

“I ain’ mad now and I know taint no use to lie”: honesty, anger, and emotional resistance in formerly enslaved women’s 1930s’ testimony

Article

Published Version

Creative Commons: Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY)

Open access

Wilson, B. R. (2021) “I ain’ mad now and I know taint no use to lie”: honesty, anger, and emotional resistance in formerly enslaved women’s 1930s’ testimony. *American Nineteenth Century History*, 22 (3). pp. 307-326. ISSN 1466-4658 doi: 10.1080/14664658.2021.2022543 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/104452/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher’s version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2021.2022543>

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

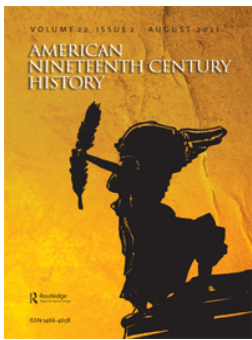
All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online



“I ain’ mad now and I know taint no use to lie”: honesty, anger, and emotional resistance in formerly enslaved women’s 1930s’ testimony

Beth R. Wilson

To cite this article: Beth R. Wilson (2022): “I ain’ mad now and I know taint no use to lie”: honesty, anger, and emotional resistance in formerly enslaved women’s 1930s’ testimony, American Nineteenth Century History, DOI: [10.1080/14664658.2021.2022543](https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2021.2022543)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2021.2022543>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 14 Feb 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 368



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

“I ain’ mad now and I know taint no use to lie”: honesty, anger, and emotional resistance in formerly enslaved women’s 1930s’ testimony

Beth R. Wilson*

Department of American and Canadian Studies, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

This article argues that racialized and gendered emotional standards shaped formerly enslaved women’s decisions surrounding speaking honestly about slavery during their interviews in the 1930s. Scholars have demonstrated that Jim Crow racial dynamics impacted on interviewees’ decisions to speak openly, but few have considered the constraining impact of society’s emotional standards. For the three women considered in this article, however, speaking candidly about their memories of slavery was intimately connected with expressing anger about these experiences. Before they gave detailed descriptions of their experiences, they had to consider the constraints white society placed on Black Americans’ expressions of anger, alongside specific restrictions on Black women’s anger when speaking about white violence. When these women made considered decisions to speak more honestly and transgress these emotional standards they, therefore, undertook a form of “emotional resistance” that must be recognized alongside the intellectual agency they displayed.

KEYWORDS

Slavery; women; WPA; emotions

On 5 December 1936, 90-year-old Margrett Nickerson described her experiences of growing up enslaved in Leon County, Florida, during a Works Progress Administration (WPA) interview. She recounted her memories to Rachel Austin, an interviewer who worked for the “Negro Writers’ Unit,” a group of exclusively Black WPA field workers in Florida.¹ Nickerson divulged information about her life during slavery and after emancipation, as many WPA interviewees did, yet when giving her testimony she also explicitly stated that she was not lying about her experiences. After Nickerson discussed memories of her enslaver, William A. Carr, and the violence he inflicted on her family, she stated that:

I don’ wanna make no mistakes and I don’ wanna lie on nobody – I ain’ mad now and I know taint no use to lie, I takin’ my time.²

CONTACT Beth R. Wilson  b.wilson2@reading.ac.uk

*Present address: Department of History, University of Reading, UK

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

While it is clear from a wider analysis of formerly enslaved interviewees' frank descriptions of slavery's violence within their testimony that many chose to speak candidly about their experiences, Nickerson's explicit labelling of her honesty, and emphasis on it, is much rarer, albeit not unique. Two other formerly enslaved women made similar "truth-telling" statements when giving testimony in the 1930s and early 1940s.³ Four years earlier, on Edisto Island, off the coast of South Carolina, formerly enslaved woman Diana Brown made her own explicit statement about wanting to "tell the truth" about white men's actions. Lorenzo Dow Turner, a Black American scholar, recorded Brown as part of a linguistic study of the Sea Islands.⁴ Brown did not discuss her memories of slavery extensively; instead, she described how similar the "hard times" that Black Americans on Edisto Island were experiencing in the 1930s were to life in bondage. Despite the difference in emphasis, when recounting the actions of a contemporary plantation owner Brown bluntly stated that "I may as well tell the truth. See?" Significantly, as in the case of Nickerson, Brown exposed her anger when describing this man as the "the meanest man" and the "devil."⁵ Similarly, during a 1940 WPA interview conducted in Louisiana by a white interviewer named Flossie McElwee, Henrietta Butler made a less explicit but clear reference to the fact that she was going to speak openly; "I was born in slavery. Ice not ashame' to tell it either, an' known somethin' about it."⁶ As Nickerson and Brown discussed the actions of white men alongside making their statements, Butler also gave this statement before describing her anger at the physical and sexual violence inflicted by her enslaver.

