁴ Jane Williams to Eliza Eagles Haywood, April 22 1805, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

water dey pull out de peg and Dreen de water out and put some coal fresh water in.¹²⁵

Perhaps the efficacy of this system was what enabled Owens's slaveholders to use 'suck bottle[s]' for '[d]em what so little dey can't eat outer a pan'.¹²⁶ Milk cooling houses, tanks, or dairies were the preserve of larger plantations, though, and the south 'was "notorious" for its low milk production'.¹²⁷ Those who could not breastfeed had to exercise 'considerable judgement' in the correct quantities and types of food, and were often required to boil animal milk before use and combine it with other substances.¹²⁸ Perhaps these problems with animal milk was what led slaveholding mothers such as Gertrude Thomas to abandon both cow's and goat's milk for feeding her baby in favour of enslaved wet-nurses.¹²⁹

The use of breastmilk alternatives, then, was labour intensive, and thus for many slaveholding women relied upon their ability to use slave labour. North Carolinian Mary Jeffreys Bethell, for example, upon the advice of her mother, gave her 'sick and weak' weaning baby cow's milk mixed with 'loaf sugar' and a 'little water'. Unlike less privileged mothers, Bethell was able to have the milk expressed freshly for each feed (undoubtedly by slaves) and was also able to use the advice and attention of a doctor to oversee her infant's health on this milk.¹³⁰ The ability to use enslaved people to assist in expressing animal milk, keeping bottles clean, boiling and cooling milk, and retrieving milk, undoubtedly made the use of animal milk a more viable and safe means of infant-feeding than for other southerners.

Some slaveholding women avoided the need for bottle-feeding by wet-nursing one another's children.¹³¹ In cases where a white mother was sick or died, friends and family sometimes stepped in to nurse a needy infant. Neighbours, and somewhat more distant women as indicated by the titular 'Mrs', also played the role of wet-nurse from time-to-time. Sade Lenoir, for example, remarked in 1854 that one of her neighbours called 'Mrs Austin' was nursing her sister's sickly baby for several days.¹³² Similarly, in New Orleans, Fanny Lawrence had her baby nursed by a 'Mrs Tilford' in 1845. Mrs Tilford had her own baby, and Fanny sometimes fed the baby with a bottle as well.¹³³ The financial arrangement, or lack thereof, is

¹²⁵ George Owens, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 166.

¹²⁶ George Owens, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 166-7.

¹²⁷ Covey and Eisnach, *What the Slaves Ate*, 135-8. See, for example, Della Briscoe, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 1, 123; Mrs Robert Brashear to Frances Brashear, May 3 1844, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

¹²⁸ Ewell, *Planter's and Mariner's Medial Companion*, 266.

¹²⁹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, July 16 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

¹³⁰ Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], 6, SHC.

¹³¹ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 20-1.

¹³² Sade [Sarah Jones Lenoir] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Aug. 1 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹³³ F.E.L [Frances E. Lawrence] to [Henry E. Lawrence], Sep. 4 1845, Brashear and Lawrence Family Papers, SHC.

unclear. However, it suggests that white women practiced wet-nursing quite casually, and emphasises that they too practiced co-mothering among their peer groups.

White women did not necessarily always embrace this role, though. In North Carolina, Kate DeRosset Meares allowed a woman named Sallie Holmes to breastfeed her baby twice-a-day, as she ‘cant get her milk dried up’ in 1854. Kate, however, felt a sense of obligation she was not certain she should indulge: she ‘didn’t know whether it was right or not, but hate to refuse - & it doesn’t seem to hurt him at all’. She began to see the advantage. Her baby had ‘improved wonderfully – fattens every day’. Kate also acknowledged breastfeeding had been ‘a great drain on me - I am very thin & feel right weakly sometimes though my health is excellent’.¹³⁴ Thus, both the sentimentality of breastfeeding rhetoric and the emphasis on its medical importance were often allayed to the day-to-day realities of breastfeeding and the problems it often presented. Slaveholding women approached infant-feeding with pragmatism and breastfeeding was not necessarily restricted to the mother-child relationship.

Of course, slaveholding women who rejected altruistic wet-nursing for their peers could often simply coerce a slave to do it for them instead. Eliza Clitherall, for example, nursed a foundling child along with a neighbour. At night, however, Elsey and Milly bore the burden of this additional labour.¹³⁵ South Carolinian rice planter John Berkley Grimball explained such a circumstance in more depth. In 1832, Grimball’s sister was ‘extremely ill’ with an ‘obstruction’ and ‘fever’. He felt ‘exceedingly uneasy’ about her condition. His own wife, Mary Meta Grimball, ‘nursed sister’s baby as well as her own for three days – but she can’t support it’. Instead, ‘they intend of making Tibbi nurse it’. Tibbi’s willingness and ability, of course, are notably irrelevant, and the slaveholders’ coercion clear.¹³⁶

Both choice and necessity shaped slaveholding women’s infant-feeding practices. Mistresses approached infant-feeding with flexibility. It was a flexibility that they were able to indulge in, to a greater or lesser extent, because of their privileges as slaveholders. They were able to procure bottles and animal-milk (and slave labour), and other women, to feed their children. These choices, even when borne of necessity, were not shared among other southern women. The ideas of infant-feeding practice popularised through medical and prescriptive literature were influential, but they were not determinant. In fact, they acknowledged many of the issues women encountered in breastfeeding and provided medical recognition of these issues, as well as the basis upon which to choose a wet-nurse. That ‘maternal nurturing’ was

¹³⁴ Kate [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares] to mother [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset], July 23 1854, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹³⁵ Caroline Elizabeth Burgwin Clitherall, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 7, 35, SHC.

¹³⁶ John Berkley Grimball, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 1, May 17 1832, May 23 1832, 6, SHC.

‘an accepted rite of motherhood’, then, overlooks both the variation and choice with which slaveholding women approached infant-feeding.¹³⁷ As Patrice DiQuinzio has identified, cultural constructions of mothering enable space for ‘subjectivity, agency, and entitlement’.¹³⁸

In exercising their subjectivity, agency, and entitlement, slaveholding mothers drew most significantly and most detrimentally upon enslaved women. Wet-nursing has historically taken a variety of forms: from the ‘act of female solidarity and co-operation’ in ‘the custom of shared suckling’, to wet nursing that was ‘carried out principally for reasons of social identification rather than for the benefit of the child or mother’.¹³⁹ That enslaved women sometimes nursed one another’s children as did slaveholding women points to the variety of wet-nursing practices that existed in the antebellum south. Yet, in historical contexts characterised by such disparities in power, privileged women and their families have been able to coerce other women to do this maternal labour, and the exploitative aspects of this practice are its defining features.¹⁴⁰

The interlocking structural racism and sexism that shaped southern society must be understood as the context to enslaved wet-nursing practices. Southerners’ relational racial and class constructions underscored the suitability of black women for this labour.¹⁴¹ Cross-racial wet-nursing relied upon the fallacy of black women’s suitability for both manual and reproductive work. Jennifer Morgan finds that whites historically emphasised African women’s easy breastfeeding and the abundant quantities of breastmilk they produced alongside their fecundity.¹⁴² Practices of extended breastfeeding in West Africa that may well have prevailed in the colonial period in North America may also have bolstered whites’ beliefs in enslaved women’s fitness for breastfeeding.

Certainly, it was a form of labour white women capitalised upon during the colonial era, and historians have noted that during this time the practice was limited by the availability of enslaved women rather than any disdain for interracial wet-nursing.¹⁴³ White upper-class women’s preparedness to use wet-nurses derived from their familiarity with the practice from its long history in Western Europe, together with their relational racial beliefs, and of course

¹³⁷ McMillen, ‘Mothers’ Sacred Duty’, 333, 343-4.

¹³⁸ Patrice DiQuinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood: Feminism, Individualism, and the Problem of Mothering* (New York, 1999), 20.

¹³⁹ Gabrielle Palmer, *The Politics of Breastfeeding* (London, 1988), 122.

¹⁴⁰ For examples of wet-nursing in other systems of slavery, see Rebecca Lynn Winer, ‘Conscripting the Breast: Lactation, Slavery and Salvation in the Realms of Aragon and the Kingdom of Majorca, c.1250-1300’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 34 (2008), 164-84; Tuba Demirci and Selçuk Akşin Somel, ‘Women’s Bodies, Demography, and Public Health: Abortion Policy and Perspectives in the Ottoman Empire of the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 17, 3 (2008), 337-420; Kris Lane, ‘Captivity and Redemption: Aspects of Slave Life in Early Colonial Quito and Popayán’, *Americas*, 57, 2 (2000), 225-46.

¹⁴¹ Weitz, *Politics of Women’s Bodies*, 6-7.

¹⁴² Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 36-41.

¹⁴³ For examples of enslaved wet-nursing in the colonial era, see Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, IL, 1985), 15; Julia C. Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972), 57. For remarks on availability, see Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 154-5; Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in 19th Century America*, 46.

their ability to coerce this labour from other women.¹⁴⁴ It was a practice that resonated across the system of transatlantic slavery, facilitated in North America at least by the rapid growth of chattel slavery.¹⁴⁵ The ideological and practical maturation of slavery thus shaped both attitudes towards and the ability for enslaved wet-nursing in the south. To suggest that '[w]omen had always nursed their babies, and most would never have considered doing otherwise', then, overlooks this history of wet-nursing. If 'tradition' shaped women's infant-feeding practice, as Sally McMillen contends, this 'tradition' for many privileged white women was wet-nursing.¹⁴⁶

iii. Wet-nursing: in sickness and in health

Mistresses did not only use enslaved wet-nurses 'as a last resort'.¹⁴⁷ Their reasons for doing so, however, can be explored in more depth: they cover a spectrum of arrangements from the death or critical illness of a mother to her concerns about her appearance. A slaveholding mother's illness, or her death, were common contexts to enslaved wet-nursing. Accounts such as Roxana Chapin Gardine's are fairly common: in 1865 in West Point, Mississippi, Roxana described how 'we got a negro woman as wet nurse' after a nursing mother named Maddie died.¹⁴⁸ Wet-nursing could preserve the health of a child or even be life-saving in such circumstances. Kate DeRosset Meares described to her husband, Gaston, that when Mary Pearson had 'every symptom of milk leg', and found her 'milk has all dried', she used 'a wet-nurse for the baby' in the spring of 1851.¹⁴⁹ When Mary sadly died the following week, the baby flourished 'with her new nurse' and was 'quite fat'.¹⁵⁰ These decisions were clearly made by slaveholders more broadly than mothers alone.

In cases of serious illness, too, slaveholding mothers drew upon enslaved wet-nurses to feed their infants. In 1818, for example, Eliza Colston wrote to her brother, Kentuckian

¹⁴⁴ Traditions of wet-nursing in pre-industrial Western Europe, especially France, for example, may have led European emigrants to American colonies to approach infant-feeding similarly. Katherine Kemi Bankole, for example, identifies that white women in the French colonies used enslaved wet-nurses. See Bankole, *Slavery and Medicine*, 57-8. See also Hausman, *Mother's Milk*, 7; Yalom, *History of the Breast* (London, 1998), 106; Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in 19th Century America*, 46.

¹⁴⁵ While systems of slavery in South America, North America, and the Caribbean were distinct, the prevalence of wet-nursing across these regions evidences the clear preparedness for Europeans settling in the Americas to use black women to feed their children. For discussion of the practice in Brazil see Marcus Wood, *Black Milk: Imagining Slavery in the Visual Cultures of Brazil and America* (Oxford, 2013), 2, 6-7, 440; Hilary Owen and Anna Klobucka, *Gender, Empire, and Postcoloniality: Luso-Afro-Brazilian Intersections* (London, 2014), 130-2; Maria Helena Pereira Toledo Machado, 'Between Two Benedicts: Enslaved Wet-nurses Amid Slavery's Decline in Southeast Brazil', *Slavery & Abolition* 38, 2 (2017), 320-36. For discussion of the practice in Cuba, see Sarah L. Franklin, *Women and Slavery in Nineteenth-century Cuba* (Rochester, NY, 2012), 134, 137. For discussion of the practice in Barbados, see Hilary Beckles, 'Black Female Slaves and White Households in Barbados', in Gaspar and Hine (eds), *More than Chattel*, 121.

¹⁴⁶ McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 111, 118.

¹⁴⁷ Jones-Rogers, '[S]he Could ... Spare One Ample Breast for the Profit of her Owner', 340.

¹⁴⁸ Roxana Chapin Gardine to Emily McKinstry Chapin, June 22 1865, Roxana Chapin Gardine Collection, Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, University of Mississippi.

¹⁴⁹ Wife [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares] to Gaston [Meares], April 13 1851, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁰ Kate M. [Katherine D. DeRosset Meares] to husband [Gaston Meares], April 22 1851, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

slaveholder and physician Louis Marshall, to explain her daughter had been frequently ill throughout her pregnancy and childbirth, suffering ‘an ulcerated bladder’, ‘falling of the womb’, and ‘violent spasms’. She ‘attempted to nurse her own child’ but only ‘grew more feeble’ and ‘weak’, which ‘compelled her to get a nurse’.¹⁵¹ Former slaves also remembered white women’s illnesses as cause of their using enslaved wet-nurses. Kiziah Love, who was formerly enslaved in the Oklahoma region and ‘a grown woman, married and had one baby when de War done broke out’, recounted that when her master’s brother’s wife was sick, an enslaved woman was ‘sent’ to nurse the baby who was lactating ‘so she could nurse the baby if necessary’.¹⁵² Their comments are often fairly ambiguous. In South Carolina, Louise Pettis’s mother wet-nursed her owner’s child because ‘[h]is mama got sick’ and in Mississippi, Henry Lewis’s mother was also an enslaved wet-nurse because ‘[s]umthin’ wus de matter wid my Mistiss an’ she couldn’t nurse her baby’.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, they confirm that in white women’s illnesses, enslaved women could be used to provide an apparently essential service.

The circumstances surrounding enslaved wet-nursing were typically less critical than serious illness and death. Mistresses’ issues with breastfeeding in particular formed a frequent point of complaint. In 1860, for example, Ella Ann Simpson wrote to Angelina Selden Edrington of Stafford County, Virginia, and complained of the ‘pane’ in her ‘brest’ from ‘nursing the baby so much’.¹⁵⁴ In 1803, North Carolinian Eliza Haywood also described how she ‘suffered great Pain’ from breastfeeding.¹⁵⁵ Her sister, Ferebee Hall, similarly struggled and found breastfeeding ‘gives her pain the stomach’.¹⁵⁶ Considering Eliza and their mother’s use of wet-nurses, these problems may well have led Ferebee to use a wet-nurse. Mary May Irving certainly appeared to have used a wet-nurse to alleviate her from the pain of breastfeeding. In January 1858 she felt ‘the greatest sufferer I think I ever knew’, as her ‘nipples have been so sore that I have done nothing but cry and scream when the baby would nurse’ having ‘tried everything’ to relieve them’.¹⁵⁷ By July, she had evidently determined for her teething baby to be fed by Rose (who appears to have been an enslaved woman), instead. She remarked that she had ‘tried in every way in a dark room and at night and day-break to get her to nurse Rose - and she would not [...]’. Neither would the baby return to her own breast.¹⁵⁸ While Mary’s infant-feeding problems were clear, her account suggests the circumstances in

¹⁵¹ Eliza Colston to Louis Marshall, March 2 1818, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

¹⁵² Kiziah Love, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 194-5.

¹⁵³ Louise Pettis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 334; Henry Lewis McGaffey, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 9, 4, 1395.

¹⁵⁴ Ella Ann Simpson to Angelina Selden Edrington, Feb. 17 1860, Edrington Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁵ Eliza Eagles Haywood to Jane Williams, Dec. 20 1803, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁶ Jane Williams to Eliza Eagles Haywood, Nov. 11 1806, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁵⁷ Mary May Irving to Mary Dame, Sep. 7 1858, Dame Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁵⁸ Mary May Irving to Mary Dame, July 26 1861, Dame Family Papers, VHS. Irving’s comment strongly implies the woman was enslaved (free white wet-nurses were typically given the titular ‘Mrs’, and did not usually live-in).

which enslaved women wet-nursed: closely confined to their slaveholders, demanded to work at all hours.

Breastfeeding was clearly a trial for many women. Lucy Nelson Page Grammer was so perturbed by her sister's 'suffering' with 'inflammation and very sore' breasts she concluded that women 'had all better remain in a state of single blessedness' and avoid such trials altogether.¹⁵⁹ Some women thus procured medical attention in attempting to remedy their ills.¹⁶⁰ The 'lancing' and 'drawing' of breasts by a doctor might resolve some breastfeeding problems. Home remedies included the application of 'caustic' and 'wetting flannels in hot vinegar'.¹⁶¹ However, using an enslaved wet-nurse could avoid painful treatments. For example, when Edwina Burnley's mother 'breast rose' and 'she could not nurse' the infant Edwina, she was able to use an enslaved woman named Rose, whose 'baby died about the time [Edwina] was born', on the Somerset Plantation near Hazlehurst, Mississippi.¹⁶² Jane Williams also used a wet-nurse for a similar problem. In 1798, she wrote to her daughter who was experiencing feeding problems herself: 'I have told you the first fortnight you were born you slept with [Mary] and that she had the entire care of you for that time in every respect, my being disabled with bad breasts'.¹⁶³ Though white women's needs for alternative ways of feeding their children may have been very real, their ability to coerce enslaved women to do this intimate labour for them epitomised their power to enforce the primacy of their own family's needs over enslaved women's.

Women were especially preoccupied with the quality and quantity of their breastmilk. When Mary Jeffreys Bethell, of Rockingham County, North Carolina, had measles during childbirth in 1860, she found she 'was so sick I did not give any milk for the dear babe'.¹⁶⁴ North Carolinian Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset similarly described a woman who 'has not much milk enough' for a baby who was 'cross and troubles her a great deal' in 1845.¹⁶⁵ Some former slaves shared in the belief that it was white women's insufficient milk supplies that led to their use of enslaved women as wet-nurses.¹⁶⁶ Mistresses' belief in the inadequacies of their milk often led them to use enslaved wet-nurses. In Salisbury, North Carolina, Mary Ferrand Henderson expressed the common concern that she could 'afford but little nourishment for my

¹⁵⁹ Lucy Nelson Page Grammer to Mary Dame, Aug. 19 [undated], Dame Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Mary M. Carr, Diary, May 19 1861, May 27 1861, 95-7, DU; Anonymous, Diary, Nov. 16 1854, Nov. 18 1854, Nov. 19 1854, Dec. 13 1854, Dec. 14 1854, David Bullock Harris Papers, DU; Mary Walker to Gustavia Adie, undated, Adie Family Papers, VHS; Mother [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset] to Catherine D. DeRosset, Feb. 12 1845, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁶¹ Mary May Irving to Mary Dame, Jan. 30 1861, Lucy Nelson Page Grammer to Mary Dame, Aug. 19 [undated], Dame Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁶² Edwina Burnley Memoir, 5-6, SHC.

¹⁶³ Jane Williams to Eliza [Eagles] Haywood, Aug. 18 1798, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Jeffreys Bethell, Diary [typed transcription], Sep. 21 1860, 54, SHC.

¹⁶⁵ Mother [Eliza Jane Lord DeRosset] to Catherine D. DeRosset, Feb. 21 1845, March 1 1845, DeRosset Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁶ Jeff Calhoun, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 3, 2, 602-4; Mary Anne Patterson, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 8, 7, 3023.

dear little babe' in 1855.¹⁶⁷ Over several years, she felt her breastmilk was 'not wholesome' and 'disagrees' with her children.¹⁶⁸ Though Mary appeared to attempt to feed all of her children, she also noted that she could not nourish 'without assistance' and used enslaved wet-nurses.¹⁶⁹ They did so quite casually. Laura Norwood reflected that 'when the time comes we must do what seems to be best under the circumstances and trust to providence'.¹⁷⁰ It was an approach facilitated by the ability to exploit other women or procure those alternatives reserved for society's most privileged.

Evidently, it was ultimately white women in these cases who determined their ability to breastfeed. Considering white women's beliefs in their own fragile health, conclusions like Laura Norwood's seem unsurprising. In 1842, Laura wrote of 'M', who was 'weak before the birth of the child'. Though she suggested a 'sound and healthy' wet-nurse would be helpful 'if M has no milk', she also explained that her experience 'goes much against' the feeding of 'young babies' who prospered on an enslaved woman's milk. Her suggestion that '[i]t would also spare you and S more fatigue and trouble than you are perhaps aware of, & I should not think you had much strength to spend unnecessarily' indicates that there was far more benefit to using a wet-nurse than simply her milk.¹⁷¹ It alleviated women of a tiring form of labour in breastfeeding and bottle feeding.