Historians have extensively analysed formerly enslaved women's WPA interviews to explore their experiences in bondage, producing illuminating studies on sexual violence, healthcare, and family practices.⁷ Careful analysis of the interviews, however, can also provide a fuller picture of the interview encounter itself, including the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and the complex decisions that formerly enslaved people made before speaking openly in their interviews. Around the time that George Rawick published these interviews in the 1970s, for example, John Blassingame and Norman Yetman demonstrated that race mattered at the interview encounter. Formerly enslaved people were more likely to speak candidly about their experiences with Black interviewers, particularly those of the same sex, while concealing their memories when in the presence of a white questioner.⁸ Deepening our understanding of this complicated racial dynamic in recent years, Catherine Stewart and Sharon Ann Musher analysed how the racial politics of the project shaped the resultant interviews, considering specific states' interviewing and editing practices and interviewees' attempts to veil their honesty.⁹ What is exceptional about Nickerson, Brown, and Butler's interviews, however, is that whether in the presence of a white or Black interviewer, these women all made fairly explicit statements about speaking openly alongside expressions of anger towards white men and women. Despite the presence of such emotion in 1930s interviews, few studies have considered how white society's emotional standards, meaning the emotions, and emotional expressions, that Jim Crow society valued and restricted, shaped the formerly enslaved people's testimony, an essential task needed to fully understand the feelings and memories presented within the interviews.

Though it is impossible to know why these formerly enslaved women chose to speak openly during their interviews, this article contends that the WPA interviews and Turner's recording do give us a rare, but fragmented, glimpse into their possible thought processes surrounding their decisions, due to their own explicit discussions of their

honesty in their testimony. Of course, we can never know if Nickerson, Butler, and Brown were speaking completely honestly about their experiences. Yet in the case of these three women, their own language surrounding their candour and their subsequent detailed testimony must guide us, and this article ultimately probes some of the decisions that speaking *more* openly may have encompassed. Thus, to begin to explore their thought processes surrounding this decision, the first section will outline how each woman discussed anger and honesty within the specific context of her interview, arguing that, when the formerly enslaved women chose whether or not to speak candidly, they also had to consider their feelings of anger. Guided by Nickerson's comments suggesting she had to consider constraints on her expression of anger, the second section will analyse the formerly enslaved women's testimony through an "emotionological" lens, a concept developed by historian Peter and psychiatrist Carol Stearns to explore societal standards for emotion. In their foundational study, they defined the concept of "emotionology" as "the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression" to focus historians' attention on societal factors that determine or limit the expression of emotion.¹⁰ Stearns and Stearns have explored the changing emotional standards of American society, including focusing on the changing norms relating to anger, but have only briefly considered racial aspects of these standards.¹¹ Applying this concept of emotional standards to Jim Crow society, however, highlights that white society placed explicit restrictions on Black Americans' emotional expressions, such as that of anger, which was a practice that developed during slavery as part of an interlocking web of constraints and control mechanisms that enslavers placed on enslaved people.

Alongside acknowledging that formerly enslaved women had to consider restrictive emotional standards before speaking freely and expressing their anger at the interview encounter, this article will reflect on the additional emotional standards placed on Black women who were speaking out against racial violence. Early twentieth-century local and national Black female activists, who were often part of the Black Women's Club Movement, had to tread a careful line between exposing their anger at injustice and treading the colour and gender line, often choosing to conceal their anger to adhere to the "politics of respectability."¹² Though these formerly enslaved women were not in the public eye and did not have to consider respectability politics in the same way as those who were, they were also speaking out about racial violence and had to consider white reactions to their testimony. Thus, analysing Nickerson, Butler, and Brown's interviews in light of Jim Crow society's emotional standards highlights that the decision to expose their anger and speak candidly, or to keep this emotion hidden, was a complex one. It involved consideration of constraints placed on the display of anger, white racial violence if these limits were transgressed, and particular emotional standards placed on Black women as part of the politics of respectability. Ultimately, Nickerson chose to only speak openly once her "malice" had diminished, while Brown and Butler bluntly expressed their rage at white plantation owners, highlighting how their individual personalities, contemporary living situations, and individual interview encounters likely shaped their decisions. Yet, all three interviews highlight the complex overarching emotional considerations that formerly enslaved women had to make when choosing to speak freely to interviewers. In turn, the interviews also

reveal the formerly enslaved women's "emotional resistance," a term I use to describe their transgression of emotional standards when they expressed or discussed their anger and spoke candidly about their experiences of racial oppression.