Clearly, Laura herself had found breastfeeding difficult, though. She found her 'heart almost sinks [...] at the thought of feeding another child'. In June 1839, she had provided 'as much milk all day as [her baby] could destroy'. The following month, though, Laura had been unwell and unable to feed the baby who 'does not seem to thrive well on cow's milk'. By August, Norwood commented to her mother that she had 'hardly any milk' for the baby, that [hand] 'feeding does not agree with her at all'. She thus determined to use a wet-nurse instead.¹⁷² By February 1840, Laura had clearly succeeded, and wrote to her mother that 'when the baby is old enough to wean from the nurse I can get along very well with only Eliza and by hiring my washing'.¹⁷³ The following year, when she found that '[a]s usual I make but a poor nurse not having half enough milk', Laura used a wet-nurse again, this time hiring 'a black woman who lives very near'.¹⁷⁴ Laura reasoned her use of wet-nurses was a result of her

¹⁶⁷ Mary Ferrand Henderson, *Diary*, vol. 2, part 7, Dec. 16 1855, 1, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁸ Mary Ferrand Henderson, *Diary*, vol. 2, part 7, Jan. 4 1856, 12, Jan. 5 1852, 13, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁶⁹ Mary Ferrand Henderson, *Diary*, vol. 2, part 7, June 23 1856, 73, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁰ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thos Lenoir], May 1 1845, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷¹ L.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thos Lenoir], Feb. 6 1842, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷² Jos. C. [Josiah C.] Norwood to S.L. [Selina Louisa] Lenoir, June 1839, Jos. C [Norwood] to unknown, July 25 1839, Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], [Aug. 8 1839], Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷³ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], Feb. 11 1840, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁴ Laura [Norwood] to S. [Selina] Louisa Lenoir, June 29 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

inability to effectively feed her children . She felt she ‘never would have had one if my children had not done so badly on feeding’.¹⁷⁵

Laura’s use of wet-nurses gives some insight into slaveholding women’s ability to outsource breastfeeding when they were unable to feed their children themselves. It is perhaps easy to empathise with Laura’s concerns over her children’s health, and the other slaveholding women who felt they could not feed their children. But, Laura’s ability to rely upon wet-nurses allowed her to continue to grow her family and ensure that her children were properly nourished. It was Eliza who bore the burden of feeding another child alongside her own. She would be used by other members of the extended Lenoir family, too, presumably meaning she was separated from her own children. Enslaved mothers often bore the brunt of white women’s infant-feeding problems and solutions. Of course, mistresses’ infant-feeding decisions may have also been influenced by the desires of their husbands, who frequently concerned themselves with women’s health and may have encouraged early weaning for white women to return to their duties as domestic managers and also to resume conjugal relations (which were warned against during breastfeeding).¹⁷⁶ It was, however, typically white mothers who made the choice to procure a wet-nurse. Thus, while the emphasis on enslaved wet-nursing as an alternative means of feeding in cases of illness is not misplaced, neither women’s ability to determine their infant-feeding in many cases nor the range of reasons they had for doing so should be overlooked.¹⁷⁷

Indeed, slaveholding mothers often compounded their concerns over their milk and health with a clear acknowledgement of the benefits of having assistance with feeding, much like Laura’s initial comments might have suggested. In Raleigh, North Carolina, Eliza Haywood, for example, suffered with painful breasts, but she also found the demands of running a house and nursing a baby rendered her ‘very weak and low’. Having had her breasts lanced, Haywood described in 1803:

I am almost worn out and Broke down, with Fatigue and want of rest we have Company every Day four or five [...] Fabius keeps me awake what few hours I have to sleep by getting up so often to Suck [...] he disturbs me so often I cant sleep [...]¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother/Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], May 1 1845, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁷⁶ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 23-4; Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 97.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 35; Yalom, *History of the Breast*, 85.

¹⁷⁸ Eliza Eagles Haywood to Jane Williams, Dec. 20 1803, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

Eliza Haywood appeared to continue to feed this child, but her correspondence with her mother also suggests she was using wet-nurses over the course of her child-bearing years, as her successive children likely only amplified her sense of exhaustion. In 1812, Eliza's baby Rebekah was suckled by the aforementioned Cate, an enslaved wet-nurse. Eliza used Cate to care for her child when she wanted to 'ride' or 'go to Church'. Thus, she alleviated Eliza from some of the demanding and physically straining aspects of motherhood, but she also facilitated her mobility and her leisure time. It seems that Eliza had resolved her disrupted sleep by using this enslaved woman for night-feeds at least. Cate was an incredibly useful nurse to Eliza, who was able to leave her children with her when she went away.¹⁷⁹ For a slaveholding women with suckling children an enslaved wet-nurse thus proved a valuable asset. Cate, on the other hand, was described as 'too sleepy by day or by night': a suggestion of the exhaustion a day's slave labour and a night's enslaved wet-nursing must have entailed for the enslaved woman.¹⁸⁰ Cate's own child is not mentioned.

The combination of factors that appear to have driven Eliza's decisions were quite common, as Mary Ferrand Henderson's discussion of her infant-feeding shows. While Mary considered her concerns over her milk, along with her own sickness, cause for using an enslaved wet-nurse, she also found great benefits from using Sally to wet-nurse her child. She was using Sally 'during the day and until bed time' and noted that she hoped to 'soon be able to do it myself'.¹⁸¹ Mary continued to justify the decision on the grounds of her 'little milk' and 'very weak state'. However, using Sally as a wet-nurse also allowed her to leave 'the babe', and to do activities like horse-riding, visiting, and going to the store. She added that Sally would continue to nurse that baby 'until I recover'.¹⁸² It is not clear if Mary did resume breastfeeding the child – she found she was not 'very rapidly' returning to health, but described herself as 'nursing' the baby.

Thus, it is clear some slaveholding women seized the opportunity an enslaved wet-nurse provided them to free themselves of some of the restricting aspects of breastfeeding. For some women like Eliza and Mary, their infant-feeding issues appear to have been compounded with their desire for a degree of independence. Others simply seem to have rejected breastfeeding. Agatha Marshall Logan, for example, gave birth to a 'premature' baby in October, 1857. Despite its prematurity, her baby was 'perfectly well', and despite Agatha's

¹⁷⁹ Eliza Eagles Haywood to John Haywood, March [?] 1804, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁰ Jane Williams to Eliza Eagles Haywood, March 18 1812, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁸¹ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 4, Sep. 30 1855, 22, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

¹⁸² Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 4, Oct. 1 1855, 25, Oct. 3 1855, 26, Oct. 4 1855, 26-7, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

unwellness (blisters on the breast and throat, and chills), she had ‘plenty of milk’.¹⁸³ Regardless, by December she had determined to get a wet-nurse. Logan added that her nurse, ‘Mrs Bean’, opposed her decision, but stated she would ‘exercise my own judgement aided by the physician’s in Baltimore’.¹⁸⁴ Her comments exemplify the ability white women had to make these decisions, the sources of authority they negotiated, and ultimately their power in this arrangement. For all mothers who used enslaved wet-nurses, it meant that even if she ‘don’t give milk enough for the baby’, she was able to ensure her child was still a ‘very healthy fat little fellow’.¹⁸⁵

Formerly enslaved people’s discussion of the practice sheds further light on reasons enslaved women were called upon to perform this labour. For Mattie Logan, it was certainly owing to a ‘want’ rather than a ‘need’. She recognised the way in which slaveholding women not only allowed mistresses mobility but was motivated by this. Formerly enslaved in Mississippi, just south of Jackson, Logan noted that using an enslaved wet-nurse meant ‘it didn’t keep her [mistress] tied to the place and she could visit around with her friends most any time she wanted ‘though having to worry if the babies would be fed or not’. So, ‘mistress Jennie’ used Mattie’s mother to nurse all of her six children. She added ‘because all of her young ones and my mammy’s was born so close together it wasn’t no trouble at all for mammy to raise the whole caboodle of them’. Whether this was the mistress’s opinion, or whether Mattie’s mother perhaps preferred childcare to other forms of labour, is unclear. But Mattie was certain whose benefit this was done for. It was, she described, ‘a pretty good idea for the Mistress’.¹⁸⁶

It was a ‘good idea’ shared by other slaveholding women, too. Moses Slaughter’s mistress similarly relied upon an enslaved wet-nurse to facilitate her lifestyle. As a result, Moses’s mother wet-nursed all ten of her mistresses’ children. Formerly enslaved in Montgomery County, Tennessee, Moses recalled that:

Master Joseph and the mistress and so many friends and went about in society until they had no time to take care of their children, but they knew Mamma would give them all the care they would ever need.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Agatha [Marshall Logan] to Apo [Appoline Alexander Blair], Oct. 28 [1857], Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁴ A.M.L [Agatha Marshall Logan] to sister [Mira M. Alexander], Dec. 28 1857, Louis Marshall Papers, SHC.

¹⁸⁵ Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds to mother [Jane Watkins Edmunds], undated, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁸⁶ Mattie Logan, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 187.

¹⁸⁷ Moses Slaughter, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 194.

Much like Eliza Haywood and Mary Henderson, then, Mattie and Moses's comments reveal the ways in which some slaveholding women relied upon enslaved wet-nurses to maintain some independence from the demands of childrearing. Thus, some women, much like Genia Woodberry's mistress, simply rejected nursing their children. Enslaved on a large plantation belonging to Ben Gause in South Carolina, Genia remembered how she:

Nu'se Massa Ben Gause child fust en den I nu'se four head uv Miss Susan chillum a'ter she marry Massa Jim Stevenson. Sleep right dere wid dem chillum aw de time. Miss Susan ne'er didn't suckle none uv dem chillum¹⁸⁸

Genia gave no discussion of ill-health and thus it appears Susan chose to use a wet-nurse for all of her children. These few sources – whether the more ambiguous ones authored by slaveholding women, or these revealing comments of former slaves – are of great importance in understanding that slaveholding women did not simply call upon enslaved women as wet-nurses in times of need.

Indeed, for all the castigation in prescriptive literature and at the pulpit for women who deigned to put their looks or their lifestyle above their needful infants, some slaveholding mothers were still inclined to outsource their breastfeeding for these very reasons. Formerly enslaved in Mississippi, Betty Curlett, explained: 'White women wouldn't nurse their own babies cause it would make their breast fall. Rich women didn't nurse their babies, never did, cause it would cause their breast to be flat'. Instead, a 'healthy woman and a clean woman' was installed in 'a house close by'.¹⁸⁹ Others were motivated by their sense of propriety. In Memphis, Tennessee, Ellen Vaden's mistress used a wet-nurse out of 'modesty'. Ellen remembered her mother nursed her along with 'Dave Johnson's boy'. She described:

Miss Luiza was so modest she wouldn't let Tobe have 'titty'. He would come lead my mother behind the door and pull at her till she would take him and let him nurse. She said he would lead her behind the door.¹⁹⁰

Thus, breastfeeding was not exceptionalised in many cases from the other forms of mother-work that could be outsourced either on the basis of a mistress's sense of her 'need' or

¹⁸⁸ Genia Woodberry, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 218.

¹⁸⁹ Betty Curlett, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 76-7.

¹⁹⁰ Ellen Vaden, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 7, 3.

her 'want'. The choice slaveholding women enjoyed as mothers was just one aspect of women's experiences of infant-feeding where the inequalities between women of slaveholding or enslaved status is clear. For enslaved mothers, restricted breastfeeding was routine across the south. Their ability to feed their children was curtailed on a day-to-day basis, and their means of circumscribing routinised infant-feeding may have enabled greater control over breastfeeding, but carrying a child on one's body or leaving a child by one's place of work were not unproblematic arrangements. When an enslaved mother could not or did not want to breastfeed her child, her options were hugely limited and enslaved mothers generally relied upon one another. Enslaved mothers could resist slaveholders' restrictions of their breastfeeding by maintaining night-time and weekend feedings, though this did not resolve many of the problems of how a child was fed in a mother's absence, nor how she laboured without being able to regularly express milk. The relative paucity of choice and autonomy enslaved mothers faced is clear, as well as the bleakness of the conditions in which they sought to raise their children.

Infant-feeding was often a highly unwelcome intervention into slave labour and slaveholders would constantly negotiate their interests in slave infant health with their interests in enslaved mothers' slave labour. Slaveholders certainly sought for the survival of enslaved children and thus often facilitated breastfeeding, but this did not mean enslaved mothers had the ability to feed their children, the choices over infant-feeding, and the control over infant-feeding that they needed or desired. Rather, slaveholders enforced mothers' primacy as slave-labourers, and in doing so, orchestrated a wide-range of structured, systematised, and restrictive infant-feeding practices and also used violence to communicate this primacy. The range of these interventions together with the practice of chewing, white women's wet-nursing enslaved children, and coerced communal nursing, suggest additional dynamics to slaveholders' 'structural interference' in enslaved women's infant-feeding.¹⁹¹ Most of these interventions had hugely detrimental effects on infant health already rendered precarious by the conditions of enslavement. The poor quality of enslaved mothers' milk together with the health-risks of weaning rendered regular and extended feeding highly preferable. Yet, the cruel irony was that children most needing of proper nourishment were the most deprived, and the mothers whose ability to nourish their children was most debilitated were understood to be the most suitable for the dual demands of manual and reproductive labour.

¹⁹¹ See Dunaway, *Women, Work and Family in the Antebellum South*, 255-9.

Slaveholding women, on the other hand, were able to delegate all aspects of mother-work they either could not or would not do themselves. Though the emphasis on wet-nursing as an outcome of a woman's inability to breastfeed is not misplaced, slaveholding women's agency and their choice (as well as the costs of this on other women) should clearly not be understated. Neither did slaveholding women necessarily embrace breastfeeding as an 'accepted rite of motherhood'.¹⁹² The sentimentality present in the rhetoric of breastfeeding, and even 'tradition', often had little place in the lives of white women. Slaveholding women balanced the demands of household-management and parenting and their desires for leisure and social time with the physical challenges of infant-feeding and their concerns over adequate child nourishment and infant health. Slaveholding afforded them material resources and human labour that systematically privileged them as mothers (and disadvantaged enslaved mothers).

Of course, enslaved wet-nursing was not always solely a white woman's prerogative, most evidently in cases of critical illness and death. Each mother's decision to use a wet-nurse was also a personal one, shaped by factors including a woman's physical capacity to breastfeed and her personal inclination. Infant-feeding decisions could change on a child-by-child basis, and depending on a mother's and their infant's health. However, infant-feeding was yet another area where slaveholding women would make interventions that sought to claim aspects of enslaved women's mothering for their own. Breastfeeding thus constituted one aspect of enslaved women's mother-work that could be forcefully re-directed to slaveholders. And, it was one most essential for the survival of their own child.

Whites' discussions of their uses of enslaved women as wet-nurses must be read closely and critically to consider how their decisions may have affected enslaved mothers and children, despite the absence of sources which speak to this aspect of maternal exploitation. It is clear that the use of another woman's maternal labour would have been costly for an enslaved woman's own child, and Chapter Five explores the exploitative nature of this practice in its many forms. Yet even in comparing enslaved and slaveholding women's infant-feeding, slaveholding women's privilege, their centrality to the practice of wet-nursing, and the lack of gendered essentialism in their relationships with enslaved women is clear. Power is not always violent, forceful, or malicious, but takes the form of subtle prioritisations, redirections, and exploitations. However, such power also has debilitating, even fatal, consequences. Infant-feeding practices thus emphasise the inequalities inherent in a system of racial-chattel slavery

¹⁹² McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 338, 332.

and motherhood's inextricability from social hierarchy and its material and social consequences. And, most veritably, 'life's inequalities began with the first drop of milk'.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Yalom, *History of the Breast*, 37.

Chapter Five

Enslaved Wet-Nursing and Maternal Exploitation

Marse John would [...] tell Aunt Mary to go on and nuss his baby fist.
Aunt Mary couldn't answer him a word, but my ma said she offen seed
Aunt Mary cry 'til de tears met under her chin.

William McWhorter (1936-8)¹

The greatest mark of esteem that one family paid to another was to
exchange these human luxuries to obtain the benefits of their peculiar
talents.

Time-Democrat (1888)²

The image of William McWhorter's aunt Mary with tears gathered beneath her chin having been forced to breastfeed her owner's child evokes the distress and anguish characteristic of a practice of maternal exploitation that has been historically represented as an act of shared mothering. These 'human luxuries', as the *Time-Democrat* so characterised enslaved wet-nurses, were enslaved mothers coerced into cross-racial wet-nursing. Enslaved wet-nursing was a dynamic form of maternal exploitation. Some wet-nurses were used for the duration of their child-bearing years, forced to divide their milk between black and white children; others were used temporarily, removed from their 'normal' labour, their homes, and their families to perform this intimate bodily and emotional labour. Many enslaved wet-nurses were bereaved of their own children. This was confining work, physically taxing, and typically afforded enslaved women little benefit either for themselves or their children. It is thus an aspect of enslaved women's labour that more than any other emphasises the vast distance between the perverse and pervasive portrayals of enslaved women as mammies and the abusive nature of slaveholders' relationships with enslaved mothers.

The 'black Mammy' who shared her 'generous breasts' with her slaveholders' children certainly illustrated the affections of '*the real, ante bellum, family slave*' and her 'constant

¹ William McWhorter, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 3, 96-7.

² 'A Time-Democrat Reporter Interviews a Lively Centenarian', *Time-Democrat*, New Orleans, LA, Sep. 10 1882, 18, LWPA.

practical good' for white southerners seeking to evoke the interracial intimacies of slavery.³ These '[l]ong established myths', Sally McMillen argues, have 'prevented an accurate assessment' of slaveholding women's infant-feeding practices.⁴ Though the sentimentalised portrayals of enslaved wet-nurses that abounded in the postbellum era entirely reconstructed the practice for its representative value and rhetorical purposes, though, they clearly did not fabricate that enslaved mothers were frequently called upon to breastfeed slaveholders' children.

Indeed, contemporary scholarship emphasises both the extent of enslaved wet-nursing practice and some of its exploitative characteristics. Stephanie Jones-Rogers explains that slaveholders rendered enslaved women's breastfeeding a form of 'skilled labour' in the formal marketplace. She positions white mothers as central in this market yet 'largely invisible' because transactions were 'initiated and finalized' within mistresses' own households.⁵ That slaveholding mothers were instrumental to this 'distinct aspect of enslaved women's commodification' is thus understood to shed light on 'the more intimate worlds of southern black and white women'.⁶

Both the nature of slaveholding women's roles in enslaved wet-nursing and the insights this practice gives into slaveholding and enslaved women's relationships, however, can be more fully established by examining the multi-faceted nature of enslaved wet-nursing across three distinct yet interrelated sites: within-slaveholding wet-nursing, the informal marketplace, and the formal marketplace. Slaveholding women drew upon enslaved women from their own households, farms, and plantations to perform this labour. Others procured wet-nurses from family and friends. It was a practice that routinely broached the boundaries of southern households and newspapers were peppered with adverts procuring and proffering wet-nurses. Each form of enslaved wet-nursing gives insights into both how slaveholding families used enslaved wet-nurses and the implications of this for enslaved mothers and their children.

Within-slaveholding wet-nursing practices suggest that both long-term wet-nursing and short-term wet-nursing entailed co-nursing, forced weaning, and family separations. The very nature of these arrangements alongside the testimony of former slaves and slaveholders provides means of challenging the misconception that wet-nursing was a privileged form of labour for enslaved nurses. Indeed, the casualness with which slaveholders demanded their

³ Robert Q. Mallard, *Plantation Life Before Emancipation* (Richmond, VA, 1892), 9, DocSouth; Mary Minta Pleasants, *Which One? and Other Ante Bellum Days* (Boston, MA, 1910), 17, VHS.

⁴ McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 334-5.

⁵ Jones-Rogers, '[S]he Could ... Spare One Ample Breast for the Profit of her Owner', 338, 348.

⁶ West with Knight, 'Mother's Milk', 37, 50.

slaves to perform this labour, and the other forms of work wet-nurses undertook, firmly centres enslaved wet-nursing practices within the broader patterns of appropriation and redirection that characterised maternal labour. Slaveholding women's use of enslaved mothers as transferrable mother-work and the absence of their emotional bonds with wet-nurses are further emphasised in their informal slave-trading. In these networks, the 'visibility' of slaveholding women's roles can be better established. Finally, while the formal marketplace offers little in the way of women's experiences of this practice, the impersonality of this trade and its distinct features suggest exploitative aspects of the practice not as strongly reflected in its other forms. Accordingly, exploring wet-nursing across these sites builds a more comprehensive picture of this practice in which exploitation characterised all its forms, providing means for directly addressing both notions of enslaved wet-nurses' privilege and their familiarity with their mistresses.

i. Within-slaveholding enslaved wet-nursing

The first recourse for a slaveholding woman or family seeking a wet-nurse was generally to call upon one of the slaves they already owned. This was a matter of convenience that avoided unnecessary costs and could also allay some of those common anxieties over a wet-nurse's character and health. George Watson gave some insight into slaveholders' sentiments. At the Green Spring plantation in Virginia, Ann Watson suffered the common ills of hardness in and discharge from her breasts and asked her husband to procure her a nurse, which considering the nature of her complaints, seems to have been a wet-nurse.⁷ George had entered a relatively gendered realm of the marketplace for slave-labour, and having not known 'how to go about an enquiry for one', had made an unsuccessful trip to a 'Mrs Chevallie' in the autumn of 1817. He informed his wife that he much preferred to procure one 'out of so many negroes my fathers has', as:

The expense of hiring is an objection to it at any rate, and then the precarious tenure by which you hold a hireling & the worst of that absolute and lasting control which is necessary to keep the proper degree of authority is another.⁸

⁷ George Watson to Ann Watson, Sep. 21 1816, George Watson to Ann Watson, Sep. 13 1817, Watson Family Papers, VHS.

⁸ George Watson to Ann Watson, Sep. 13 1817, Watson Family Papers, VHS.

It was thus not simply the ‘expense’ that shaped slaveholders’ engagement with the formal market, and George’s concerns over the ‘precarious tenure’ of the arrangement and the ‘proper degree of authority’ one needed to exert over hirelings were quite common. Slaveholders felt - as Elizabeth Early expressed to her sister in 1849 - ‘as long as we are providentially in the midst of slavery & obliged to have the benefit of their labour it is far better for us to own them, than to hire’.⁹

Those slaveholders on the lower end of the slaveholding class were certainly not able to exercise such choice. In 1823, Virginian slaveholder Lucy Ambler, for example, noted that among the slaves ‘on the farm’, there simply was not a suitable nurse. She wrote:

I have now three children to work for and it keeps me quite busy. Cinthea’s nursing well but there is not a girl on the farm that is large enough to nurse except one that is too bad for the purpose and the women all have young children so I can’t make nurses of them.¹⁰

That one woman ‘is too bad for the purpose’ could refer to either physical or personality characteristics, but suggests Lucy’s was a want rather than a need. The concerns Lucy expressed over her enslaved women’s ‘young children’ likely reflected the problems often posed by making alternative feeding arrangements and their ramifications on valuable slave life, rather than any compassion for the enslaved mothers.

One did not have to own a vast number of slaves, however, to be able to use enslaved mothers as wet-nurses. It was whether a woman was deemed fit for the task and how to best organise slave-labour that were slaveholders’ more pressing concerns. Childbirth rates, of course, differed over time and region, but enslaved women generally gave birth every twenty four to thirty months.¹¹ Thus, even those who owned relatively few slaves could call upon enslaved women to perform this labour. In Virginia, Ann Powell Burwell recorded in her ‘commonplace book’ that between the period of 1801 and 1839, about thirty children were born to only eight enslaved women.¹² Jane Rebecca Irving Masters recorded some twenty-three children born to six enslaved women between 1833 and 1861.¹³ Even one enslaved woman’s

⁹ Elizabeth Early to Martha Binns Susanna Childs, April 19 1849, Early Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁰ Lucy Ambler to Sarah Massie, April 18 1823, Massie Family Papers, VHS.

¹¹ Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 104-5; Gutman, *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 50-1; White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman*, 97; Dunaway, *African-American Family in Slavery in Emancipation*, 125-7.

¹² Children born to Kate, Lucy, Lidea, Sally, Charlotte, Mary, Annabella, and Aggy. Ann Powell Burwell, *Commonplace Book*, VHS.

¹³ Children born to Sally, Lively, Victoria, Jincy, Harriet, and Sally [two women named Sally]. Jane Rebecca Irving Masters, *Commonplace Book*, Irving Family Papers, VHS.

patterns of childbearing could provide a mistress with a wet-nurse. Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds, for example, used a wet-nurse for her baby who ‘has a baby also’. It was quite likely her child’s ‘nurse’, Harriet, who had some ten children between 1850 and 1861, and could have provided milk for any number of her mistress’s own ten children.¹⁴ The Edmunds family, though, also had a sizeable estate and in just ten years between 1855 and 1865 some thirty two enslaved infants were born.¹⁵

Slaveholding mothers were thus often able to procure enslaved wet-nurses without leaving the confines of their own slaveholding. Sometimes, it was an enslaved woman’s defined occupation. Mary Anne Patterson, for instance, explained that it was her ‘job’ to wet-nurse her slaveholders’ child during her enslavement in Texas.¹⁶ Others were called upon for one-time occurrences, as Kiziah Love recalled. When her master’s sister-in-law was ill, the mistress ‘sent for’ an enslaved woman from among their slaves to wet-nurse her child.¹⁷ Those who used wet-nurses also drew upon the women they already owned more customarily. Susan Dabney Smedes remarked that mistresses’ ‘wet nurses for her babies’ were ‘chosen from among her negro servants’, though of course Susan’s reflection was imbued with the slaveholders’ sense that this practice reflected privilege and the ‘chosen’ ‘servants’ apparently showed ‘a devotion’ to white children ‘great than the love for their own’.¹⁸ Slaveholding mothers thus quite casually capitalised upon enslaved mothers’ ability to breastfeed their children.

Most women performed the demands of breastfeeding their slaveholders’ children alongside other labour responsibilities. This tended to be domestic labour. Louisa Street, for example, was a wet-nurse for her mistress’s white child while breastfeeding her own child, as well as a ‘house maid’.¹⁹ Clark Heard, Clayton Holbert, and Emmet Beal all remembered enslaved wet-nurses worked as cooks, too.²⁰ Spinning and weaving were also tasks commonly given to enslaved wet-nurses.²¹ Despite the ‘light’ connotations of household labour, the routine of productive and reproductive labour could be relentless. Ned Chaney, for instance, was formerly enslaved in Choctaw County, Mississippi. His mother had seven children and suckled ‘some’ of his mistress’s children, too. Ned remembered this work ‘kep’ her purdy busy,

¹⁴ Lucy Jane Barksdale Edmunds to mother [Jane Watkins Edmunds], undated, Nicholas Edmunds Commonplace Book, section 8, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁵ Nicholas Edmunds Commonplace Book, section 8, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁶ Mary Anne Patterson, *TAS SSII*, Texas Narratives, 8, 7, 3023.

¹⁷ Kiziah Love, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 194-5.

¹⁸ Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 86.

¹⁹ Amy Elizabeth Patterson, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 150-1.

²⁰ Clark Heard, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 361; Clayton Holbert, *FWP*, Kansas Narratives, VI, 3; Emmet Beal, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 1, 127.

²¹ Hattie Thompson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 315; Mary Anne Patterson, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 8, 7, 3023.

too': she would nurse the children, 'totin' 'em round if she was busy', as well as working 'in de loom room ever' day of her life', and 'was right busy doin' some other kinder particular work'. Though Ned's mother was universally referred to as the 'mammy', this title entailed the numerous and laborious roles of wet-nurse, midwife, nurse, and house-slave.²² Enslaved women's lactation, for slaveholders, often simply qualified them for a new and additional form of labour to be negotiated with their other responsibilities. Many women, like Molly Horniblow, thus found themselves 'officiating in all capacities'.²³

Enslaved mothers taken into the household for the purposes of enslaved wet-nursing often suckled the children of their slaveholders alongside their own, or 'co-nursed'. This mitigated the need for alternative feeding arrangements and was also likely permitted to encourage an enslaved mother's compliance. In former slaves' testimony of enslaved wet-nursing, a passing comment that one was suckled 'together' with a master or mistress was fairly common.²⁴ Mattie Logan, for example, described that she was born around the same time as her young mistress, and: 'They say I nursed on one breast while that white child, Jennie, pulled away at the other!'.²⁵ For some mothers, this labour may have been preferable to other forms of work. However, women often had little choice in the matter. Co-nursing often extended over multiple children, for multiple years. Indeed, some enslaved mothers suckled every single one of their mistresses' children.²⁶ For Jeff Calhoun's mother, formerly enslaved in Alton, Alabama, his 'little and frail' mistress who 'wuz no good to gib milk' relied upon her to feed 'ebry one' of her fifteen children.²⁷ The physical demands of this labour could be extreme. 'Wet nursing', as Wilma Dunaway writes, 'often broke the health of slave women'.²⁸

Long-term wet-nursing arrangements were clearly relied upon both by women who simply rejected this aspect of their mother-work and by those women who continued to grow their families but were unable to feed their children. It was enslaved mothers, however, who performed this intimate labour that sometimes extended over decades. While slaveholders routinely negotiated an enslaved woman's role as a labourer and as a reproducer when they casually drew upon enslaved women as wet-nurses, for those long-term enslaved wet-nurses, manual and reproductive labour could become almost indistinguishable. Wet-nursing was a practice through which slaveholders not only capitalised upon a woman's manual labour and

²² Ned Chaney, *TAS SS1*, Mississippi Narratives, 7, 2, 370-3.

²³ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 184, 12, DocSouth.

²⁴ See, for example, Louise Pettis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 5, 334; Margaret Bryant, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 1, 147-8.

²⁵ Mattie Logan, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 187.

²⁶ See, for example, Jeff Calhoun, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 1, 188; Cynthia Jones, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 4, 139; Genia Woodbury, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 218-20; Josephine Howell, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 340.

²⁷ Jeff Calhoun, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 3, 2, 602-4.

²⁸ Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 140.

her production of children, but also upon her maternal body. It thus provides an important additional dynamic to our understanding of the intersections of race and gender in enslaved women's exploitation.

Indeed, breeding and wet-nursing appear to have sometimes gone hand-in-hand. Returning to the nature of slaveholders' interventions in enslaved women's couplings as discussed in Chapter Three, it was no coincidence that some long-term wet-nurses' own childbearing was coordinated to their mistresses'. Formerly enslaved on the Little Deer Creek plantation in Jefferson County, Mississippi, Mary Jane Jones explained:

You see, my mother was a wedding gift to my master at the time of his marriage; was given to him as a kind of nest egg to breed slaves for him, and just as soon as he carried her home he bought a slave husband for her and children came to both families thick and fast. My mother would have a baby every time my mistress would have one, so that my mother was always the wet nurse to my mistress.²⁹

Considering that Mary's master 'bought a slave husband for her' 'just as soon as he carried her home', it would appear that she was bought explicitly with this lifetime of labour in mind. Thus, innumerable enslaved women who did not even have children may have been procured with similar intent. Those women sold with young children may also have been sought for the purposes of wet-nursing. Louisa Picquet's master, for example, bought Louisa and her fifteen-year-old mother Elizabeth when Louisa was just an infant. When they 'first went to Georgia' with this man, Elizabeth 'suckled Madame Cook's child' with Louisa before becoming a cook for the white family.³⁰ It seems that Elizabeth was bought for this labour, considering her immediate work in her role. The ability of enslaved women to work in other capacities when their milk was not required, and alongside their wet-nursing, meant this was a sound investment for slaveholders.

While the way in which Mary's mother's slaveholders communicated their demands for her to bear children are of course unclear, it suggests sexual exploitation (broadly construed) could form another aspect of enslaved women's exploitation in their roles as wet-nurses. Neither were interventions into slaves' couplings only a male prerogative, as Chapter Three has evidenced. Slaveholding women's contriving and curtailing of enslaved women's

²⁹ Mary Jane Jones, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 1243. See also Minerva Davis, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 127

³⁰ Louisa Picquet and Hiram Mattison (ed.), *The Octoroon: or Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life* (New York, 1861), 7, DocSouth.

relationships and motherhoods were interventions that sought for slaves' mothering to reflect their own interests, and enslaved wet-nursing was a form of such intervention that was explicitly intended to facilitate a mistress's own mothering. Furthermore, because enslaved wet-nursing demanded such close proximity between enslaved women and their slaveholders, the risks of enslaved women's sexual abuse by white males were also increased. Elizabeth, for example, had 'three more *quadroon* children, while Mr. Cook owned her; but no husband, either black or white'.³¹

The actual labour of breastfeeding, then, was within the context of multiple and interacting forms of exploitation. Yet, even for women like Mary Jane Jones's mother, who both had sixteen of her own children ('and raised eleven of them') as well as being 'always the wet nurse' for her mistress, her children appear to have been placed in the same childcare arrangements as the other slave infants.³² This was not simply owing to the provisions of slave-nurseries on plantations such as the one Mary and her family lived upon. Peggy Sloan's mother was a wet-nurse and nurse on a small farm in Tulip, Arkansas. While Peggy's mother was able to co-nurse her own and her slaveholders' child, her role as a nurse to the white children was to take pre-eminence. Peggy remarked that there were separate nurses for 'the little colored children' and the 'white children', and her mother 'was a nurse for the white children'. Peggy explained that '[m]y mother didn't have nothing to do with the colored children'.³³ Thus, slaveholders could both encourage (or coerce) an enslaved woman's childbearing in the interests of their wet-nursing labour and allow co-nursing in the interests of the life of a valuable slave child, but then routinely restricted the nurturing and bonding aspect of the mother-child relationship. Slaveholders' manipulations of enslaved women's mothering were complex and diverse, but they always sought for it to serve their ends.

Though co-nursing was probably preferable to not feeding one's child at all for many women, it was not an unproblematic arrangement. Tensions often arose around the 'sharing' of a mother's milk. Henry Clay Moorman's mother fed him alongside their owner's child in the poignant scene of 'both the black and white white child' on his mother's lap 'battling' for her attention on a plantation in Breckenridge County, Kentucky.³⁴ The infant had no understanding of his secondary status. Slaveholders, however, did. Revisiting William McWhorter's account of his Aunt Mary, William's description of slaveholders' mechanisms for ensuring such prioritisations is telling. Enslaved in Greene County, Georgia, he explained

³¹ Picquet, *Octoroon*, 50.

³² Mary Jane Jones, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 8, 3, 1243.

³³ Peggy Sloan, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 168.

³⁴ Henry Clay Moorman, *FWP*, Indiana Narratives, V, 138.

how:

My Aunt Mary b'longed to Marse John Craddock and when his wife died and left a little baby – dat was little Miss Lucy – Aunt Mary was nussin' a new baby of her own, so Marse John made her let his baby suck too. If Aunt Mary was feedin' her own baby and Miss Lucy started cryin' Marse John would snatch her baby up by the legs and spank him, and tell Aunt Mary to go on and nuss his baby fist. Aunt Mary couldn't answer him a word, but my ma said she offen seed Aunt Mary cry 'til de tears met under her chin.³⁵

McWhorter's aunt's mistress had died, and the contexts to enslaved wet-nursing were often bitterly complex. However, the apparent 'necessity' for a wet-nurse does not detract from Mary's experience. Mary had to watch in complete silence while her child was snatched up by the legs and spanked. It is one of the most evocative testimonials of the distress mothers experienced through these interventions. Mary's silence and Mary's tears had been related by her sister, who had clearly remembered this painful scene of maternal exploitation. Such forced prioritisations were surely fairly common within co-nursing practices. Indeed, it belies the problem with the very term 'co-nursing': nothing between slaves and their owners was truly 'shared'.

While co-nursing and whatever coercions it entailed appear to have been a common arrangement in within-slaveholding wet-nursing, the emphasis slaveholders placed on an enslaved wet-nurse's child life was entirely negotiable, as slaveholders' various interventions into infant-feeding make clear. Some slaveholders eliminated the need for co-nursing practices entirely by removing an enslaved mother's child from her. This ensured no slaveholding infant would be subsidiary to an enslaved infant and also removed the need for a slaveholder's watchful eyes at every feed. T.W. Cotton, for example, was raised on the bottle by his grandmother in Indian Bay, Arkansas, so that his mother could breastfeed her mistress's child instead. 'There was something wrong wid Miss Fannie', he explained.³⁶ In Wake County, North Carolina, slaveholder Sade Lenoir proposed that if an enslaved woman named Sallie they intended to use as a wet-nurse did not have enough milk for her own child, they could simply put Sallie's baby to the bottle.³⁷ Both appear to have been 'justified' by a mistress's ill

³⁵ William McWhorter, *FWP*, Georgia Narratives, IV, 3, 96-7.

³⁶ T.W. Cotton, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 41.

³⁷ Sade [Sarah Jones Lenoir] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Aug. 1 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

health of some vague description, and in both these cases (if Sallie was indeed used as a wet-nurse), these enslaved mothers had to cease feeding their own babies in order to feed their slaveholders' child. While the mother-child relationship could be manipulated to a slaveholders' advantage, then, this was another way in which its severance equally served slaveholders' ends.

Enslaved wet-nursing thus emphasises some of the most explicit interrelationships of women's privileges and disadvantages as mothers. Slaveholding women who could not or would not feed their infants were able to enforce another woman to do so. The cost of this and a woman's experience of this showed great variation. Yet, in the cases where slaveholders enforced weaning, this could be a near-fatal choice. Alternatives to breastfeeding, as Chapter Four has evidenced, were far more dangerous for enslaved infants than slaveholding-class infants. To reiterate: enslaved infants were 2.2 times more likely to die than white babies, they were most vulnerable during the period of weaning, and slaveholding women were well-aware of the risks of early weaning for infant health.³⁸ Thus, this redirection of maternal labour could not only be emotionally distressing and physically trying, but was at real cost to infant health and a mother's time with their baby. It was the most explicit form of the forced-prioritisation of white children, situated within broader patterns of slaveholding women's re-directions of enslaved women's nursing work and gendered domestic labour.

It was these forced-prioritisations that were at the core of enslaved women's resentments. It was the very trade-off between white and black life that Harriet Jacobs's grandmother, Molly Horniblow, had sought to express to James Norcom in explaining 'how she had taken her own baby from her breast to nourish his wife'.³⁹ It was the very trade-off between white and black life that Sojourner Truth had expressed when she explained that 'her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring'.⁴⁰ These were not simply rhetorical uses of enslaved wet-nursing practice, but were expressions of the appropriations of maternal labour that enslaved women constantly endured.

Certainly, in literature that critiqued the 'peculiar institution', the juxtaposition of black women's 'inferior milk' with 'lordly white babies', or women deemed suitable to breastfeed white infants but 'not good enough' to 'sit at the same table with [white Southerners]', evoked

³⁸ Steckel, 'Women, Work, and Health under Plantation Slavery in the United States', in Gaspar and Hine (eds), *More than Chattel*, 50; Dunaway, *African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, 144, 14; Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*, 255.

³⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 130.

⁴⁰ Sojourner Truth, 'Pro-Slavery in Indiana', *The Liberator*, Oct. 15 1858, in Teresa C. Zackodnik (ed.), *"We Must Be Up and Doing": A Reader in Early African American Feminisms* (Ontario, 2010), 58.

the puzzling intimacies and apparent hypocrisies of slavery.⁴¹ As one more visual representation from the Civil War era depicted:



Image II: ‘Though now unconscious on Ma Ma’s breast, Glorious destiny awaits the high born babe’.⁴²

Critics also presented the exploitative nature of the practice in articulating the nature of African American women’s enslavement. John Hawkins Simpson’s 1863 *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade*, for example, recounted the story of an escaped Virginian slave named Dinah who was ‘wet-nurse to thirteen of her master’s children, and these children were, in early years, under her care’. Simpson’s account explained how Dinah’s master sold her child, despite her belief that he surely would not ‘sell the playmate of his own children, who had been nursed at her breast’.⁴³ Harriet Jacobs’s 1861 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* also described an enslaved wet-nurse whose valuable and intimate labour for her slaveholders afforded her no reprieve from the brutality of slavery. Ordered by her mistress to be ‘stripped and whipped’,

⁴¹ Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York, 1864), 45; John Patterson Green, *Recollections of the Inhabitants, Localities, Superstitions, and KuKlux Outrages of the Carolinas. By a “Carpet-Bagger” Who Was Born and Lived There* (Cleveland, OH, 1880), 59, DocSouth.

⁴² ‘Slave Nursing White Baby Envelope’, ‘Slave Nursing White Baby Envelope 2’, 1861-1865, John A. McAllister Collection: Civil War Envelopes, The Library Company of Philadelphia.

⁴³ John Hawkins Simpson, *Horrors of the Virginian Slave Trade and of the Slave-Rearing Plantations. The True Story of Dinah, an Escaped Virginian Slave, Now in London, on Whose Body Are Eleven Scars Left by Tortures Which Were Inflicted by Her Master, Her Own Father. Together with Extracts from the Laws of Virginia, Showing That Against These Barbarities the Law Gives Not the Smallest Protection to the Slave, But the Reverse* (London, 1863), 29, 32, DocSouth.

the distraught woman committed suicide by drowning herself.⁴⁴ Yet, the coerced re-directions of enslaved women's mother-work that Molly Horniblow and Sojourner Truth described, the lack of privilege wet-nursing provided enslaved women as portrayed by John Hawkins Simpson, and the abusive nature of slaveholding women's relationships with their wet-nurses that Harriet Jacobs depicted, were not out of keeping with the nature of this practice as reflected through a wide variety of forms of testimony.

ii. Reinterpreting 'mammy'

The exploitative aspects of enslaved wet-nursing are clearly inextricable from the very nature of this practice. In its diverse forms even within the slaveholding, this was seldom an act of shared mothering but an additional and costly intervention into enslaved women's mothering that sought to appropriate their maternal labour. Despite the revisions that have been made to interpretations of domestic servitude as a preferable form of labour, and beyond the general inattention to this practice, wet-nursing often remains characterised as role through which status and privilege could be accrued, though. Katy Simpson Smith, for example, explains that:

These women who were employed as nurses, whose milk was co-opted for white mouths, may have lost some nourishment for their own children, but they were also carving out spaces in the plantation hierarchy for themselves and their families; a valued, even beloved, black nurse could earn compensation and favors from a white family that could provide a more secure life for her children in the future.⁴⁵

Smith's interpretation of the practice of enslaved wet-nursing encapsulates some common oversights. That enslaved mothers 'may have lost some nourishment for their own children' understates the dependency of this practice on restricted feeding in its many forms. Of course, the costs of enslaved wet-nursing also far exceeded the effects on one's infant's health. As William McWhorter's aunt Mary's experience suggests, this practice was deeply painful for mothers too. That enslaved wet-nursing garnered enslaved women 'compensation and favors' is also a problematic assumption. Most enslaved mothers were not decisive in their employment as wet-nurses, and most enslaved wet-nurses were certainly not 'beloved'. This

⁴⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 184.