Speaking honestly about racial oppression and considering anger

In early winter 1936, Negro Writers' Unit interviewer Rachel Austin visited Margrett Nickerson at her home in Jacksonville, Florida. The fact that Austin was of the same race and sex as Nickerson, which are characteristics shown to elicit more honest and lengthy accounts from interviewees, meant that the interviewer/interviewee dynamic lent itself to a more open discussion from the outset.¹³ Being interviewed by a Black WPA interviewer, however, was uncommon, as only three 'Negro Writers' Units' existed, situated in Florida, Louisiana, and Virginia. The interview narrative, however, demonstrates the positive effect that this racial and gendered dynamic had on the interview encounter.¹⁴ The interview transcript was 2066 words and eight pages long, and included details ranging from the labour Nickerson was forced to undertake on the plantation to the violence inflicted by her enslaver and her experiences after Emancipation. It is such detailed discussion that is rarer to see in interviews produced by whites. Significantly, during her interview, Nickerson also made two explicit references to her honesty. In the first, she stated plainly that she was not going to lie about her experiences in bondage:

now je lis'en, I wanna tell you all I kin, but I wants to tell it right; wait now, I don' wanna make no mistakes and I don' wanna lie on nobody – I ain' mad now and I know taint no use to lie, I takin' my time. I done prayed an' got all de malice out o' my heart and I ain' gonna tell no lie fer um and I ain' gonna tell no lie on um.¹⁵

Nickerson made this statement during a discussion of her enslaver, William A. Carr, suggesting that it was he whom she was refusing to lie for or about. Carr enslaved Nickerson on a rice, cotton, and corn plantation near Lake Jackson in Leon County, and, according to the 1850 census, enslaved 57 people, ranging from the age 75 to 6 months.¹⁶

Immediately before and after Nickerson's statement relating to her decision to not lie, she spoke about three instances of physical and psychological violence that Carr inflicted upon her and her family. First, she recounted being physically abused by Carr when, as a young girl, she was tasked with moving meat, food, and water around the plantation, including delivering food to enslaved field labourers. While we do not know Nickerson's age, these were jobs usually undertaken by children aged five or six, who were tasked with carrying and weeding.¹⁷ When she was moving between different groups, Nickerson recounted that Carr would "beat" her if she left her shoes in the field, rather than carrying them with her, and call her the "gun-haired devil."¹⁸ Second, after stating that she was refusing to lie about Carr, Nickerson also described the violence he enacted "way more'n once" on her uncle, George Bull. When detailing this violence, Nickerson attributed it to Carr's dislike of Bull's ability to read and write, a common fear amongst slave-owners, who believed that literate enslaved people threatened their individual authority and the slavery system as a whole. Heather Andrea Williams notes that the system of slavery "depended upon the masters being able to speak for the slave, to deny his or her humanity and to draw a line between slave consciousness and human will."¹⁹ Enslaved people who could read or write threatened this system through displaying

their intelligence, and Williams argues that the testimony of formerly enslaved people from the 1930s reveals that many enslavers enacted extreme violence against enslaved people who had these skills.²⁰ Nickerson's interview is an example of this tendency, as she described Carr's actions using graphic detail:

dey would beat him tel de blood run outen him and den throw him in de ditch in de field and kivver him up wid dirt.²¹

Exposing her opinion of this violence, she bluntly stated that "dey beat him lak dat and he didn' do a thin' to git dat sort uf treatment."²²

Lastly, Nickerson also refused to lie about the psychological violence that Carr inflicted upon her, by continually threatening her with sale. This was a common threat that enslavers made; in each decade between 1820 and 1860 around 200,000 enslaved people were sold from one region and one plantation to another.²³ Within this general trend, however, enslaved people in the Deep South, including Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were more likely to have experienced separation through forced migration from the older slave states during the antebellum era. Nickerson was enslaved in Leon County, a county situated in Middle Florida that was only acquired by the U.S. in 1821. With the expansion of the plantation system to Middle Florida, by 1860 it had 75,000 residents, with over half of whom were enslaved Black Americans who had little choice in their forced migration.²⁴ While Nickerson was not sold herself, in her interview she described that "my mother and uncle Robert and Joe wus stol' from Virginia and fetched here," highlighting that she was all too aware of the threat of sale and family separations, and perhaps even the practice of slave-stealing.²⁵ Though Nickerson noted that she never saw Carr sell an enslaved person from his plantation, she also commented that, alongside the continual threat of sale, Carr had sold her father's first wife.²⁶