⁴⁵ Smith, *We Have Raised All of You*, 187.

exploitative practice should not be understood primarily in terms of any possible privileges enslaved women and their families received. These were, as this study suggests, both uncommon, precarious, and simply did not characterise the majority of enslaved wet-nurses' experiences.

Smith's interpretation could derive from some former slaves' discussion of the practice that portray wet-nursing in more mammy-like terms. Fred Dibble, for example, remembered that his mother was bought presents by the white man she suckled who 'allus t'ink lots of her' and called her 'mammy'.⁴⁶ In Troup County, Georgia, Clark Heard's mother was also called 'Black Mammy' by the white children that she wet-nursed, who 'jes' love her'.⁴⁷ Heard remembered this as work that distinguished his mother, just one of two house slaves, from the 140-50 field slaves. Certainly, that this labour differentiated an enslaved woman from her peers may have encouraged these kind of reflections. As with all second-hand testimony, informants may have also imbued these roles with their own sense of what this work represented. Some enslaved wet-nurses, over many years, did accrue some status. When they did, however, it was the outcome of often decades of arduous, intimate, and confining labour. As Deborah Gray White writes, the best many enslaved women could do was 'to hope that the odds would come up in her favour'.⁴⁸

Many of the benefits commonly understood to derive from this labour were in slaveholders' own interests. Betty Curlett, for example, explained that enslaved wet-nurses were given a house 'close by' the slaveholding household, received better food, and 'didn't have to work'.⁴⁹ Yet, she also explained that the absence of heavy labour was a privilege only received because otherwise 'the milk would be hot to give the babies'.⁵⁰ A close-by house and an improved diet were also clearly orientated around ensuring both the ease of wet-nursing and the quality of the wet-nurse's milk. Similarly, Mattie Logan described her mother's house as a 'two room cabin right back of the big house'. But this too clearly facilitated her quick summoning to attend the 'caboodle' of children she raised. Indeed, Mattie explained that the house was not actually any different to the other slave cabins.⁵¹ Despite any perks this work brought, both Mattie and Betty were clear about whose interests it was in, whether it was a mistress's independence or the appearance of her breasts. Because of the largely work-orientated nature of these 'benefits', they also often quickly disappeared when a woman's

⁴⁶ Fred Dibble, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 60.

⁴⁷ Clark Heard, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 361.

⁴⁸ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 55.

⁴⁹ Betty Curlett, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 77.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Mattie Logan, *FWP*, Oklahoma Narratives, XIII, 187-8.

utility did. Mary Kincheon Edwards, for example, found that having had a lessened work-load as a wet-nurse in Texas, she soon came to be working in domestic labour as well as making baskets and picking cotton.⁵²

Whether an enslaved woman preferred wet-nursing to other forms of labour or not, it was something she generally had little choice over. Hattie Thompson, formerly enslaved near Arlington, Tennessee, for example, explained that her mother Mariah Thermon was ‘house woman and cook’ to her mistress as well as her wet-nurse. Hattie remembered her mother’s talents spinning, weaving, and quilting: ‘She was a good hand at that’. Despite being skilled in domestic labour, though, and breastfeeding her mistress’s children, Hattie’s mother also ‘worked in the field lots’. Hattie remembered how she ‘never was no count in the field’ and ‘jess couldn’t hold out’.⁵³ For Mariah, domestic labour (including breastfeeding) may have thus been preferable to field work. Hattie remembered how: ‘Mama was a pretty good hand at doing mighty nigh what she took a notion to do about the house’. Yet, her slaveholders clearly sought to use her just as their needs dictated and as always placed emphasis on an enslaved woman as a worker or reproducer as they deemed fit. That she performed this valuable labour clearly did not alter this.

For other enslaved wet-nurses, though, the field offered opportunities household servitude did not. In Mississippi, Edwina Burnley’s enslaved wet-nurse Rose went on to work as a seamstress. Yet, she ‘begged to go to the field’ during cotton picking season to win ‘the prize’.⁵⁴ While it is quite possible Rose sought the harvest prize, she also perhaps sought to participate in the broader enslaved community, or simply to be distanced from her slaveholders. The ‘obstacles and challenges’ domestic slaves faced ‘in their efforts to shape their work lives and negotiate the terms and conditions of their labor’ were surely amplified for enslaved wet-nurses.⁵⁵ Breastfeeding is an intensive practice, especially in the early months of a child’s life. Perhaps more so than any other forms of household-based labour, it did not adhere to routinised patterns of working days and authorised free-time. It was a boundless labour. As Chapter Two has explored, enslaved women explicitly resisted their mistresses’ demands for them to ‘sleep in’.⁵⁶ Some of these women may have been resisting wet-nursing. Octavia Wyche Otey, for example, might have just wanted Mary to replace her usual nurse who was sick, but she also had a suckling baby that she complained ‘hangs on me so much that I cant do any work

⁵² Mary Kincheon Edwards, *TAS SS2*, Texas Narratives, 4, 3, 1279.

⁵³ Hattie Thompson, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 6, 315-6.

⁵⁴ Edwina Burnley Memoir, 6, SHC.

⁵⁵ Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*, 34.

⁵⁶ Octavia Wyche Otey, Diary, vol. 2, April 13 1852, 37, May 10 1852, 55, May 11 1852, 56, June 27 1852, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC; Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher, Diary, June 1857, 131, Lucy Muse Walton Fletcher Papers, DU.

hardly’.⁵⁷ Whatever Octavia’s demands for Mary, enslaved women’s efforts to resist ‘sleeping in’ reflected their rejection of labour that curtailed personal autonomy and demanded closeness between them and their slaveholders.

The passing comments enslaved and formerly enslaved women made to the constancy and confining nature of this work, then, should not be overlooked. Harriet Newby, for example, was an enslaved woman who lived in the Loudon vicinity of Virginia. In a rare source authored by an enslaved woman, Harriet wrote to her husband in 1859 and described how her mistress had a baby that Harriet had ‘to “nurse her day and night”’.⁵⁸ The constancy of this labour was clearly something Harriet wanted to convey to her partner. Genia Woodberry similarly remarked how as a wet-nurse she ‘[h]adder stay right dere to de big house aw de time’ when nursing her mistress’s four children. ‘Sleep right dere wid dem chillum aw de time’, she explained. ‘Miss Susan ne’er didn’t suckle none uv dem chillum’.⁵⁹ Their comments also evoke the image of Cate, Eliza Haywood’s ‘sleepy’ wet-nurse.

Because of the requirement for enslaved wet-nurses to ‘sleep in’ with their mistresses’ children, this labour also generally entailed separations from one’s own kin. Some mothers were at least able to keep their own suckling child with them during their night-time wet-nursing. Formerly enslaved in Mississippi, Henry Lewis McGaffey’s was born on the same day as his mistress’s daughter, Amelia. His twin-sister did not survive, but Amelia’s mother ‘culdn’t nurse her baby’, thus had Henry’s mother stay ‘in de big house at night while Miss Amelia wus a baby so she cud nurse during de night’. These demands were additional to a day’s slave labour. In Henry’s case, he was able to stay with his mother in the house. However, Henry also had five siblings who ‘staid in de quarters’ who his mother was clearly separated from. While this was a temporary if possibly distressing experience for Henry’s mother, though, her and Henry’s time in the ‘big house’ had a more permanent outcome. After Amelia was weaned, Henry was kept in the house and his mother was returned to the quarters. Once again, a mistress’s close proximity with an enslaved woman’s child resulted in her extending her sense of ownership over this child and separating a child from its mother. Despite performing this intimate labour, and being separated from her other children, Henry’s mother was not afforded any special treatment. She was later whipped by her master and eventually ran away.⁶⁰

If Henry’s mother felt fortunate that she was at least able to keep her nursing baby with

⁵⁷ Octavia Wyche Otey, *Diary*, vol. 2, April 13 1852, 37, Wyche and Otey Family Papers, SHC.

⁵⁸ Stevenson, *Life in Black & White*, 98.

⁵⁹ Genia Woodberry, *FWP*, South Carolina Narratives, XIV, 4, 218.

⁶⁰ Henry Lewis McGaffey, *TAS SSI*, Mississippi Narratives, 9, 4, 1395.

her, then, it was probably short-lived. Other enslaved wet-nurses appear not to have been able to keep their babies with them. In Montgomery County, Tennessee, Moses Slaughter's mother had ten children of her own and also wet-nursed the ten children of her slaveholders. In order for her to 'care for the babies all night', Moses remembered that his mother 'slept in a room of the Fauntleroy home'.⁶¹ It is not clear who cared for her children. Even with a close-by house, like Josephine Howell's mother had, mistresses demanded enslaved wet-nurses in their own households 'to help with the babies'. Never mind that Josephine had a husband and five children of her own at home.⁶²

Josephine, her daughter explained, did not like her mistress. The restrictive and boundless nature of this work notwithstanding, it was proximity to the mistress that could be its cruellest aspect for women like Henrietta Butler. Henrietta was enslaved in La Fouché, Louisiana, and her 'dam ol' Missus [Emily Haidee] was mean as hell'. She was physically and verbally abusive. Henrietta described to the Federal Writers' Project interviewer that Emily:

[...] made me have a baby by one of dem mens on de plantation. De ole devil: I gots mad ever' time I think about it. Den dey took de man to war. De baby died, den I had to let dat ol' devil's baby suck dose same tiddies handing right here. She was allus knockin' me around. I worked in the house nursin'⁶³

Henrietta's brief comment gives insights into the ways in which different forms of exploitation again interacted in enslaved women's lives. Her enslaved wet-nursing was just one of her mistress's interventions into her mothering; she also forced her to have a baby in the first instance. Then, after Henrietta's baby died, she forced Henrietta to breastfeed her own baby. It did not stop Henrietta's mistress from 'knockin'' Henrietta around. The intimacy of this labour and that it was so often fashioned as essential work thus did not necessarily protect enslaved women from mistresses' abuse.

Emily's approach to Henrietta was not anomalous. Slaveholding mothers who used enslaved wet-nurses routinely moved women who they shared absolutely no bonds with into their households to perform this intimate labour. The context of women's conflictive and violent relationships as established in Chapter One is thus incredibly important in challenging existing interpretations of enslaved wet-nursing practice. Emily's capitalisation upon

⁶¹ Moses Slaughter, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 194.

⁶² Josephine Howell, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 3, 340.

⁶³ Henrietta Butler, 'Interview with Ex-slave Henrietta Butler. Gretna, LA', 1, LWWA.

Henrietta's bereavement was also a characteristic of enslaved wet-nursing in the formal marketplace. Thus, Henrietta's experience of this practice must have been shared by many enslaved wet-nurses, bereaved mothers, and women abused by their mistresses. That as an elderly woman this memory still brought her to feel 'mad' gives further expression to the trauma enslaved wet-nursing could inflict upon enslaved women.

Quite plainly, enslaved wet-nurses were not 'beloved' slaves and the 'value' of their labour did not largely equate to any privilege nor any emotional bonding between women. Mary Ferrand Henderson's relationship with her enslaved wet-nurse Sally is indicative of this. Sally wet-nursed at least one of Mary's children in her household in Salisbury, North Carolina. It seems likely that with Mary's continued concerns with her milk quality and quantity over other infants in successive years, Sally was used repeatedly. In the autumn of 1855, when Mary diarised Sally's work as wet-nurse, she made no mention of Sally's own child. Sally was still working – making pants 'for the men'.⁶⁴ Despite the additional and apparently essential labour Sally was performing for Mary as wet-nurse, though, it did not protect her from the woman's mistreatment. Having apparently given her mistress a 'regular jawing', Henderson vowed to punish Sally for her impudence. This was just over two months after she first mentioned Sally's work as a wet-nurse.⁶⁵ Apparently her services were no longer required, as several days later, Sally was hired away as a cook.⁶⁶ Once again, Mary made no mention of Sally's child, who was presumably left behind. Mary had utilised Sally as it suited her. Then, when she was clearly no longer reliant on Sally, she was hired away. She evidently returned to the Henderson household. Two years later, in 1858, Henderson remarked she 'truly hope[d]' her husband would manage to 'dispose' of Sally and her child, among other enslaved mothers and children, who were apparently among a number of 'idle servants'.⁶⁷

Mary Ferrand Henderson's relationship with Sally provides further insights into the nature of enslaved wet-nursing within women's relationships. Her relationship with Sally was based upon the exploitation of her labour – in whatever form – and certainly did not garner Sally any benefits and was no cause for any expression of compassion on Mary's part. The transience of Sally's importance to her mistress in fact bears resemblance to the impersonality of wet-nursing as manifest in its other forms: temporary labour was not uncommon in the informal marketplace and it prevailed in the formal marketplace. Enslaved mothers' importance was in the labour they provided and thus lasted as long as it was demanded. This

⁶⁴ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 5, Oct. 22 1855, 11, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

⁶⁵ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 7, Jan. 1 1856, 8, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

⁶⁶ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary, vol. 2, part 7, Jan. 5 1856, 12, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

⁶⁷ Mary Ferrand Henderson, Diary [typed transcription], vol. 2, part 10, Jan. 1 1858, 1, John S. Henderson Papers, SHC.

was the predominant character of enslaved wet-nursing. That slaveholding mothers whose ‘infants’ lives depended on the ministrations and skill of slaves must have developed a close relationship with their black servants’ is thus not borne out in the realm of wet-nursing.⁶⁸

Slaveholding women generally recognised enslaved wet-nurses neither as having special status nor discussed them in affectionate terms. Positive comments on enslaved wet-nurses, much like enslaved women more generally, largely centred on their usefulness. Jane Williams, for example, heralded the talents of ‘valuable’ Mary who wet-nursed her infant and worked as a midwife. Mary’s children were still divided between Jane and her own children.⁶⁹ It was a common pattern. Charity Bowery was the wet-nurse to all of twelve of her mistress’s children. Her mistress still sold all of Charity’s children.⁷⁰ Mary Reynold’s mother, Sallie, was also wet-nurse. When her mistress died, Sallie suckled Sara along with Mary ‘til we was a fair size’. Mary felt that ‘Miss Sara allus looked with kindness on my maw’ and ‘Miss Sara loved me so good’. Yet she too was sold ‘cheap’ by her master because he ‘didn’t want Miss Sara to play with no nigger young ‘un’.⁷¹ As Moses Slaughter described, even loyalty and hard-work as an enslaved wet-nurse did not elevate one’s family from their status to slaveholders as property. His mother, who wet-nursed all ten of his owners’ children (so the Fauntleroy’s could be ‘about in society’) was ‘gentle, loving’, a ‘loyal slave, a Christian’, who ‘never turned a deaf ear to a child’ and white and black alike called her ‘Mamma’. Moses’s ‘first real sorrow’ was, all the same, ‘having to leave my mother and the other children’ when he was given as a ‘bridal present’ to his young mistress.⁷²

For some women, that slaveholders did not recognise the value or costs of this labour or respond accordingly was maddening. On the Polk’s cotton plantation in Mississippi, for example, Ellen Cragin’s mother Luvenia Polk had wet-nursed her young master. She was a ‘breeder’, a weaver, and sometimes worked in the field. She also worked at the loom ‘so long and so often’ that she once fell asleep. The young master ‘beat her awake’. So, Cragin’s mother took the pole from the loom and preceded to beat the child: ‘She said, “I’m going’ to kill you. These black titties sucked you, and then you come out here to beat me.” And when she left him, he wasn’t able to walk’. However, the altercation resulted in the harshest outcome for Luvenia and Ellen. Luvenia ran away and Ellen did not see her again until freedom: ‘she knew

⁶⁸ McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 70-1.

⁶⁹ Jane Williams to Eliza Eagles Haywood, Oct. 28 1798, Jane Williams to Betsy [Eliza Eagles Haywood], Dec. 11 1805, Eliza Eagles Haywood to Jane Williams, Jan. 21 1808, Jane Williams to Elizabeth [Eliza] E. [Eagles] Haywood, Aug 6. 1817, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

⁷⁰ Charity Bowery quoted in Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 263.

⁷¹ Mary Reynolds, *FWP*, Texas Narratives, XVI, 3, 236-7.

⁷² Moses Slaughter, *TAS SSI*, Indiana and Ohio Narratives, 5, 194.

they would kill her if she stayed'.⁷³ Thus, while enslaved mothers certainly had 'to hope that the odds would come up in her favour', it would appear they seldom did.⁷⁴

Wet-nursing is a practice that has been 'almost untraceable' historically.⁷⁵ This is owing to the casual nature of this practice that so often occurred within the confines of a household or slaveholding. Yet, predominantly through the testimony of former slaves, the diverse forms of wet-nursing practice and their ramifications for enslaved mothers and children can be better understood. Those women who were mothers under slavery themselves provide great insights into some of the most exploitative and emotionally painful nature of this practice. Thus, had more of the informants to the Federal Writers' Project had children during their enslavement, these aspects of enslaved wet-nursing may have been discussed more frequently, and in greater depth. Nevertheless, it is evident that the prevailing character of enslaved wet-nursing practice in its many forms even within the confines of slaveholding was not one of privilege or familiarity.

Long-term wet-nursing in particular is represented much more strongly in the testimony of former slaves than in either the informal or formal marketplaces. Yet, the benefits some enslaved women managed to eek out of their employment were largely in the interests of their slaveholders. While there were certainly 'easier, more desirable ways of seeking better material conditions or attempting to obtain one's freedom', even if one chose to pursue enslaved wet-nursing or utilise it to this ends, it seldom promised or provided these benefits.⁷⁶ Slaveholding mothers certainly 'valued the maternal labour' of enslaved women.⁷⁷ Yet, its value was purely in terms of the labour it provided enslaved mothers; whether because they needed a wet-nurse, or they wanted one. These characteristics of wet-nursing practice, and those rare sources which speak to enslaved women's experiences of cross-racial breastfeeding, all provide grounds for questioning long-held assumptions about the privileged nature of this labour and women's bonds through mothering.

iii. Markets for mothers: enslaved wet-nursing and the informal marketplace

For those who could not procure a wet-nurse from among their slaves, white women were able to mobilise networks of slaveholding family, friends, and neighbours. Janet Golden's assertion

⁷³ Ellen Cragin, *FWP*, Arkansas Narratives, II, 2, 42, 44-5.

⁷⁴ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 55.

⁷⁵ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 3.

⁷⁶ West with Knight, 'Mother's Milk', 50.

⁷⁷ Jones-Rogers, '[S]he Could ... Spare One Ample Breast for the Profit of her Owner', 351.

that slaveholders had ‘easy’ but ‘not necessarily certain’ access to wet nurses is clear, but their use of wet-nurses exceeded searching ‘beyond their own plantations to find a wet nurse’ ‘at times’.⁷⁸ Rather, as Chapter One and Chapter Two have evidenced, slaveholding women positioned themselves in an inter-household slave-trading network and they routinely used this in proffering and procuring slave labour. In these networks, slaveholding women casually traded and loaned enslaved mothers between one another for the purposes of wet-nursing. They featured much more prominently than the formal marketplace in slaveholding women’s testimony, and provide much finer insights into the roles of slaveholding women in this practice.

While white women were clearly economically-minded and financially-interested slaveholders, these informal markets for enslaved women’s labour were complex systems of exchange. Kenneth Barton suggests ‘monetary gain’ characterised the market relations of slave hiring even on the most local of levels, rather than ‘social obligations’.⁷⁹ However, in the trade of enslaved wet-nurses among slaveholding women’s informal networks, because they so frequently included family members, or were required in cases of a mother’s illness, social obligations certainly played their part. It seems unlikely, for example, that Ella Clanton Gertrude Thomas’s father requested money for the wet-nurses taken from his plantation to feed his grandchildren. Instead, Thomas provided a replacement slave by way of exchange.⁸⁰ Similarly, Samuel Pickens did not appear to pay his sister for the wet-nurse she provided for his motherless child, but simply put another slave in her place in Greensboro, Alabama.⁸¹ The lack of monetary exchange in some of the markets for enslaved wet-nurses was not necessarily less harsh for the enslaved women moved around between slaveholders as demanded, however. These moves would have been disruptive if perhaps less permanent than the formal sale and hire markets. For more long term arrangements, money undoubtedly passed hands, or permanent exchanges were established.

Within the social networks for slave-labour, family connections were commonly used to procure wet-nurses, and trade arrangements were commonplace. White women who belonged to families who owned sizeable amounts of slaves were able to draw wet-nurses from their extended family estates. Slaveholding women’s use of enslaved wet-nurses over the course of their childbearing thus offers means for exploring both the nature of the practice and

⁷⁸ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 26.

⁷⁹ Kenneth C. Barton, “‘Good Cooks and Washers’: Slave Hiring, Domestic Labor, and the Market in Bourbon County, Kentucky”, *Journal of American History*, 84, 2 (1997), 439.

⁸⁰ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Dec. 26 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁸¹ Samuel Pickens to Selina Lenoir, April 26 1836, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

the relationships (or lack thereof) between slaveholding women and wet-nurses. Gertrude Thomas, for example, used a series of enslaved wet-nurses. Gertrude had been given twenty-three slaves in a trust shortly after her marriage by her father, as well as a new marital home outside of Augusta, Georgia. Clanton Thomas was, as aforementioned, one of the wealthiest planters in Georgia. He had abundant slaveholdings within Augusta, its neighbouring counties, and beyond, and owned just under four hundred slaves.⁸² This meant Gertrude had nearly unparalleled opportunities to procure enslaved wet-nurses.

Gertrude first discussed her use of an enslaved wet-nurse in 1858, an unnamed woman from her father's plantation who she decided to use after her mother had determined Gertrude 'did not give nourishment enough' to her baby, Mary Bell.⁸³ So, Gertrude provided another enslaved woman, Maria, 'in her place' at Clanton Thomas's plantation. These decisions were always disruptive to enslaved women who were expected to accommodate their new labour demands and the moves these entailed, even if temporarily. Thus while those wet-nurses used within the slaveholding were frequently separated from their families especially through 'sleeping in', for those loaned at any distance from their homes their opportunities were even more curtailed.

It is not clear whether the enslaved women that came from Clanton's plantation worked in the house or field. It was not uncommon to use field slaves in this way, as John Grimball's use of Tibbi suggested. Indeed, when Samuel Pickens's wife Selina Lenoir Pickens died in 1836, he too arranged just such a circumstance in Greensboro, Alabama. Samuel sent their baby to his sister who 'fortunately had a woman who had a child about one month old - a fine healthy careful negro woman, who suckles it'. This enslaved woman 'was a field hand', and Pickens had another enslaved person put 'in her place' so she could give 'the whole of her time and attention to the infant'.⁸⁴ Whether the enslaved wet-nurse that Pickens used was able to keep her child with her is unclear, but Pickens's emphasis that the nurse provided the 'whole of her time and attention' to the child would imply she was separated from her own one-month-old child. It was the type of separation, prioritisation, and movement characteristic of enslaved wet-nursing through informal networks. It also challenges Marli Weiner's perspective that in this 'unusual' practice 'mistresses chose [enslaved wet nurses] because their skills and personalities were familiar, a familiarity born of the contact they had when the slaves worked as domestic producers'.⁸⁵

⁸² For a description of the Thomas family's estate, see Curry, *Suffer and Grow Strong*, 18-24.

⁸³ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Dec. 26 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁸⁴ Samuel Pickens to Selina Louisa Lenoir, April 26 1836, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁸⁵ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 15.

Wherever the enslaved women Gertrude relied upon were derived from, owing to her wealth, she was one of few slaveholding women able to have separate nurses for each of her children. When she found three years later that she again did not ‘give sufficient milk’ for her baby, she used an enslaved wet-nurse named Georgianna. Though apparently successful for a time, Georgianna ‘did not have enough milk for both’ her own baby and Thomas’s.⁸⁶ So, Thomas used another enslaved woman, America, also from her father’s plantation, to feed her child instead. Perhaps this was a moment of compassion for Gertrude. Perhaps she realised using Georgianna’s milk only created another infant-feeding problem and recognised that Georgianna’s baby was in ill health.

Whatever her motivation, Thomas felt some sadness when Georgianna’s baby George died just two months after Thomas had diarised her dilemma. Gertrude had ‘nursed’ ‘[p]oor little George’ in sickness ‘until he has become an object of great interest to me’. However, quite typically, her sense of loss was infused with property considerations. She noted that:

Aside from being interested in him I disliked to write Mr Thomas of his death for he has been so unfortunate since he left. We have lost three horses that I have had to tell him of and I do not wish to tell him of any thing calculated to depress him [...]⁸⁷

That Georgianna had performed such an apparently important form of labour for Gertrude, and one that was reliant on them both being mothers, did not alter Gertrude’s perspective of Georgianna and her child as anything other than slaves. Gertrude’s concerns over disappointing her husband with the news of ‘lost’ property formed a stark comparison to the reactions of enslaved women. Georgianna gathered with other enslaved women, including America, who had lost her own baby just several months earlier.⁸⁸ Together, the women mourned the death of Georgianna’s only child in songs and prayers.⁸⁹

Gertrude was frustrated with her own inability to feed her children, but her ownership of slaves permitted her to continue having infants and ensuring they were provided for.⁹⁰ From the first, unnamed wet-nurse of Mary Bell in 1858, Thomas also relied upon America to feed Jefferson (born in 1861) and Nancy to feed Cora (born in 1863). Nancy’s baby had been born

⁸⁶ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, July 16 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁸⁷ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Sep. 18 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁸⁸ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, July 16 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁸⁹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Sep. 18 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁹⁰ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, July 31 1863, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

some months earlier than Cora, her baby being born in December 1862 and Cora in June 1863.⁹¹ Perhaps reflecting common ideas that a wet-nurse's baby (alive or deceased) should have been born the same time as the 'recipient' child, Gertrude was clearly making provisions for alternatives. Should Nancy's milk 'not agree' with the child, Thomas planned to use another of her father's slaves, America's sister Emmeline.

The power she exhibited over these women is quite clear. Both Nancy and Emmeline had their own infants and were thus seemingly expected to bear the burden of an additional child to feed. As emphasised by the death of Georgianna's baby George, enslaved infants' health was so very precarious without any further compromises to their nutrition. Much like those former slaves who discussed the co-nursing as aspect of enslaved wet-nursing, then, enslaved mothers may have been able to keep a nursing child with them but they were still separated from any other children, their husbands, and broader family. Of course, this additional infant-feeding must have also been taxing for enslaved mothers. Nancy also cooked and performed other forms of labour in the household. America also worked in the household. By September, 1864, however, America and Nancy who had wet-nursed Jeff and Cora were still described by Thomas as the 'nurses' of her children.⁹² Thus, it is possible that America and Nancy were breastfeeding these children for years.

Thomas's use of wet-nurses thus exemplifies that though white women felt they needed alternative arrangements, their privilege as slaveholders enabled them to capitalise upon enslaved women's mothering. Sally McMillen writes that the 'best sources for understanding maternal behavior are the words of the women themselves and their families'.⁹³ Yet, for slaveholders, one must always consider how this 'maternal behavior' affected other mothers. That slaveholding women did not consider this beyond the need to make provisions for alternative infant-feeding or labour arrangements is one of the most telling signs of the absence of gendered empathy in women's relationships. Enslaved women's experience of this aspect of the practice can only be inferred, because former slaves do not appear to have discussed either their experiences of wet-nursing as bereaved mothers (beyond Henrietta's mention of this) or being moved plantations specifically in this capacity. Some of Thomas's enslaved wet-nurses were bereaved. They were moved from their homes in a neighbouring county to Gertrude's own for this labour. Their roles were confining; their labour was intimate. They did not appear to return home. And, Gertrude did not remark upon these enslaved wet-nurses with

⁹¹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Dec. 30 1862, July 24 1863, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁹² Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Sep. 17 1864, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

⁹³ McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 336.

any special value, compassion, or affection. Rather, they appear in her diary largely as any other domestic servants, discussed almost entirely in relation to their labour for Gertrude and her children.

Informal networks of slave-trading among family were, of course, not confined to the slaveholding elite to which Gertrude certainly belonged. The Lenoir family's slaveholdings were somewhat more modest. Fort Defiance in Wilkes County, North Carolina, was first the home of General William Lenoir (1751-1839) and remained the centre of the Lenoir family into the late antebellum period under the management of William's son Thomas and his wife Selina. Their two-story house stood upon a vast tract of land upon which the Lenoir descendants built their homes and cultivated livestock, corn, and wheat. At Thomas's death in 1861 they owned sixty-one slaves.⁹⁴ Their children's marriages meant their own estates likely showed some variation, but both Laura and Annie's families owned and hired slaves.⁹⁵ Certainly, the Lenoir family did not necessarily share the Thomas's ease in simply summoning slaves from a plantation and thus provide further insights into the nature of the trading of enslaved wet-nurses.

Laura Norwood used a number of wet-nurses throughout her life and her mothering of her seven children. As mentioned in Chapter Four, she first used an unnamed wet-nurse in 1840, and in 1841 a hired 'black woman' as wet-nurse.⁹⁶ Perhaps this was because Eliza, her enslaved 'domestic', 'has been sick ever since my confinement', because Laura seemed to ultimately settle with Eliza as her wet-nurse.⁹⁷ She remarked in a letter to her mother in February 1842 that:

Mary at 2 months was as large as either of my other children at 5 or 6 - and I shall always believe that if Laura had had such a nurse as Eliza (especially for the first few months) she would hve been as healthy as any child.⁹⁸

In Laura's eyes, Eliza was clearly a successful nurse who had contributed to the strong health of her baby in a way that Laura felt her own breastfeeding could not. By the summer of 1842, Eliza was again 'in her maternal anticipations'. Despite how valuable Eliza's maternal labour had proved to Laura, though, she was not pleased upon hearing this news. It was at this point

⁹⁴ John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 215.

⁹⁵ Larry J. Griffin, *Slavery in Wilkes County, North Carolina* (Charleston, SC, 2017), 32-3.

⁹⁶ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], Feb. 11 1840, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁹⁷ Laura [Norwood] to S. [Selina] Louisa Lenoir, June 29 1841, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

⁹⁸ L.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thos Lenoir], Feb. 6 1842, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

that Laura had informed her mother that ‘the idea of having a possey of little negroes about me is the most dismal of all’.⁹⁹ Laura, then, only saw Eliza’s mothering in terms of its transferability to her own children. Otherwise, it was a domestic inconvenience. Thus, when Laura found herself pregnant several years later in May 1845, she again took interest in Eliza’s pregnancy. Anticipating further breastfeeding problems, she found her ‘heart almost sinks within me at the thought of feeding another child’. Eliza’s pregnancy was inopportune for Laura, who would be ‘3 months ahead of her at least’ and though ‘Eliza will be able to give me some assistance after a while, but not at the time it will be most needed’.¹⁰⁰ Laura only saw Eliza’s mothering as it pertained to her and her own mothering, something no more clearly reflected than the distinct lack of discussion over even the birth of her wet-nurse’s children.

Eliza’s valuable work as a wet-nurse seemed to do little to elevate her from the status of transferable mother-work. In fact, it only led to her being used by more women and more frequently in this capacity. In 1843, for example, Eliza was loaned to another member of the family. Laura Norwood’s mother wrote to Laura’s sister, Sade, in September 1843, enquiring ‘how Laura gets along without Eliza, as I hope your cousin Anna had concluded to take her for a nurse before you went down’.¹⁰¹ By December, Eliza was still at cousin Anna’s, and Laura found that she had ‘got on very well without Eliza so far’.¹⁰² Her new mistress was delighted with her, and found her ‘an excellent servant & the best nurse in every respect she ever saw’. It seems, considering Eliza’s work for Laura as a wet-nurse, that this ‘nursing’ was breastfeeding. Laura wrote that Anna ‘seems to think it impossible for me to do without [Eliza] in any comfort though really I have not miss’d her near as much I expected’.¹⁰³ Eliza’s apparently valued and essential labour, then, did not appear to qualify her for any privilege nor any stability. In fact, it did quite the opposite.

Laura’s confidence without Eliza was short-lived. This was of course related to the birth of her own child in December 1843. Sally Lenoir had noted Laura would ‘try to do without getting a wet nurse’, but, once again, was a ‘poor nurse’ herself.¹⁰⁴ As a result, Eliza was wet-nursing for two different women in the extended Lenoir family, being moved between their households in order to breastfeed their children. By January, 1844, Laura’s sister Sade noted that Laura:

⁹⁹ Laura [Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir] [letter addressed to Col. Thomas Lenoir], May 20 1842, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁰ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], May 1 1845, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰¹ S.L.L. [Selina Louisa Lenoir] to Sarah J. Lenoir, Sep. 19 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰² L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother/Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Dec. 6 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰³ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to mother/Louisa S. Lenoir [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Dec. 6 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁴ Sally [Lenoir] to Thomas Lenoir, Dec. 27 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

[...] misses Eliza very much now she comes up twice or three times a day to nurse the baby since it has been sick and we do not feed her any she takes very little from any one now, but was quite greedy before she was sick. Cousin Anna is much pleased with Eliza, she says she is “the most comfortable nurse” she ever had.¹⁰⁵

Eliza was thus returning *two or three times a day* to nurse Laura’s sick baby, on top of whatever labour (manual, reproductive, or both) she was doing for the slaveholder she was loaned to. It is not clear where Anna lived, but the demanding nature of Eliza’s role here is clear. Even localised ‘sharing’ of wet-nurses was a hugely exploitative and arduous form of slave labour.

The whereabouts of Eliza’s children is not mentioned in 1843. As Laura Norwood had several other enslaved mothers working in her household, it is probable that Eliza’s children were left at the Norwoods’ to be cared for along with the other infants while she fed two white children. Or, she carried her own baby with her as she moved between these households. Wet-nursing always entailed either the burden of feeding multiple children, or being separated from one’s own children for the role (or bereaved wet-nursing). And, much like within-slaveholding wet-nursing, one’s talents often only led to further confinement. Enslaved women’s wet-nursing had incredibly high use-value to enslaved women, and slaveholding mothers commodified enslaved mothers for the use of privileged white women. So, much like Gertrude Thomas, the Lenoir women simply provided replacement slave labour for the wet-nurses they used. When Laura had loaned Eliza away, she gained an additional domestic servant from ‘A’. Indeed, Anna was so delighted with Eliza, she ‘would send me every servant she has if she thought I wanted them’.¹⁰⁶

Sade Lenoir’s letter to her mother, Selina, over ten years later in 1854, reveals the extent to which slave ownership enabled white women to utilise black women’s bodies and mothering to their own ends. Sade’s niece, Julie (likely Julia Howe, Laura’s seventh child, born in 1854), had ‘been quite sick since Sunday evening’ and her mother was unwell and ‘had so little to do with her’. Sade felt the case was ‘a desperate one’.¹⁰⁷ A neighbour, Mrs Austin, had ‘come and nurse’ the infant, Julie, for several days, but clearly Sade and the other family members required a more long-term solution. Such demands upon a woman who was likely free and white (as indicated by the titular ‘Mrs’) were deemed unfair. Sade stated: ‘you know it is very

¹⁰⁵ Sally [Lenoir] to S.L. [Selina Louisa] Lenoir, Jan. 3 1844, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁶ L.C.N. [Laura Norwood] to to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Dec. 6 1843, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁷ Sade [Sarah Jones Lenoir] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Aug. 1 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

inconvenient for a woman with small children to leave home three times a day for an hour or so and we can't expect her to do it for long'. Such consideration was, of course, not extended to the enslaved women who were nominated for the task. Indeed, Eliza had been doing this work exactly between two Lenoir mothers some years earlier.

First, the Lenoirs had used Eliza to feed baby Julia. This was some ten years after Eliza appears to have first started wet-nursing for Laura and her family. In this space of time, Eliza surely was called upon to feed Laura's other children and probably other Lenoir mothers' children, too. By 1854, however, Eliza had insufficient milk. This may have been because Eliza had become physically debilitated by her long term wet-nursing, or simply passed her fertile years. It could also indicate Eliza had contrived a way of deceiving her slaveholders. Regardless, Eliza had 'so little milk, and it seems to oppress her almost as much as feeding, and we neer could tell how much she got, and thought as Eliza could not nurse her long it was useless to begin'.

So, the Lenoirs determined which other enslaved mothers might be fit for use. Sade proposed trying 'Sallie's milk', a slave at her mother's household. '[I]f it answered', Sallie would be removed from her home, to the residence of the baby Julie. Here, she would 'do the washing' as well. Thus, even in cases where enslaved wet-nursing appeared to be on the grounds of ill-health, slaveholding women were not simply seeking any woman who could breastfeed a sickly baby. They were procuring slave labourers who would be demanded to work in the variety of capacities that most other enslaved women who laboured in the household were. Sallie was proposed only to stay for the winter, and in exchange, Sade suggested Jane would replace Sallie at her mother's household. Presumably Jane, like the other women who were used to replace wet-nurses, was a non-candidate for wet-nurse.

As Sade pondered the women suitable for this role she suggested Sallie's baby could simply be raised by hand so that Sallie could feed the Lenoir baby Julie. Evidently, their desires for a wet-nurse at this time were greater than their interests in the slave child. It was perhaps a more likely situation because Sade expressed concern over the other enslaved mothers that might be able to breastfeed Julie. She 'would not be at all willing for her to suck Elsie', presumably through some concern over her milk, as Sade added: 'Sallies may be no better'. Sade decided another enslaved woman, Maria, was also unsuitable. She was too young, 'and her children cry so much that she will not do'.¹⁰⁸ Thus, concerns over characters of wet-nurses

¹⁰⁸ Sade [Sarah Jones Lenoir] to mother [Selina Louisa Lenoir], Aug. 1 1854, Lenoir Family Papers, SHC.

and milk quality as expressed in domestic and medical literature may have had some influence in women's decision making, much like Gertrude's concerns over Nancy's milk.

But, ultimately it was slaveholders who determined who was suitable for this labour. Joaney, for example, was a bereaved mother on the Manigault's Gowrie plantation in South Carolina, and though she was described as a 'little Runt', she was still deemed a suitable wet-nurse for her overseer's child when his wife died of malaria.¹⁰⁹ Jane Williams even determined Nancy would be a suitable wet-nurse before she or the daughter she offered her to had given birth. Nancy herself had a troublesome pregnancy, in fact at times she could 'hardly walk' and had been 'very sick indeed'. Nevertheless, Jane decided she would make an '[e]xcellent wet nurse' to her expected grandchild.¹¹⁰ Thus, the power that slaveholding women held in determining an enslaved women's capacity and suitability for this labour is quite clear.

The movement of enslaved mothers between slaveholders also emphasises the range of whites in a slaveholder's network who could stake claims to black women's bodies. The demands for mother's milk did not come from one's own mistress alone. As the Lenoir women's wet-nursing practices show, slaveholding women determined these arrangements between themselves. The Lenoir family evidently found an arrangement that suited for feeding baby Julie, who was 'doing very well' by October 1854. Despite the apparent legitimacy of their reasons for seeking wet-nurses, slaveholding mothers' casualness in determining the women for this labour, moving them, separating them from their children or forcing alternative feeding arrangements is striking.

Of course, there is no consideration of black women's emotional or physical well-being. At no time is there any notion of enslaved women's consent or choice in this labour. Beyond some consideration of how an enslaved wet-nurse's child would be fed, white women's decisions to use enslaved wet-nurses were orientated around theirs and their families' needs and desires. Much like practices contained within slaveholdings, slaveholding women did not appear to respond to the fact that this labour was apparently vital and valuable nor costly and possibly painful for enslaved mothers in their interactions. Slaveholding mothers did not extend their understandings of motherhood to include enslaved women, even when employed in the most maternal of roles. Breastfeeding was a form of labour, and thus a site of slaveholders' interventions, manipulations, and re-directions.

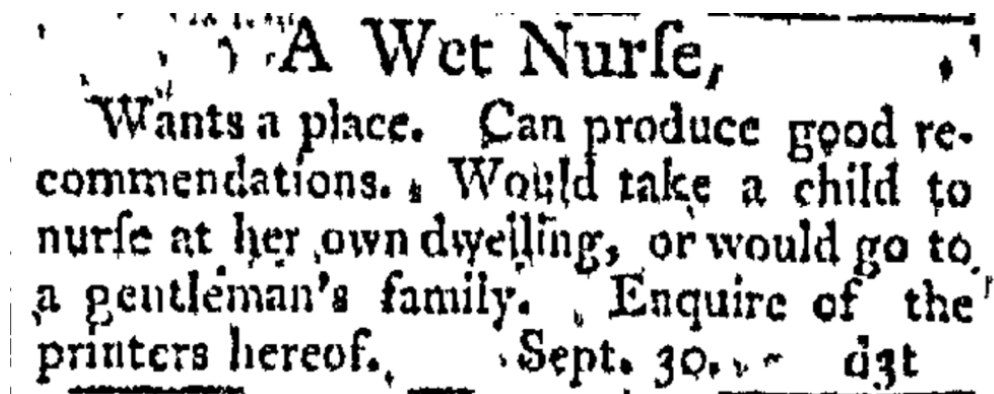
¹⁰⁹ Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days*, 86.