While it is significant that Nickerson spoke freely about Carr as she was no longer willing to lie for or about him, she also linked her decision to speak openly with her diminished anger. Nickerson declared to Austin that she "ain' mad now" and had "prayed an' got all the malice out o' my heart," suggesting that her reduced anger towards her enslaver played a part in her being able to discuss her experiences in detail. She further emphasized this connection between diminished rage and speaking openly after she discussed episodes of violence inflicted by the overseer, Joe Sanders. After describing her job carrying materials across the plantation, Nickerson stated that Sanders would beat her for being too slow when working. Labelling her feelings towards being physically disabled by this violence, she again divulged that her anger had diminished, and she would no longer lie about her experiences:

I never walked straight frum dat day to dis and I have to set here in dis chair now, but I don' feel mad none now. I feels good and wants to go to he'ven – I ain' gonna tel no lie on white nor black cose taint no use.²⁷

It is significant that, while this statement appeared immediately after her discussion of being physically disabled by violence inflicted by the overseer, Nickerson stated that she was not going to lie for "white nor black." While it could be suggested that Sanders was in fact an enslaved or free African American overseer, explaining her refusal to lie for "white nor black," this is highly unlikely, given the fact that she did not identify him as Black within the interview, and she also noted that he served as a

lieutenant during the Civil War. Thus, a more plausible explanation for this statement is that Nickerson was refusing to lie about the resistance that enslaved people undertook during slavery, as immediately after this discussion of violence she spoke about enslaved runaways. Nickerson discussed the enslaved men who ran away from the plantation, including Jake Overstreet, George Bull, John Green, Ruben Golder, and Jim Bradley, who were all punished for running away by having an iron band and bell placed around their necks. Unlike her frank discussion of violence undertaken by white people, and her feelings towards these acts, nowhere does Nickerson speak negatively about other enslaved people or attribute anger towards their actions. This suggests that her candour was reserved for issues that white society had generally restricted African Americans from discussing openly, such as white violence and Black resistance, rather than a decision to speak completely openly about the intricate dynamics within the enslaved community during this interview encounter.

There is, of course, an added religious aspect to Nickerson's decision to speak more openly than others, as she connected her decision not to lie to her desire to go to heaven. At the time of the interview, she was a member of the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Jacksonville, having converted in Leon County after Emancipation. The Mount Zion AME Church was established in 1866, but the denomination was created in 1787 when Richard Allen split from the white Methodist Church. Allen made few changes to established Methodist doctrines, a practice which continues until the present day. This meant that the church continued to abide by the Ten Commandments, as outlined in Allen's *Doctrines and Disciplines*, and asked those who were baptized to pledge their obedience to them, as Nickerson would have done when she converted after emancipation.²⁸ The ninth commandment, "thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," commands Christians against speaking dishonestly about others, a teaching that was included throughout issues of *The Christian Recorder*, the newsletter of the AME Church. In the period after the Civil War when Nickerson joined the church, articles described lying as a sin, a "mean and despicable vice," and included passages from the Bible suggesting that "lying lips are an abomination to the Lord."²⁹ Though we know from her interview that Nickerson was illiterate and thus could not read the newsletters, these central teachings of the AME Church may well have shaped her decision to speak honestly about her experiences, including providing her with a feeling of protection when she spoke frankly about white men.