¹¹⁰ Jane Williams to Eliza [Eagles] Haywood, Aug. 18 1798, Ernest Haywood Collection of Haywood Family Papers, SHC.

iv. Markets for mothers: enslaved wet-nursing and the formal marketplace

Slaveholders' use of enslaved wet-nurses frequently took them beyond their households and plantations, and beyond their social networks, to the formal marketplace. Stephanie Jones-Rogers explains these markets not only provided choice for slaveholding mothers, but that their own choices were 'instrumental in shaping a formal and informal market for enslaved wet nurses'.¹¹¹ There was no one formal marketplace, but rather many intersecting local markets. The dynamics of these markets of course also changed over time, in ways that cannot be captivated by small sample sizes of advertisements. Rather than seeking to establish the extent of wet-nursing practice through the market, though, newspaper advertisements for the purposes of this study can act as a window into the nature of this market in relation to the other forms of wet-nursing.¹¹²

Regional differences certainly shaped wet-nursing practice. In urban areas such as Washington and Baltimore in the border states of the District of Columbia and Maryland, the language of these advertisements suggest they were dominated by free white women: those offering and seeking wet-nurses as 'ladies' were a stark comparison to those being offered and sought as 'negroes' and 'wenches' to 'hire'. In Maryland, for example, of the total adverts offering the services of a wet-nurse, some 97.83% of these were women who 'wants a place' or 'situation'. Others' free status is clear through their wet-nursing in their own homes. Such adverts were fairly common in these markets:



A Wet Nurse,
Wants a place. Can produce good re-
commendations. Would take a child to
nurse at her own dwelling, or would go to
a gentleman's family. Enquire of the
printers hereof. Sept. 30. d3t

Image III: Baltimore (MD), 1800.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Jones-Rogers, '[S]he Could ... Spare One Ample Breast for the Profit of her Owner', 346.

¹¹² Methodology and sources referring to newspaper advertisements can be found in the Introduction, p.32.

¹¹³ *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, Baltimore, MD, Sep. 30 1800, 3, EANO.

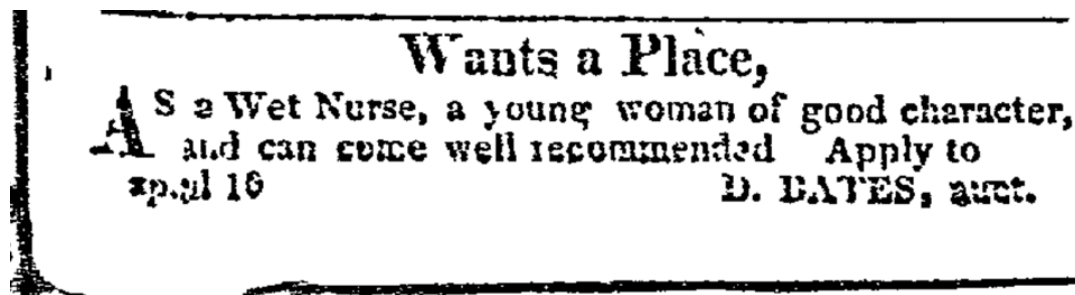


Image IV: Washington (DC), 1821.¹¹⁴

Free black women in these markets appear to have described themselves as such. The prevalence of free labour reflected the demography of the region. Maryland saw a huge decrease in its slave population across the course of the antebellum era.¹¹⁵ This was, in part, owing to manumissions and the rising tide of abolitionism. The District of Columbia, for example, was heavily focused upon in petitions to congress over the 'slavery question'.¹¹⁶ However, the absence of enslaved wet-nursing did not necessarily reflect softening attitudes to slavery in the upper south: declining slave populations were largely the result of the interstate slave-trade that 'both followed and fuelled the geographic expansion of cotton'.¹¹⁷

Race was largely implicit in these markets, and adverts seeking wet-nurses in particular generally made no reference to either the race or social status of a wet-nurse. Thus, the following descriptions were quite common:

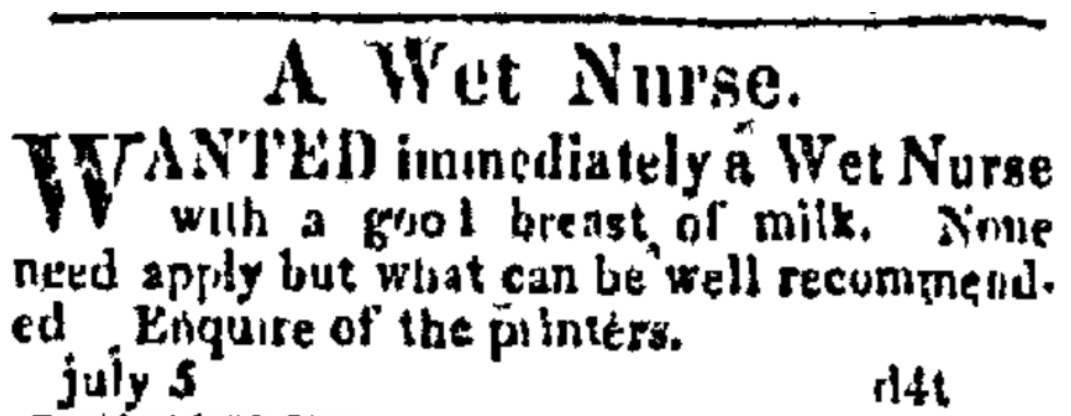


Image V: Baltimore (MD), 1815.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *City of Washington Gazette*, Washington, DC, May 17 1821, 1, EANO.

¹¹⁵ Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT, 1985), 15.

¹¹⁶ John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, vol. I. (Cambridge, 1995), 129.

¹¹⁷ Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, 2014), 19.

¹¹⁸ *Baltimore Patriot*, Baltimore, MD, May 7 1815, 3, EANO.

A WET NURSE may be had
of a healthy constitution, and well recommended, by
applying at this Office.
sep27—3t*

Image VI: Washington (DC), 1821.¹¹⁹

These type of adverts suggest race was perhaps insignificant to those seeking wet-nursing services. Certainly, there was a clear emphasis on other characteristics, namely a woman's character and the quality of her milk. Janet Golden finds these characteristics were those most commonly sought in wet-nurses across the United States.¹²⁰ Indeed, what was largely shared among these markets was the characteristics wet-nurses were advertised and sought by. Across Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and South Carolina, the character of a wet-nurse was the overwhelming characteristic represented in adverts procuring and offering wet-nurses, and character descriptions were included in between 58.54% and 85.37% of these adverts.¹²¹

A slightly finer examination might suggest some differences in slave and free labour markets. References to a woman's 'temperament' were more distinct to the markets of South Carolina and Virginia, possibly reflecting racist constructions of motherhood that characterised black women as animalistic. Yet, adverts in these regions also largely used the language of 'recommendation' in advertising likely wet-nurses. Indeed, 'want' advertisements also focused on a woman's character. This was often in the most general terms, seeking a woman of 'good character', though some elaborated on what this meant:

¹¹⁹ *City of Washington Gazette*, Washington, DC, Oct. 2 1821, 3, EANO.

¹²⁰ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing America*, 70.

¹²¹ Adverts included descriptions of desirable characteristics including affection for children, simply of being of 'good' character, or that a woman came with recommendation(s). Of total adverts, in the District of Columbia, some 85.37% of adverts described the character of the wet-nurse, and in Maryland, 77.83%. In Virginia, this was 61.76% and in South Carolina, 58.54%.

Wet Nurse, to hire,
 Without a child, has a good breast of Milk, and is ve-
 ry healthy, is an excellent disposition, and fond of chil-
 dren—whose character can be warranted. Apply at the
 corner of King and John Streets.
 July 18 tutlis3*

Image VII: Charleston (SC), 1820.¹²²

While a well-behaved woman who liked children was certainly desirable, of course markets for wet-nurses also emphasised the quality and quantity of a wet-nurse's breastmilk, descriptions of which appeared in between 30.85% and 43.8% of adverts.¹²³ Adverts describing the qualities of women's breastmilk tended to emphasise that milk was 'fresh', abundant, or simply 'good':

W A N T E D,
A WET NURSE, with a fresh breast of
 milk. None need apply without good recom-
 mendations.—Apply to the Printer.
 August 5. d

Image VIII: Alexandria (VA), 1808.¹²⁴

¹²² *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC, July 21 1820, 1, EANO.

¹²³ Descriptions of wet-nurses' milk featured in 43.8% of total adverts in Maryland; 39.02% in the District of Columbia; 38.82% in Virginia; and 30.85% in South Carolina.

¹²⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, VA, Aug. 5 1808, 3, EANO.

A Wet Nurse.
WANTED immediately a Wet Nurse
 with a good breast of milk. None
 need apply but what can be well recommend-
 ed Enquire of the printers.
 July 5 d4t

Image IX: Baltimore (MD), 1815.¹²⁵

A focus on breastmilk was important to avoid any expensive ineffective arrangements. Adverts tended to also emphasise to varying extents the young age of a wet-nurse and her health (including her cleanliness or sobriety) alongside her character and milk.¹²⁶ The characteristics advertised and sought in wet-nurses through the formal marketplace, then, largely reflected those discussed as desirable in domestic, prescriptive, and medical literature. Slaveholding women's decision-making in procuring wet-nurses in their informal networks also evidently took into account some of these factors. Though comments upon the characteristics of wet-nurses were not common, mention of the quality and quantity of a woman's milk, a wet-nurse's character (broadly construed), her cleanliness, and the age of her milk can be discerned in their discussions. These considerations were certainly not prescriptive, as evidently white women drew casually upon enslaved women as they deemed fit, but they do appear to have had some influence. Thus, the mothering practices of rural southern mothers should not be readily dislocated from ideals and practices largely characterised as urban and often northern. This commodifying approach to women's mother-work was shared to some extent both in the farmyard and the formal marketplace, in medical texts and in the meetings of mothers discussing candidates for wet-nursing.

In areas such as Charleston, Richmond, and Alexandria, slaveholders took to urban marketplaces seeking and selling enslaved women's mother-work. In doing so, and in opting to use a language that reflected upper-class socio-medical maternal ideals, they fused the maternal politics of southern households, commercial slave-trading practices, and a much broader urban and female-centred business practice. It was a practice instrumental in

¹²⁵ *Baltimore Patriot*, Baltimore, MD, July 5 1815, 3, EANO.

¹²⁶ In Maryland, 37.99% of total adverts specified the young age of a wet-nurse, and 12.14% their health. In the District of Columbia, 30.08% of adverts specified the young age of a wet-nurse, and 13.01% their health. In Virginia, 23.53% of adverts specified the young age of a wet-nurse, and 18.24% their health. In South Carolina, 39.55% of adverts specified the young age of a wet-nurse, and 22.31% their health.

constructing class within and across American households, though the racial make-up of a household hierarchy was dependant upon its locale. This merging of human bondage and bourgeois domesticity was, of course, not new: that slaveholding women so commonly referred to their slaves as ‘servants’ and ‘maids’ is most indicative of this. But, the emergence of this formal market for enslaved wet-nurses in the antebellum south meant that slaveholding mothers’ reliance upon and demand for enslaved women’s mother-work transcended both the household and the informal marketplace, taking the additional form of impersonal and cash-orientated transactions increasingly evocative of an emerging modernity in the south. The short-term nature of the labour proffered in slave-dominated markets may have even offered an emergent urban middle-class to ‘buy in’ to slavery through wet-nursing.

Yet, the distinct nature of the slave market is clear: a free woman ‘wants a place’, a slave is ‘to hire’, and as Stephanie Jones-Rogers has emphasised, in marketing wet-nurses slaveholders ‘drew upon the lexicon of the slave market and created a distinct discourse in the process’.¹²⁷ Though race was not always explicit, these markets were saturated by slave labour as the services offered suggested. In Virginia and South Carolina, some 65.52% and 84.88% of advertisements respectively that proffered the services of a wet-nurse offered a woman ‘to hire’.¹²⁸ Hiring a wet-nurse made economic sense if her services would only be needed for the breastfeeding of one child until its weaning. Also, a ‘timely arrangement proved critical’ for those parents who were possibly unable to feed a child, and for those slaveholders who wished to capitalise upon the lactation of an enslaved woman.¹²⁹ ‘Want’ adverts were largely wanting in the most general sense, but they too exhibited the desire to hire. The following were thus quite typical:

¹²⁷ Jones-Rogers, ‘[S]he Could ... Spare One Ample Breast for the Profit of her Owner’, 342.

¹²⁸ In South Carolina, just 2.04% of those adverts offering wet-nurses services specified that the woman was for sale, and 9.59% was a woman seeking a place or similar. In Virginia, the remainder of those proffering services stated similarly sought a place or similar.

¹²⁹ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 28.

WANTED TO HIRE,
For the remainder of the year,
A WET NURSE,
 of unexceptionable character.
ALSO,
A NEGRO LAD,
 About 15 or 18 years old, as a House Servant—
 For whom liberal wages will be given.
Apply at this Office
 June 18. 3t

Image X: Norfolk (VA), 1818.¹³⁰

To Hire.
A WET NURSE with a child, a healthy young
 Wench with a fine breast of milk.
 Likewise, a good Negro **COOPER**. Apply to the
 subscriber, corner of George and St. Philip's-streets.
Peter Laurans.
 March 7. 1uths 6

Image XI: Charleston (SC), 1809.¹³¹

While most 'want' adverts made no reference to race at all, in South Carolina, some 25% of adverts seeking wet-nurses specified that the woman they sought was either enslaved or black.¹³² There were various factors that made enslaved wet-nursing a preferable arrangement for whites. Beliefs about black women's suitability for breastfeeding, lower rates of hire, the coercion and additional labour enslaved wet-nurses could be subjected to, all likely motivated the preference for enslaved labour. The prevalence of enslaved wet-nursing in socio-cultural groups within the south might also suggest that microcultures developed in which enslaved

¹³⁰ *American Beacon*, Norfolk, VA, June 18 1818, 3, EANO.

¹³¹ *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC, March 7 1809, 3, EANO.

¹³² 7.98% wanted a white woman and 64.93% of adverts made no reference to race. The remainder of adverts seeking wet-nurses sought free women. In Virginia, 6.83% of adverts seeking wet-nurses accepted 'either' black or white women, 14.89% of adverts seeking wet-nurses, however, specified they sought an enslaved wet-nurse in requesting a woman to 'hire' or 'purchase'. 0.71% specified they wanted a white woman. The remainder made no reference to race.

wet-nursing was simply more popular.¹³³ While white women had no reluctance to use a 'racial inferior' to feed their child, a sector of the markets in Virginia and South Carolina catered to this too.¹³⁴

Ultimately, though, for most women of the slaveholding household these markets were simply extensions of their means of procuring enslaved labour that began at home. Entering the 'precarious tenure' of the formal marketplace was likely a final recourse for slaveholding mothers. Whites' ability to find available enslaved wet-nurses in these markets, however, varied. Enslaved wet-nurses were in high demand in Virginia, for example: some 82.94% of the total adverts placed were 'want' adverts and demand thus far exceeded availability.¹³⁵ In other areas, however, the market was more balanced. In South Carolina, adverts offering the services of wet-nurses outweighed those seeking the services of wet-nurses, comprising 54.43% and 45.56% of the total number of adverts placed respectively. Regardless of the availability of slave labour in these markets, which undoubtedly fluctuated over time and by region in ways that cannot be captured by small sample sizes, they offered an additional means of procuring slave mothers.

While as Stephanie Jones-Rogers shows, the marketplace can be examined to reveal white women's influence on markets for skilled labour and the role of wet-nurses' labour within these markets, historians can also explore what the nature of this practice implied for enslaved mothers. The formal marketplace reflects certain aspects of enslaved wet-nursing practice much more strongly than the other sites of interaction between slaveholding women and enslaved wet-nurses. That enslaved wet-nursing was often short-term labour, for example, is evident to some extent both in slaveholding women's use of wet-nurses from within their slaveholding and in their informal networks. The predominance of this in the formal marketplace, however, suggests an additional dynamic to enslaved wet-nursing practice. It firstly confirms that enslaved wet-nurses were not necessarily long-term family slaves, but rather enslaved women hired to breastfeed white children for as long as their use, and then returned. Quite distinctly from other forms of enslaved wet-nursing practice, however, the formal market evidences that slaveholders not only capitalised upon enslaved women's ability

¹³³ Margaret Washington, for example, suggests that Dutch Americans were likely proponents of wet-nursing, and Barbara Krauthamer identifies that 'Indian masters' utilised wet-nurses. See Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America* (Urbana, IL, 2009), 22; Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2013), 186.

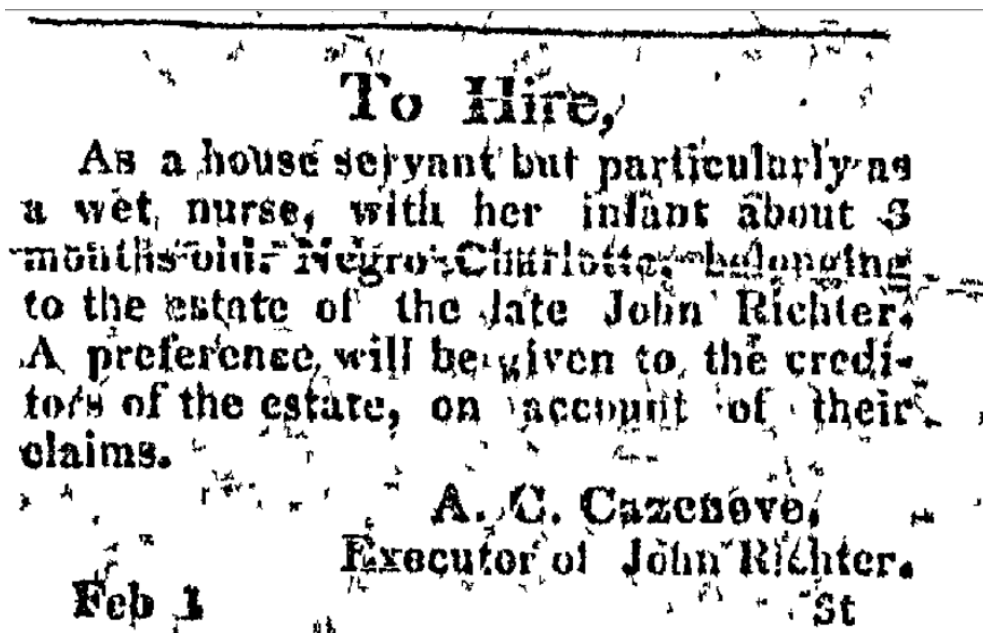
¹³⁴ Rebecca Tannenbaum, *Health and Wellness in Colonial America* (Westport, CT, 2012), 64. In South Carolina, 10.17% of advertisements that offered wet-nursing services specified the woman was white, and 7.98% of adverts seeking wet-nurses specified they sought white women. In Virginia, 10.3% of advertisements that offered wet-nursing services specified the woman was white, and 0.71% of adverts seeking wet-nurses specified they sought white women. The relative prevalence of free labour in Virginia might reflect regional differences or the smaller sample size than South Carolina. See section iii of the Introduction for quantitates of advertisements.

¹³⁵ For comments on availability, see Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 155; McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 350.

to breastfeed by re-directing their maternal labour, but entered them directly into a commercial marketplace for monetary gain.

Here, enslaved mothers were moved from their homes at a much greater distance than within-slaveholding wet-nursing, and probably a greater distance than in those often highly-localised informal-networks for wet-nursing, too. The whites they performed this labour for would have often been completely unfamiliar to them; they were removed from family, from friends, from home. Thus, while these advertisements of course do not speak to the trauma of this experience, the nature of this practice gives a clear picture of what enslaved wet-nursing practice actually often entailed. The reduction of enslaved black mothers into commodities is striking: slaveholding mothers sought compliant maternal bodies for their milk. And, as characteristic of enslaved wet-nursing practice, these women would perform the wide variety of work that slaveholders demanded of them.

Markets dominated by adverts proffering and procuring women for hire frequently emphasised her other 'uses'. Indeed, some 44.83% of the total adverts offering wet-nurses in Virginia emphasised the woman had other skills. This was perhaps a regional practice: in South Carolina, 11.04% of such adverts advertised skills in other forms of labour. In keeping with within-slaveholding wet-nursing and wet-nursing in the informal marketplace, this was typically other forms of domestic labour:



To Hire,
As a house sevyant but particularly as
a wet nurse, with her infant about 3
months old. Negro Charlotte, belonging
to the estate of the late John Richter.
A preference will be given to the credi-
tors of the estate, on account of their
claims.
A. C. Cazenove,
Executor of John Richter.
Feb 1 St

Image XII: Alexandria (VA), 1817.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, VA, Feb. 4 1817, 1, EANO.

**FOR HIRE,
AS A WET NURSE,**
A HEALTHY YOUNG WOMAN, of
a good character, sober and honest, with
a male child. The Woman is also a plain
Cook, and an excellent Washer, Ironer,
and House Servant.
Apply at this Office.
March 1. **St**

Image XIII: Norfolk (VA), 1820.¹³⁷

FOR SALE,
A WENCH, who is an excellent House Servant, Cook,
Washer and Ironer, and a good Wet Nurse, with her in-
fant child, is offered for sale. Apply to
J. B. DUPLAT,
February 4 **3** **King st.**

Image XIV: Charleston (SC), 1803.¹³⁸

Thus, these advertisements further underscore that enslaved wet-nurses were not simply an ‘emergency’ means of feeding a child who would otherwise be malnourished, but that breastfeeding was an additional form of labour that slaveholders demanded of enslaved women alongside other forms of work, much as within the slaveholding and in the informal marketplace. Of course, much of the domestic labour enslaved wet-nurses also performed directly and indirectly related to the care of children. Breastfeeding was situated within the broader patterns of redirection and commodification that characterised mothering in the antebellum south, whether within homes or markets.

The formal market offers a window into another distinct aspect of enslaved women’s maternal exploitation that is less visible in both the testimony of former slaves or slaveholders. In these markets for mothers, there was one type of mother who was especially in demand: the

¹³⁷ *American Beacon*, Norfolk, VA, March 1 1820, 3, EANO.

¹³⁸ *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC, Feb. 23 1803, 2.

mother without her child. As Stephanie Jones-Rogers argues, enslaved women's 'childlessness was a selling point'.¹³⁹ Moreover, it was a demand that appears distinct to markets for slaves. In South Carolina, some 60.91% of the total adverts placed (both offering and procuring wet-nurses) specified the woman did not or should not have a child. This is a clear and somewhat startling demand for women either bereaved of or separated from their infants. In Virginia, 30% of total adverts placed (both offering and procuring wet-nurses) specified the woman did not or should not have a child.

While this does not represent the majority of adverts placed in Virginia over the represented time period (most made no reference to a child), it still shows a distinct desire for women who were bereaved or separated from their children. Conversely, only 8.86% of adverts in South Carolina and 8.24% of adverts in Virginia specified the woman offered or wanted had a child. This desire for women without children was not shared with the predominantly white/free markets of Maryland and the District of Columbia.¹⁴⁰ Adverts that explicitly sought and advertised bereaved women were thus common:

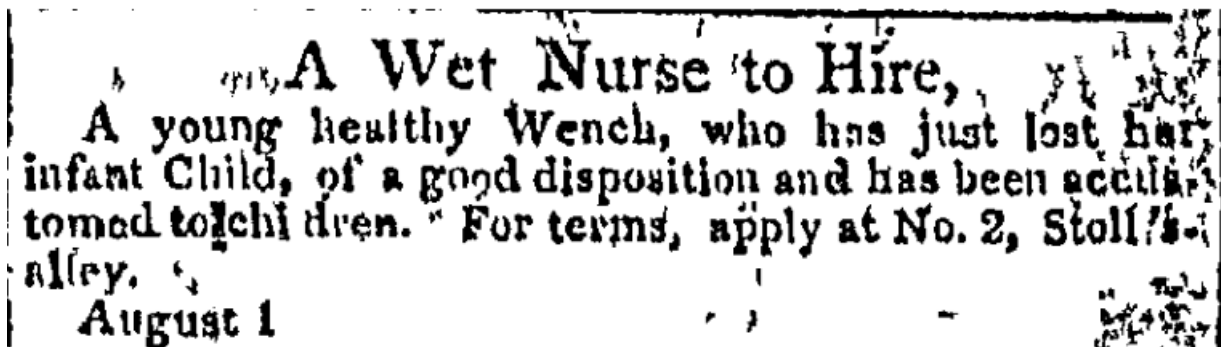


Image XV: Charleston (SC), 1809.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Jones-Rogers, '[S]he Could ... Spare One Ample Breast for the Profit of her Owner', 346.

¹⁴⁰ References to children of wet-nurses were elusive in border states' advertisements. In Maryland, only one advert stated the woman seeking a position had a child. Several adverts that requested or offered a child could be taken in the wet nurse's house may also suggest that these women had their own children. Similarly, in the District of Columbia, only one advert made reference to a wet nurse's child in its request to take a woman with a baby. However, the adverts do not show the strong preference for women without 'encumbrance'.

¹⁴¹ *City Gazette*, Charleston, SC, Aug. 1 1809, 3, EANO.

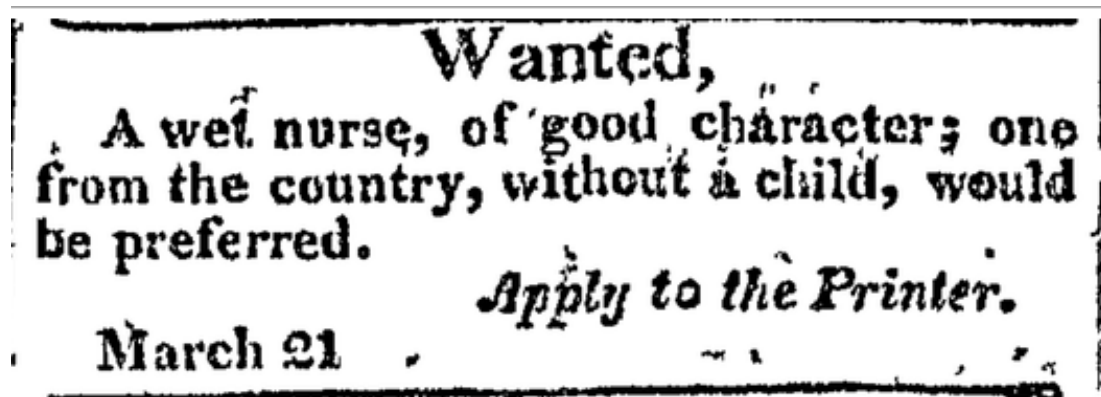


Image XVI: Alexandria (VA), 1816.¹⁴²

Thus, when the child of a wet-nurse was mentioned in an advert, it was almost always to specify she did not or should not have a child. Slaveholders thus sought not mothers, but enslaved women's maternal bodies, preferring the erasure of their maternal bonds and instead their mother-work. These enslaved women, either separated or bereaved of their infants, did not have the choice to work as wet-nurses; allowing for economic reasons and familial pressures, white and free wet-nurses did. Considerations about the emotional cost of this work for enslaved women were neither apparent nor important to slaveholders. In fact, slaveholders profited from enslaved mothers' bereavements: if a pregnancy did not yield a valuable child, it could yield a valuable body.

The numbers of unnamed enslaved women advertised in formal markets for hire as wet-nurses 'without encumbrance', without their babies, conceal the untold stories of mothers' separation, loss, and grief. Their separation from home, and the introduction of a new and intimate form of labour, surely only embellished their suffering. It is important to reflect upon what it meant for a bereaved mother to be hired as a 'young healthy wench, who has just lost her infant child'. This was a unique emotional and physical form of exploitation driven by white women's demands to delegate their breastfeeding. It was also a demand of wet-nurses that ran counter to medical advice, and despite the importance of what was shared between wet-nursing markets, the practice in the context of slavery was completely distinct in its exploitative character.¹⁴³

The preference for bereaved mothers, however, was certainly not exclusive or unique to the capitalistic marketplace and it was something that appears to have been shared in by slaveholders in part. While the issues of prioritisation incumbent with co-nursing were deeply

¹⁴² *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, VA, March 29 1816, 1, EANO.

¹⁴³ Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing in America*, 70.

undesirable for those hiring wet-nurses who had no vested interest in the life of the wet-nurse's child, slave owners did wish to ensure the survival of these children. Thus though forced weaning was clearly an option, slaveholders could avoid the complexities of co-nursing and alternative feeding arrangements altogether by relying upon women without their children.

Gertrude Thomas again provides means of exploring how slaveholding women interacted with this aspect of enslaved wet-nursing. The first wet-nurse she recorded using had 'just lost her baby a week old, and Pa kindly offered us the use of her'. This unnamed mother was thus a perfect candidate as wet-nurse in Gertrude's eyes. She was 'very much pleased with the arrangement tho I disliked having to resort to it very much at first'.¹⁴⁴ The 'inexperienced' bereaved mother was thus placed into the Thomas's household. It was an arrangement that suited Thomas very well. Patsey, another slave, had 'much more time to sew'.¹⁴⁵ It is, of course, a heart-rending juxtaposition. Seeking in 1861 a wet-nurse for Jefferson, Gertrude again chose a bereaved mother for the task:

On Sunday we sent down to the Powell plantation for America. She has lost her baby which would have been three weeks old (had it lived) to night. Pa has kindly permitted me to have her as a wet nurse for my baby. I do not give sufficient milk for him.¹⁴⁶

Once again, Thomas's struggles to feed her children are clear, yet she shows no compassion for the bereaved and enslaved women who sustained her children. Such circumstances were fortuitous to her. We know very little about America, except that she had lost a child. Her husband John was also one of Thomas's 'Pas servants', so probably lived on the Powell plantation with America.¹⁴⁷ So, bereaved America was in all likelihood taken from her home with her husband and removed to Thomas's household to feed baby Jefferson. When America fell sick with a fever, she did not have enough milk to feed Jefferson and Thomas lamented that: 'It is quite unfortunate for little Jeff as well as herself'. Thomas had to return to using the bottle.¹⁴⁸

It appears America's health returned and several months later Thomas was leaving 'Jeff in Americas charge'.¹⁴⁹ In 1864, as aforementioned, America was still working as Jefferson's

¹⁴⁴ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Dec. 26 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, July 16 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

¹⁴⁷ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Aug. 19 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

¹⁴⁸ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Oct. 12 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

¹⁴⁹ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, July 21 1861, Dec. 31 1861, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, DU.

nurse. Though freedom lingered on the horizon, perhaps America had never returned to John. Gertrude never mentioned America having another or subsequent child. Instead, America formed one member of Thomas's household of slave labourers and nurses, some of whom were mothers, some of whom were bereaved: all were expected to labour carefully to protect the health and well-being of white children while absent from or bereaved of their own.

For Sally McMillen, the use of bereaved women in this labour was not necessarily an act of exploitation, and she speculates that women may have 'resented feeding a white baby' or may have welcomed 'the substitute baby'.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, the absence of testimony of bereaved enslaved women focusing upon their experiences of this practice leaves it open to interpretation. But, it is hard to conceive that a bereaved woman, removed from her home, family, and support networks, would have embraced this isolating and intimate labour. Nowhere else is the callousness of this practice evident than the profiteering from enslaved mothers' bereavement and their bodies in these formal markets. And, white women evidently very rarely identified as enslaved women as mothers. When situated among the exploitative nature of women's relationships, and the consistent, systematic interventions into enslaved women's mothering, the use of grieving enslaved women's bodies to feed white children was unequivocally an act of exploitation. This, of course, emphasises further emotional aspects of maternal exploitation.

Little testimony of those enslaved wet-nurses who were bereaved and moved through formal markets appears to have survived. Yet, it was clearly a common context to enslaved wet-nursing. A similar silence seems to surround those women who were hired and sold without the 'encumbrance' of their living child, though former slaves' testimony of children and mothers sold from the breast must clearly not be overlooked in light of the extent of enslaved wet-nursing practices. Thus, we are often left no choice but to 'employ humanity and compassion when exploring often invisible lives in the past in order to build up a more complete picture of slavery's trials for women'.¹⁵¹ Yet, those sources which have spoken to the many exploitative aspects of this practice, and the very nature of slaveholders' use of enslaved mothers, their discussion of them, their silences, and their cruelty towards them and their families, mean this is not a difficult extension to make.

The movement of enslaved women as maternal bodies through these marketplaces evokes the harsh reality of mothers' position in slave-trading networks of the south and the commercial interests of slaveholders. Enslaved wet-nursing bound the economic and social

¹⁵⁰ McMillen, 'Mothers' Sacred Duty', 351.

¹⁵¹ West with Knight, 'Mother's Milk' 46.

worlds of slavery together; fusing a barter economy where social obligations mattered and trade predominated, with an impersonal formal market where mother's bodies had cash value. It enmeshed the undeniably physical aspects of mothering with social power, social hierarchy, abuse and exploitation. It emphasised the complete inseparability of two constructions of motherhood; white upper-class maternal and domestic ideals built upon the racist denigration and economic exploitation of enslaved black mothers. Motherhood and mother-work broached the divides between the old south and the new south, the rural and the urban. Motherhood was a means of self-identification, group-identification, and other-defining. Most importantly, it was completely and utterly inextricable from the power relations that were at once deeply entrenched and in constant reconstruction in the antebellum south.

Enslaved wet-nursing was a truly multifaceted form of exploitation. It routinely entailed confinement and separation; forced prioritisations and appropriations. It was often in the context of maternal loss and maternal pain. It was a site through which slaveholders contrived, manipulated, and intervened into enslaved women's mothering in intimate and distressing ways. It was not solely a form of intra-gendered exploitation, and its very dynamism speaks to the breadth and depth of enslaved women's maternal exploitation. It is of fundamental importance, for example, that this highly social form of exploitation occurred in the context of the deep and dire structural inequalities that determined infant-feeding practices and infant survival in the antebellum south. It is also of fundamental importance that it was not only white women responsible for interventions into infant-feeding practices but white men and slaveholding families more broadly, too.

However, enslaved wet-nursing was a practice that slaveholding mothers took central roles in. Slaveholders rendered breastfeeding a transferrable labour and made commodities of enslaved mothers. Mistresses showed startling lack of interest in both the enslaved women they used as wet-nurses and these women's children, and routinely denied the mother-child bond beyond the purpose it served them. Mistresses could demand an enslaved mother to perform a lifetime of reproductive labour for their owners' families, deny a woman's feeding of her own child, and opportunistically capitalise upon a woman's maternal body and her bereavement. Enslaved mothers were lent, traded, and used as slaveholding mothers saw fit. Then, their utility was often exhausted. The inseparability of privilege and disadvantage can be no clearer.

The study of enslaved wet-nursing reveals how despite the paucity of testimony that speaks directly to women's own experiences, historic practices of maternal exploitation can be reconstructed to give better insight into some of the overlooked aspects of women's experiences of enslavement. It suggests that the callousness of the marketplace cannot be so

readily counter-posed with the ‘familiarity’ of the slaveholding household, and rather emphasises the ways in which the racial and economic characteristics of slavery encompassed the most intimate, essential, and bodily forms of labour. While enslaved wet-nursing in all its many forms was a deeply exploitative practice, across the different sites in which enslaved wet-nursing was practiced, there are important differences in how enslaved wet-nurses were used. At the centre of this practice, however, was of course both white women and the black women forced to breastfeed the children of those who claimed their labour, their bodies, and their babies. It is a practice that gives the clearest and most incontrovertible evidence of both the absence of gendered essentialism in women’s relationships and the roles of white women in enslaved women’s maternal exploitation. Enslaved wet-nursing most patently emphasises the limitations of motherhood as a ‘point of commonality’ and both the nature and cost of ‘maternal power’.

There were undoubtedly often ‘no means of escape for enslaved wet nurses’.¹⁵² Yet, even this most exploitative form of labour may have provided opportunities for resistance. In the July of 1819, one woman named Hicky seized just such an opportunity to free herself from enslavement. Perhaps some women, some times, had been able to do the same:

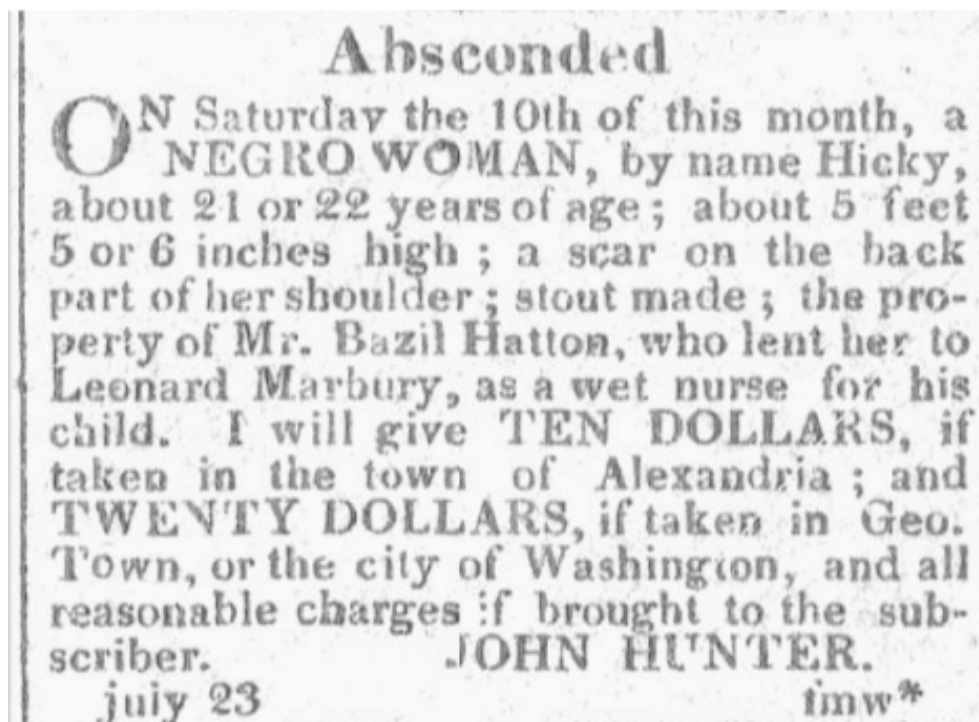


Image XVII: ‘Absconded [...] Hicky’. Alexandria (VA), 1819.¹⁵³

¹⁵² West with Knight, ‘Mother’s Milk’, 50.

¹⁵³ *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, VA, July 26 1819, 3, EANO.

Conclusions

The herstory of black women is interwoven with that of white women but this does not mean they are the same story. Nor do we need white feminists to write our herstory for us; we can and are doing that for ourselves. However, when they write their herstory and call it the story of women but ignore our lives and deny their relation to us, that is the moment in which they are acting within the relations of racism and writing *history* [...] In other words, of white feminists we must ask, what exactly do you mean when you say 'WE'??

Hazel V. Carby (1982)¹

The proem to *Mammy's Letters* that so strongly evoked Gertrude Langhorne's love for 'my Mammy', 'my old ex-slave Mammy', 'the old-time southern negro' and expressed her 'unspeakable longing' to 'turn backward' was a sentiment much more broadly shared by white southerners.² The mother, home, and mammy so essential in establishing slavery's allegedly paternalistic character alongside the maturation of the institution were also instrumental tools in constructing its history. In the long wake of the Civil War, white southern women were central agents in historicising slavery in this familial, domestic, and feminine image.³

They wrote with intent: seeking to demonstrate the mutual fidelities and affections between slaveholders and slaves.⁴ They wrote with authority: seeking to personalise and legitimise their stories by emphasising they represented 'real slaves' and their own slaveholding forebears.⁵ Adopting 'vernacular' language and including pictures of 'real' 'mammies', white southern women contributed their own vision of the world that was.⁶

¹ Hazel V. Carby, 'White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London, 1982), 212-35.

² Langhorne, *Mammy's Letters*, VHS.

³ Rohrer, 'Slaveholding Women and the Religious Instruction of Slaves in Post-Emancipation Memory'; Glenn Robins, 'Lost Cause Motherhood: Southern Women Writers', *Louisiana History*, 44, 3 (2003), 275-9.

⁴ See, for example, Andrews, *War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 11; Henrietta G. Daingerfield, *Our Mammy, and Other Stories* (Hampton, VA, 1906), VHS; Burwell, *Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 24; Morgan, *How it Was*, 19.

⁵ Langhorne, *Mammy's Letters*; Pleasants, *Which One?*; Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 3.

⁶ See, for example, Mary E. Bell, *Mammy's Story and Verses* (Baltimore, MD, undated), VHS; Emma Speed Sampson, *Mammy's White Folks* (Chicago, IL, 1919), VHS.



Image XVIII: Mothers, mistresses, and mammies (1895-1917).⁷

Motherhood was at the centre of white women's representations of both slavery's interracial affections and mistresses' nurturing roles within this system. The 'mammy' figure featured strongly in their writing, eventually and enduringly 'etched into the public consciousness' through commercially-popularised images.⁸ The 'dominant cultural fantasy' of 'mammy' - and

⁷ From top-left, clockwise; *Johnston, Ole Mammy's Torment*; Burwell, 'Reading and Repeating Verses to Him', *Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 26-7, DocSouth; Pleasants, 'Mammy Patsy' *Which One?*, VHS; Daingerfield, "'Our Mammy" - 94 Years Old', *Our Mammy*, VHS.

⁸ Jo-Ann Morgan, 'Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New Century', *American Art*, 9, 1 (1995), 87.

the submissiveness, racial harmony, and civilising effect of white rule that she represented - was more appealing than ever to white Americans in the postbellum era.⁹

To white women, the 'mammy' was the mother's ally; '*bons camarades*' with her owners and a 'true', 'loyal', and 'faithful' friend; bound to whites by connections 'almost as strong as those of kinship' and 'an honored and beloved member' of the 'family'.¹⁰ Mammies allegedly loved their white children as if they were - even more than - their own children. Their boundless maternal affection was apparently shared by their mistresses, who extended their nurturing even more widely. White women mothered not only their own children and their slaves' children, but devoted themselves to the 'cares and responsibilities' of slaves.¹¹ The mistress showed 'untiring forbearance and kindness' towards all, and her 'motherliness extended over the whole plantation'.¹² Southern white women thus constructed motherhood under slavery as a shared feminine venture, or, as racially transcendental. The 'mother and mistress' rejoiced together in the gathering of 'the children whom God hath given them' and black and white families were 'all raise up togedder'.¹³ 'The Old South', as Eliza Frances Andrews wrote, 'with its stately feudal *régime*, was not the monstrosity that some would have us believe'.¹⁴ It was, indeed, a justifying narrative: mammy's baby was actually white, and her own child was quite content to be 'all alone':

⁹ Maria St John, "'It Ain't Fittin'": Cinematic and Fantasmatic Contours of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* and Beyond', *Qui Parle*, 11, 2 (1999), 128. For discussion of the political nature of the emergence of mammy imagery in the postbellum period, see Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy*, 13, 16, 19, 61; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 58, 165; Dana-Ain Davis, 'Manufacturing Mammies: The Burdens of Service Work and Welfare Reform among Battered Black Women', *Anthropologica*, 46, 2 (2004), 275-6; Morgan, 'Mammy the Huckster', 87, 96; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 80.