Nickerson's testimony suggests, however, that alongside her religion, her decision to speak more openly was intimately connected to her emotions. Each time that she explained that she was not lying about her enslaver's and overseer's violence, she stated that her anger had diminished. This suggests that speaking candidly about her experiences of violence would have previously meant also expressing her anger towards white men, a factor that prevented her from speaking out until this point, and indeed probably also prevented other interviewees speaking about violence at all. Diana Brown and Henrietta Butler made less explicit connections between their decisions to speak openly and their rage or bitterness in their interviews. However, both formerly enslaved women's testimonies suggest that displaying anger and giving frank descriptions of white violence were intertwined. In May 1940 Butler spoke to Flossie McElwee, a white WPA interviewer in Louisiana, about the violence to which she was subjected by a white enslaver. At the start of her interview, Butler described the physical violence

enacted by her “missus,” Emily Haidee, on a plantation in LaFourche Parish, Louisiana. Speaking to her interviewer, Butler asked “You see dis finger here? – dare is where she bit it de day us was set free,” and described how Haidee called her a “little black bitch” when enacting this violence.³⁰ When Butler described the sexual abuse she suffered, she expressed explicit hatred towards her “missus.” Haidee had forced Butler to have a child with a man on the plantation, a coercive sexual practice that was commonly used by enslavers to maintain their enslaved workforce and demonstrate dominance over enslaved people.³¹ Gregory Smithers has revealed that, within WPA accounts of this sexual exploitation, women’s memories often focused on the grief, sadness, and physical and emotional pain they were forced to endure.³² While Butler’s memories undoubtedly bore witness to emotional pain, the explicit emotion she expressed in relation to this practice was anger. She described Haidee as “De ole Devil,” and exposed her deep-seated feelings towards her when exclaiming that “I gets mad ever’ time I think about it.”³³

Diana Brown expressed similar anger at white plantation owners, but this time in relation to their actions in the 1930s. The context of Brown’s interview, in contrast to Butler’s, was conducive to greater honesty. Alongside being a Black scholar, Turner aimed to become particularly comfortable with his informants so that they would speak in the dialect that they used with friends and family.³⁴ This is vital to note as Turner conducted this interview during a period when numerous white writers, researchers, and anthropologists were also attempting to “study” the Sea Islanders, due to their belief that they were examples of a “primitive” people who had been isolated from white culture. In the same years as Turner undertook his project, white researcher W. Robert Moore wrote a *National Geographic* article about the region. He went to Sapelo Island at the request of Howard Coffin, the white man who owned the island, and Melissa Cooper has demonstrated that as Moore’s subjects often worked for Coffin, and his manager often accompanied him around the area, the islanders Moore encountered were often coerced into posing for his photographs.³⁵ By comparison, Turner attempted to gain the trust of local leaders and sought them out to help him form relationships with the people on the island.³⁶ Turner’s appointment book also reveals that he visited his interviewees between six and eight times, many more than WPA interviewers.³⁷ His familiarity with Brown, in comparison to previous white researchers, undoubtedly played a role in prompting her to speak to him about her experiences.

Brown was enslaved on Edisto Island, South Carolina, until the age of 23, and during her recorded interview she discussed the contemporary labour system on the island, its similarities with slavery, and her feelings towards the white owner of the plantation, who she called “Harrison daddy.” Marvin Harrison was a truck farmer who in the 1930s moved from the mainland to Edisto Island and bought the Blue House Plantation and Gun Bluff Plantation.³⁸ Beginning by describing islanders’ bean-picking, Brown presented her defiance of the labour system and Harrison:

[They] say – the people say that man is the meanest man was. Me not going there. They have no white man. If you curse me, me and you fight. Yes, I ain’t no [one] to be cursed you know. I rather you knock me. [I] may as well tell the truth. See?³⁹

Alongside her openly defiant attitude, Brown’s anger towards Harrison and his labour practices is clearly presented in her interview. She even suggested that she would fight Harrison, instantly displaying her hatred towards him, while her resentment is also

clear when she called Harrison, as did Butler, “the red devil.” Although Brown did not openly state that she was angry, listening to the recording of her interview, this emotion is clearly apparent in her tone, alongside the phrases she used. When considering the analysis of emotion in oral testimony, historian Alessandro Portelli argues that “the tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing.”⁴⁰ There were moments in the interview when Brown displayed her rage by increasing her pitch, for example when she claimed that she would fight Harrison. Significantly, her emotions about the current labour practices on Edisto Island appeared to stem from her experiences of slavery. After explaining that people on the island also had to pick cotton in exchange for potatoes, Brown stated “Ain’t it? – Ain’t slavery coming back? All who never saw it – ain’t it coming back?”⁴¹

Despite the overarching situational and racial differences between Nickerson, Brown, and Butler’s interview encounters, as well as their differing individual personalities, memories, and contemporary situations, all three women made fairly explicit comments to their interviewers about speaking openly about their experiences of racial oppression, suggesting that they had nothing to lose in doing so. Significantly, these comments were coupled with a display of anger or an acknowledgment of previous feelings of malice toward white plantation owners. Though Nickerson chose to speak only when her bitterness had diminished, and Brown and Butler expressed their rage after their “truth-telling” phrases, their interviews suggest that their memories of racial violence and current oppression were bound up with feelings of anger. Thus, when choosing to speak honestly in their testimony, they also had to reflect on, and consider, feelings of rage, anger, and bitterness.

Racial etiquette, gendered emotional standards and decision making at the interview encounter

The “truth-telling” comments that the formerly enslaved women made – “tain’t no use to lie,” “may as well tell the truth,” “Ice not ashamed” – are important to acknowledge when attempting to dig deeper into their thought processes during their interview encounters. Despite choosing ultimately to speak fairly openly about their experiences, these passages suggest that the women were aware of, and considered, overarching constraints on criticizing white people in the 1930s. The interviews were produced at the height of the Jim Crow era when white Americans utilized an interlocking system of violence, intimidation, segregation, and social etiquette to oppress African Americans. Black Americans were regularly violently assaulted and lynched; in Nickerson’s home state of Florida, between 1882 and 1951 a total of 282 lynchings were recorded in the state, and between 1882 and 1930 it had the highest rate of lynching in the U.S in relation to population.⁴² Alongside the use of mob violence to subdue Black Americans, in the *Jim Crow Guide*, a satirical but accurate portrayal of racial etiquette, Stetson Kennedy outlined the general societal “rules” that Black Americans had to follow, including; “never assert or even intimate that a white person may be lying”; “never impute dishonourable intentions to a white person,” and “never curse a white person.”⁴³ When formerly enslaved people discussed any physical, sexual, or psychological abuse inflicted by white people, they transgressed these rules, a significant act considering

the everyday threats of violence and intimidation. As such, this strict everyday racial etiquette could influence what interviewees said about slavery. In his work on the WPA interview encounter, Blassingame revealed that when in the presence of a white interviewer, there was a “high premium placed on giving the ‘right’ answers to such questions as ‘was your master kind to you?’” leading interviewees in South Carolina, for example, to suggest they “were well treated, bountifully fed and clothed, and rarely overworked by kind masters.”⁴⁴

This racial etiquette could also have an impact on interviews with a more complicated racial dynamic. This tendency is demonstrated in Lorenzo Dow Turner’s description of when Guy Lowman, a white man, attended one of his Gullah interviews with him:

Dr Lowman unintentionally used a tone of voice which the informant resented. Instantly the interview ended. Apologies were to no avail. The informant refused to utter a word.⁴⁵

While this quotation highlights the impact that the presence of a white person could have at the interview, similar silencing could even occur when a white person was not present. For example, a formerly enslaved man who was interviewed by Ophelia Egypt, an African American sociology graduate at Fisk University, refused to discuss his experiences of slavery because of previous white reactions to his memories. He stated that “I been setting down before now and talking to some people about slavery time, and they said it was a damn lie, that white people didn’t do any such thing.” After recounting that he had been physically beaten under slavery, he explained that “I know it will just start some sort of disturbance, and I don’t care to talk about it.” Further explaining why he did not want to discuss these memories, he stated that “these white folks here don’t like to hear about how they fathers and mothers done these colored folks.”⁴⁶ Though Nickerson, Brown, and Butler were not silenced by these rules as this respondent was, their explicit “truth-telling” comments indicate that they were fully aware of the constraints on what they should say, and used these phrases to perhaps explain, or mitigate, their transgressions.

While these three formerly enslaved women had to consider Jim Crow etiquette when deciding whether to speak openly during their interviews, Nickerson’s testimony highlights particular constraints on anger that the interviewees had to consider before speaking candidly. When Nickerson stated that “I ain’ mad now and I know taint no use to lie,” she implies that in the past, when she did feel malice towards her enslaver, she felt unable to express this emotion.⁴⁷ Considering why Nickerson seemed unable to express her anger, it is important to consider the emotional constraints that she had lived by throughout her life. Applying the theory of “emotionology,” and analysing the emotional standards that Black Americans lived by under slavery, highlights that enslavers ensured that enslaved people adhered to a specific set of emotional standards, which importantly forbade the expression of hatred or rage towards white people, in a bid to keep enslaved people submissive. Nell Painter explains that both enslavers and enslaved parents taught enslaved children to conceal their anger when they were beaten, as expression of this emotion was forbidden in front of enslavers.⁴⁸ Further describing these emotional standards, which Erin Dwyer labels the “emotional norms of slavery,” she argues that the expression of hatred towards enslavers was the “primary emotion” that had to be concealed on the plantation.⁴⁹ The specific dynamics of these emotional standards are revealed in an interview conducted with a formerly enslaved woman as part of the Fisk