¹⁰ Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 193, 20; Emma Hume Hornor, *Marse Frank's Old Mammy Louisa's Experiences* (Strasburg, VA, 1944), vii, VHS; Bell, *Mammy's Story and Verses*, VHS; Annie Fellows Johnston, *Ole Mammy's Torment* (Boston, MA, 1917), 31, VHS; Daingerfield, *Our Mammy*, 14, VHS.

¹¹ Sarah R. Levering, *Memoirs of Margaret Jane Blake of Baltimore, Md., and Selections in Prose and Verse* (Philadelphia, PA, 1897), 12-4, DocSouth; Mary Norcott Bryan, *A Grandmother's Recollections of Dixie* (New Bern, NC, 1912), 4-5, DocSouth; Nancy Bostick De Saussure, *Old Plantation Days: Being Recollections of Southern Life Before the Civil War* (New York, 1909), 17-9; Elizabeth Waties Allston Pringle, *A Woman Rice Planter* (New York, 1914), 449, DocSouth.

¹² Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, 116, 108.

¹³ Daingerfield, *Our Mammy, and Other Stories*, 15, 12; Bell, *Mammy's Story and Verses*, VHS.

¹⁴ Andrews, *War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 11.

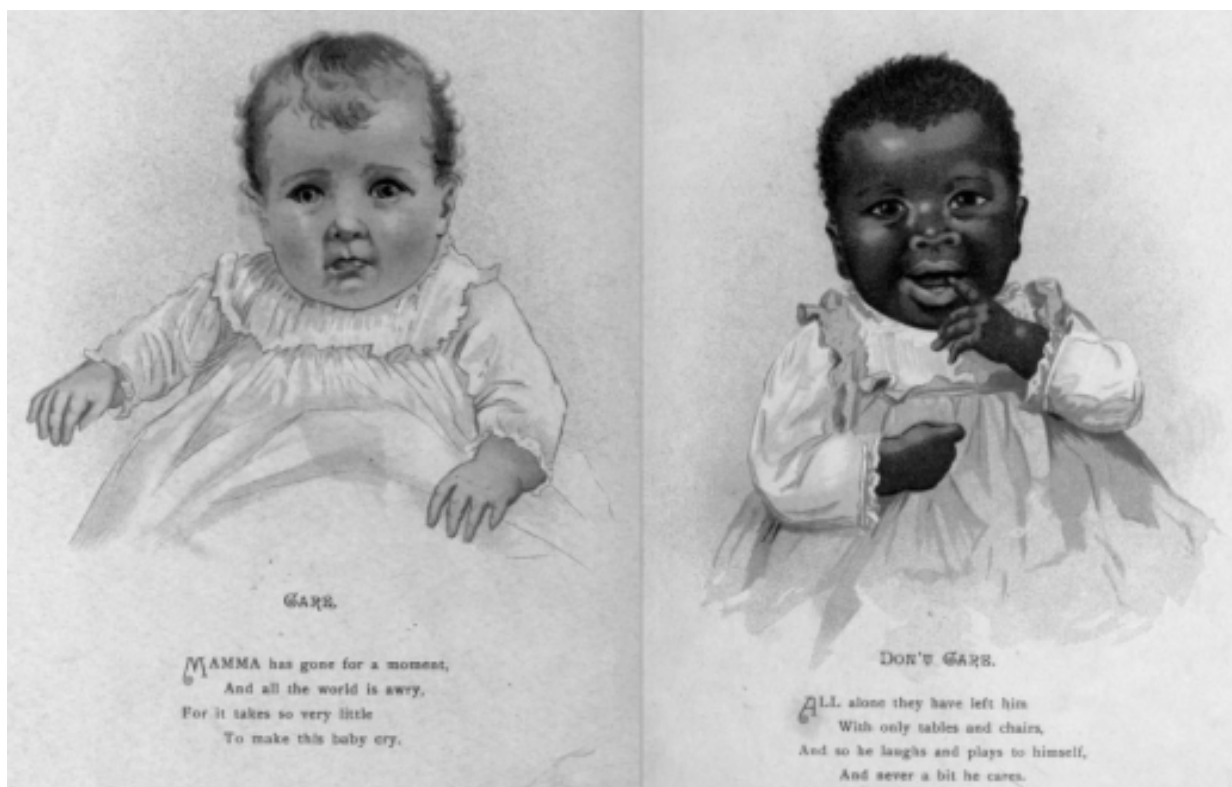


Image XIX: 'Care' and 'don't care'. *Mammy's Baby* (1890).¹⁵

The 'mother' and 'mammy' of course emphasised both the potency of racialised constructions of motherhood in the postbellum period and the power imbalances inherent to slavery: white women's extended maternal responsibilities remedied the alleged shortcomings of enslaved women, and enslaved mothers' children were often inconspicuous in these representations of the 'old South'. Slaveholding women's centrality to enslaved women's maternal exploitation, and the construction of their own mothering upon the exploitation of enslaved women and children, was manipulated into a palatable collective memory. This venerated white women's benevolent roles and redeemed their mothering, their feminine identities, and the family-centred home from the racist and economic dynamics of slaveholding. It was a pervasive and dominating narrative despite its harsh disjuncture to formerly enslaved women's representations of mothering under slavery in, for example, the nineteenth century slave narratives. Instead, such 'controlling images' as the 'mammy' sentimentalised black women's maternal exploitation.¹⁶ '[E]pistemic oppression', as Kristie Dotson writes, 'is a hallmark for holding in place and replicating the kinds of "unleveled

¹⁵ Left image caption titled 'Care' reads; 'Mamma has gone for a moment,/ And all the world is awry,/ For it takes so very little/ To make this baby cry'. Right image caption titled 'Don't Care' reads; 'All alone they have left him/ With only tables and chairs,/ And so he laughs and plays to himself,/ And never a bit he cares'. Amy Ella Blanchard and Ida Waugh, *Mammy's Baby* (New York, 1890).

¹⁶ On 'controlling images', see Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 79-91; Simms, Rupe, 'Controlling Images and the Gender Construction of Enslaved African Women', *Gender and Society*, 15, 6 (2001), 879-97.

playing fields” that mark everyday operations of oppression’.¹⁷ Thus, white women must be understood not only as taking central roles in the maintenance of slavery, its business, and its brutalities, but as key figures in the construction of histories of slavery that have diminished this and denied the experiences of black women.

Narratives of shared mothering were neither confined to white women’s writings, the south, nor the Lost Cause. The romanticised and racist representations of motherhood under slavery popularised in the late nineteenth century and into the mid twentieth century have, of course, been relegated themselves to the annals of history. Yet, the extent to which motherhood, the family, and domesticity are enduring sites in U.S. history whereby racism, exploitation, and abuse have been overlooked, diminished, and transformed should not be understated.

Indeed, despite the monumental revisions in approaches to women’s history and in the theorisation of motherhood, a profound paradigm shift towards mothering in the antebellum south has remained wanting. Thavolia Glymph’s *Out of the House of Bondage* has provided a compelling portrait of slaveholding women’s centrality both to ‘slavery’s maintenance and management’ and the ‘maiming and destruction of black life’.¹⁸ Yet, motherhood has remained more immune to this critical revision. Histories of southern motherhood have provided a rich and detailed picture of the similarities with which women sought to provide for, protect, and raise their children in a social context where choice, autonomy, and health were elusive. While historians have emphasised the divisions of race and class in women’s relationships, motherhood has remained a site where commonalities are often understood to have fostered connections. Thus, neither the extent of women’s differences as mothers nor the interrelationships of their privileges and disadvantages that so deeply influenced both enslaved and slaveholding women’s mothering on a day-to-day basis have been fully realised.

This study has taken a different approach in exploring the relationality of women’s mothering. It has evidenced not only the extent to which slaveholding and enslavement differentiated women’s opportunities, treatment, and experiences of motherhood, but has established the central roles of slaveholding women in enslaved women’s ‘maternal exploitation’. It has argued that motherhood was at the very centre of power relations between women: mistresses’ mothering was constructed upon the exploitation of enslaved women and children, they made extensive and wide-ranging ‘interventions’ into enslaved women’s mothering, and the bonds of ownership and parenthood were in constant contestation.

¹⁷ Kristie Dotson, ‘Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins’s Black Feminist Epistemology’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38, 13 (2015), 2322.

¹⁸ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 31, 28.

Social difference was expressed through motherhood both explicitly and implicitly. Slaveholding women saw motherhood through the lens of slavery and their own maternal roles were formed both ideologically and practically in interaction with and opposition to enslaved women's maternal roles. They characterised enslaved mothers from racist perspectives typical of slaveholders and discussed enslaved mothers primarily in relation to their own lives. Yet they also sometimes acknowledged enslaved mothers' capabilities for affectionate relationships with their own and white children or recognised their maternal love and loss. A sympathetic interpretation of these heterogeneous expressions around motherhood - imbalanced, infrequent, and limited as they were - would suggest motherhood was a part of slaveholding women's 'general ambivalence about slavery', which 'lends innumerable interpretive possibilities'.¹⁹ Certainly, this ambivalence allows for interpretations that maternal experiences enabled mistresses to 'explore some alternative perspectives' despite their 'racist conditioning'.²⁰ Yet, as Thavolia Glymph argues: 'Action, however, is of a different nature'.²¹

By exploring the wide range of slaveholding women's interventions in enslaved women's mothering, this study has limited some of those 'innumerable interpretive possibilities' by counter-posing this 'ambivalence' with 'action' in the realm of mothering. These interventions were hugely diverse in their forms, motivations, and effects, defying in many ways an encompassing characterisation. Mistresses superseded enslaved mothers' parental authority constantly, from intervening in day-to-day decision making to claiming rites such as naming. Constructions of maternal difference were made and remade through these actions. While these interventions were certainly habitual, some interventions were so routinised they became systemic, such as mistresses' heavy reliance on enslaved women as nurses or their removal of enslaved children from their mothers to be 'raised' as 'servants'. Both were often deeply painful for enslaved mothers, and both were reliant on a disregard for the mother-child bond and the labour interests of female slaveholders.

Importantly, for the most part mistresses' interventions into enslaved women's mothering - their roles in enslaved women's maternal exploitation - transgressed no social conventions. In committing acts of violence, mistresses 'crossed and re-crossed the South's formally designated gender boundaries' and 'contravened notions of white female gentility'.²² Motherhood, however, was firmly within her remit. To take a child to be 'raised' in the house, to use a mother to nurse one's own children, raised no eyebrows among the slaveholding class

¹⁹ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 24-25.

²⁰ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 55.

²¹ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 24-25.

²² Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 46.

or even observers. Yet neither slaveholding women's roles in this, nor enslaved women's experiences of this, should be submerged into a simple characterisation of slavery as a system. This was a system comprised by individual actions and inactions, and their ubiquity did not preclude that they were manifestations and expressions of white women's power, nor, most importantly, their severity for enslaved mothers and their families.

Slaveholding women's interventions should not be misinterpreted as simply unthinking expressions of the racial superiority and slaveholding power embedded in southern culture. Mistresses were of course entirely aware of the pain they inflicted upon enslaved women (indeed, some interventions were clearly motivated by this), not least because enslaved women expressed this in such a range of ways. The severity of these interventions must not be understated. Slaveholding women asserted their power and their dominance through mothering: expressing their sense of ownership over a woman's children, her mother-work, and in many cases, her maternal body. Mistresses recognised motherhood as a site through which they could construct their own advantage by curtailing enslaved women's maternal roles and relationships. Motherhood was a site of coercion and control, punishment and violence, and the most callous acts of cruelty. All of these interventions embodied mistresses' power, their disregard for, and attempts to capitalise upon enslaved women's motherhood. One of the 'interpretive possibilities' of 'ambivalence', then, might emphasise the capability for mistresses to recognise enslaved women's maternal feelings and their own commonalities yet to act so centrally in the exploitation of enslaved mothers and children.

A considerable part of these interventions embodied mistresses' interests in labour. Mistresses emphasised the primacy of enslaved mothers as labourers. They could welcome, encourage, even contrive enslaved women's mothering in the interests of chattel-children, slave labourers, or an enslaved woman's maternal body. Or, they could grumble about, even prohibit, enslaved women's mothering in recognising the disruptive nature of childbearing. The extent to which mistresses saw enslaved women's motherhood in terms of its use, or as it pertained to themselves and their own family, has been made clear by this study. Motherhood was routinely appropriated and re-directed, commodified and capitalised upon. It was also traded and hired, bought and sold through the same marketplaces slaveholding women developed for other forms of labour. Thus, by situating motherhood or mother-work within the broader dynamics of gendered labour, these continuities are marked.

Just as motherhood cannot be exceptionalised from these labour dynamics, nor can it from the context of enslaved and slaveholding women's conflictive relationships. Motherhood was a central part in women's constructing and contesting social hierarchies, and often at the

heart of women's struggles for power. The range of mistresses' interventions through mothering, from acts of severe cruelty to the cultivation of obligation and loyalty in children, only emphasises the variety in the mechanisms of control they employed as slaveholders. The constant tensions between women over ownership and motherhood also provide further insights into the 'particular cast to [slaveholding and enslaved women's] relations'.²³ Motherhood provided a distinctively female form of power and a distinctively female form of resistance. Evidently, it was enslaved children who were often central to both. Indeed, the limitations of mistresses' paternalism - so dependent upon the interpretation of their nurturing roles as gendered ones - are made newly evident by analysing their interactions with children and their mothers.

Thus, this study has evidenced both the inextricability of women's mothering roles and experiences and the profound limitations of interpreting the 'biological mandate' of motherhood as a 'shared female experience' or a 'point of commonality' that fostered 'bonds that seemed to defy the power relationships of slavery'.²⁴ The influence of intersectionality in guiding this approach and therefore in reaching these conclusions is clear. Through exploring the ways in which women's relative social categorisations shaped the texture of their day-to-day life as mothers, the extent of the social and material consequences or power and resources that resulted of slaveholding and enslavement is most evident. The emphasis on relationality in this approach, on the interrelatedness of women's privileges and disadvantages, also has transformative possibilities in understanding southern motherhood. This study thus also stresses the limitations of gender as an analytic rubric and suggests possibilities for engaging with critical theory that allows for new approaches to and analysis of the power dynamics in women's lives.

This study has asked not only of the nature of slaveholding women's interventions as part of enslaved women's maternal exploitation, however, but centralised their effects and women's experiences of them. Through close analysis of the limited testimony of enslaved and formerly enslaved women together with slaveholding women's own testimony, the pain, frustration, resistance and resentment with which enslaved women responded to their mistresses' interventions is clear. In their relations with female slaveholders, enslaved mothers negotiated the boundaries of women's power, asserted the rights of mothers against the rights of owners, denied the meanings slaveholders sought to impose on motherhood, and cultivated maternal bonds and mothering practices that gave motherhood distinct meaning and purpose.

²³ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 51.

²⁴ Kennedy, *Born Southern*, 4, 6, 14, 61-2.

They constantly resisted slaveholding women's interventions into their mothering and castigated their mistresses' for their refusal to respect their maternal roles and bonds. However, in focusing upon 'maternal exploitation' and 'interventions', this study has attended less to motherhood as an empowering experience and more as an exploitative one. This does not diminish the significance motherhood took in the lives of enslaved women. Rather, it emphasises the context in which women forged their identities, their roles, and their relationships as mothers.

The context was unimaginably challenging. Enslaved women's maternal exploitation, this study has argued, was not limited to white women's interventions and to focus on motherhood through women's interpersonal interactions alone would overlook shaping features of mothering under slavery. Rather, by approaching maternal exploitation as dually structural and social, this study has both accounted for the structural inequality that so deeply influenced enslaved women's mothering and made analysis of the roles of slaveholding women. It is an approach that avoids simply indicting slavery for exploiting enslaved mothers and instead offers the means of identifying the roles of different social groups and individuals. From teething solutions to time itself, slavery afforded different women different opportunities to parent, different conditions in which to parent, and different treatment as parents. Adopting a loosely comparative approach to these differences has exemplified their nature and extent, but most of all, the uniqueness of enslaved women's experiences as mothers. It belies the problematic nature of similarising women's experiences where healthcare and health, labour and violence, family stability and separation, resources and choices, were so deeply different. Enslaved women's maternal exploitation was embedded in slavery from the very laws that established slaveholders' ownership of enslaved women's children, to their treatment during pregnancy, to the removal of enslaved women's children for the purposes of slave labour. White women were agents of slavery's power and authors of enslaved women's oppression within this system.

Finally, this study has provided a case-study into infant-feeding as means of exploring the dynamism of enslaved women's maternal exploitation. In the realm of infant-feeding, slaveholders' diverse interventions were both structured and casual, and the fatal consequences of systemic inequality emphatic. Differences were to such an extent they almost defy comparison: exemplified not least by slaveholders' coercive interventions, the quality of milk and supplementary foods, and enslaved infants fed from troughs. In the realm of infant-feeding, the tensions between infant-health and enslaved mothers as labourers are also plainly clear, as is the negotiable approach slaveholders took to the former. Even lenient infant-feeding

practices posed deep limitations on enslaved mothers, and the range of ways slaveholders could curtail the nurturing role of mothers extended from forced weaning and structured separations to denying working-day breastfeeding altogether. Despite the struggles slaveholding women faced in nourishing their children, no more clearly were women's privileges and disadvantages expressed than through their infant-feeding. Their solutions to their struggles, their agency within cultural ideals of their mothering, and their maternal decisions were, as always, at direct cost to enslaved women and their children.

Enslaved wet-nursing was a practice borne of many circumstances and took many forms, but it was characterised by slaveholding women's and families' ability to enforce the primacy of their own needs and desires over enslaved mothers at great cost. Among the spectrum of slaveholding women's interventions into enslaved mothering, enslaved wet-nursing was an especially intimate and distressing form of redirection, appropriation, commodification, and abuse. Breastfeeding was thus firmly situated, much like mother-work more broadly, in the exploitative relationships of slaveholding and enslaved women and the gendered dynamics of slave labour. Indeed, nowhere else is this more emphatic than in the movement of enslaved mothers through informal and formal markets for the purposes of their breastfeeding.

Through close analysis of both enslaved women's and slaveholding women's testimony, this study has explored the nature of this practice in its multitudinous forms, established what this uniquely female form of exploitation entailed for enslaved mothers, and analysed its implications for understandings of women's relationships. This was an often constant, confining, and costly form of labour that largely reflected neither emotionally intimate relationships between slaveholding and enslaved women nor accrued significant privileges for enslaved mothers and their children. The reconstruction of this practice, drawing upon diverse yet often limited source materials, thus offers insights into an aspect of black women's enslavement historicised (often by white women) as a practice of interracial intimacy and diminished both in its extent and significance. The practice of enslaved wet-nursing, then, offers a radically different interpretation of 'Mother, Home, and Mammy!'.

There remains much to be learnt of the historic roles of white ruling class women in the exploitation of women of colour. Possible commonalities between the U.S. and in the Caribbean, for example, promise fruitful research into the nature of the roles white women took in slavery across the trans-Atlantic world.²⁵ While the nation-state arguably 'remains the

²⁵ See Hilary Beckles, 'White Women and Slavery in the Caribbean', *History Workshop*, 36, (1993), 67, 80; Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, PA, 2016), 70-99.

default frame of reference and presumptive boundary of extrapolation' for historians, the '[t]ransnational turn' in U.S. history and a focus within feminist scholarship on the 'mutually constituting relations of heteropatriarchal, capitalist, racial, and colonial authority', suggest opportunities for much broader explorations of intra-gendered exploitations.²⁶

Women participate in all aspects of social life, and though gender influences women's roles, autonomy, and experiences, women too are instrumental to systems of exploitation. To understand the nature, extent, and experiences of women's exploitation in a variety of historical contexts, it is necessary to also understand the roles of other women in reinforcing, extending, shaping these practices of exploitation. This is more complex, more globalised, and a more pressing historical inquiry now than as ever: there are 3.4 million domestic workers in forced labour today.²⁷

²⁶ Lara Putnam, 'To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World', *Journal of Social History*, 39, 3 (2006), 620.'; Robert A. Gross 'The Transnational Turn: Rediscovering American Studies in a Wider World', *Journal of American Studies*, 34, 3 (2000), 378; Dhamoon, 'A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-Racism', 27.

²⁷ International Labor Office, 'Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour' (2014), 18.

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