University interviews. The interviewee did not always hide her emotions towards her enslavers, as she explained that, when she was regularly beaten, she did not remain quiet, choosing to “sass them” instead. Yet slavery’s emotional standards still restricted her and her fellow enslaved people’s expression of malice. When her mistress died, “all the slaves come in the house just a hollering and crying and holding their hands over their eyes”; however, the interviewee then divulged that “soon as they got outside of the house they would say ‘Old God damn son-of-a-bitch, she done gone to hell’.”⁵⁰ This event exposes that the anger and hatred the enslaved people felt towards this white woman, as shown by their reaction outside of the house, could not be expressed in front of enslavers.

Born in slavery, it is likely that both Brown and Nickerson had learnt the emotional standards relating to the concealment of anger at a young age. However, these standards did not disappear when slavery ended and instead became pronounced in the Jim Crow era. Discussing the performances that oppressed people have to undertake in public spaces across cultures, James Scott uses the term “public transcript” to label “the public performance required of those subject to elaborate and systematic forms of social subordination.”⁵¹ He argues that the suppression and simulation of emotion is often needed as part of this performance. This involves the masking of one’s own feelings, but also involves “controlling what would be a natural impulse to rage, insult, anger and the violence that such feelings prompt.”⁵² Undoubtedly, this concept of the public transcript can be applied to the Jim Crow era, where Black Americans were required to control emotions such as anger as part of a complicated system of social subordination. Due to the long history of these emotional controls, any display of rage by Black Americans continued to be seen as disrespectful and threatening to the continued system of white dominance, and in turn, risked violence. Indeed, if we again consider Kennedy’s discussion of Jim Crow etiquette, it is evident that presenting anger, frustration, malice, or rage towards white people or their actions, as Nickerson, Brown and Butler did, was to transgress these rules of “never impute dishonourable intentions to a white person” and “never curse a white person.”⁵³ Due to the emotional standards of this repressive system, African American parents had to continue to teach their children the need for emotional constraints as a form of protection. Jennifer Ritterhouse has examined how parents taught these rules, noting the importance of this learning; “as every black parent knew, expressions of anger or any other form of open resistance to white dominance could get children killed.”⁵⁴ Importantly, Ritterhouse contends that parents in both working- and middle-class families were led by hope and ambition for their children to teach them a “respectable restraint.” These parents emphasized politeness and the need to rise above conflict within their teaching, rather than communicating the need for complete subservience.⁵⁵

Alongside racialized emotional standards that these formerly enslaved women had to consider before expressing anger and speaking more honestly at the interviews, it is also important to explore the gendered nature of emotional standards, and how these factored into the formerly enslaved women’s decision-making processes. The writings and actions of national and local Black female activists in the early twentieth-century highlight further constraints on the expression of bitterness by Black women who were speaking out about racial and sexual violence. Discussing Black women’s activism beginning at the turn of the century, Patricia Schechter argues that “African American women in the Gilded Age expressed anger at racist stereotyping, segregation and violence. And in nearly all

forums, their expression of anger involved repression.⁵⁶ This repression was related to the overarching threat of white violence when expressing this emotion during the Jim Crow era, as has been discussed, but also connected to attempts to move away from racist stereotyping of Black women through adhering to the “politics of respectability.”⁵⁷ Racist stereotypes of Black women, such as that of the “Sapphire,” circulated in white society during the Jim Crow era in literature, film and advertising. Alongside stereotypes of the nurturing “Mammy” or the overly sexualized “Jezebel,” the “Sapphire” was depicted as “evil, treacherous, bitchy, stubborn and hateful,” and her image was projected onto women who expressed anger or bitterness.⁵⁸ In the face of a culture of sexual violence against Black women and these negative stereotypes that often centred on their sexuality, Darlene Clark Hine argues that Black women, in turn, created a “culture of dissemblance,” which she defined as a set of behaviours revolved around creating the “appearance of disclosure, or openness about themselves and their feelings, while actually remaining an enigma.” These actions allowed Black women to protect their own “psychic space” and create a “secret, undisclosed persona” that crucially helped them to “harness the resources needed” to continue their everyday resistance.⁵⁹

Hine argues that this “culture of dissemblance” was institutionalized in 1896 with the founding of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), a group of over one thousand Black women’s clubs, and twenty-eight federations.⁶⁰ Middle-class women in these groups became intent on countering negative stereotypes and presenting themselves with “honourable” and “moral” character traits that were acceptable to white society whilst shielding aspects of their inner lives from public view. Black “Clubwomen” organized clubs in homes, church halls, and basements, dedicated to the protection and uplift of Black women, through a focus on Christian religious ideals such as purity, chastity, and a strong work ethic.⁶¹ The actions and writings of leading members of these societies reveal how this interconnecting culture of respectability, the culture of dissemblance, and fear of white violence shaped Black women’s expressions of anger. Mary Church Terrell, for example, the first president of the NACW when it was founded in 1896, was a staunch advocate for Black women. Terrell was born during the Civil War, yet unlike Nickerson, Butler, and Brown her parents had been freed from slavery, and she went to college to become an educator. During her presidency of the NACW, she advocated for social and political reform and spoke against Jim Crow segregation and lynching, always considering these issues through a prism of “racial uplift.” Terrell’s autobiography, written in 1940, indicates that even in this later period after she had been actively protesting racial oppression for decades, considerations over respectability politics and white backlash shaped how honest she could be in her writings. According to Patricia Schechter, this tension can be seen in the introduction to Terrell’s autobiography, in which she wrote that her book “told the truth and nothing but the truth – but not the whole truth.”⁶² This decision to avoid being completely open about her experiences was related to her belief that white readers would not believe her story, similarly to the case of the informant interviewed as part of the Fisk study.

Simultaneously, however, Terrell also chose to avoid “the whole truth” due to fears over being seen as angry, writing that “I am well aware that the truth will be interpreted by some to mean bitterness ... but I am not bitter.”⁶³ Alison M. Parker argues that Terrell’s decision to remain silent about this emotion was related to presenting herself as a “respectable” member of society: “Terrell decided not to fully express her bitterness toward white society; a truly honest account would have expressed too much anger

about the many hurtful consequences of racism to be acceptable to mainstream publishers or white readers.”⁶⁴ Later in her autobiography, she also included a creed she had written for the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority at Howard University, as a guide for Black American women to follow during their lives. One section suggested:

I will not shrink from undertaking what seems wise and good because I labor under the double handicap of race and sex; but striving to preserve a calm mind with a courageous, cheerful spirit, barring bitterness from my heart, I will struggle all the more earnestly to reach the goal.⁶⁵

Terrell’s guidance highlights that, in addition to general societal emotional standards, Black middle-class women were aware of further restrictions on their emotional expression, particularly if they were in the public eye. As demonstrated by this creed, Terrell considered which emotions would be best suited to furthering the cause of Black women, and perhaps also to protecting Black women’s psychological health, reflecting on white audiences, white backlash, and Black “uplift” politics. It was a calm and cheerful spirit, and a restriction of bitterness, that Terrell believed would help Black women achieve their goals.

Unlike the formerly enslaved women considered here, Terrell was a middle-class, educated woman on a national stage. Yet her ideas and beliefs about racial uplift and emotional expression filtered down to female activists in more rural Southern states, who had contact with formerly enslaved people. Eartha White, for example, was an African American activist who worked tirelessly in Jacksonville, Florida, where interviewee Margrett Nickerson also resided. Born in 1876 in Florida, White became an educator and social worker, advocating for poorer members of the community. She created the Clara White Mission, named for her mother, which she turned into a soup kitchen during the Great Depression to feed those in Jacksonville who were in poverty.⁶⁶ Significantly, the mission was a hub of activity for working- and middle-class Black Americans in Jacksonville, housing the Florida Negro Writers’ Unit during this time, where interviewers such as Rachel Austin worked. Many formerly enslaved people also came into contact with and were helped by Eartha White, including an elderly interviewee named Charles Coates. In his 1936 interview, he explained that, on his 108th birthday, White threw him a party at the Clara White Mission. Similarly, formerly enslaved man Edward Lycurgas, who was also interviewed in 1936, resided at the Clara White Mission, where he received a small amount of money to undertake jobs around the house.⁶⁷

White also worked hard to encourage Black women to register to vote in Jacksonville and was active in politics at town, county, and state level. She was the state chairperson of the National League of Republican Colored Women in 1928 and encouraged Black women to register to vote. She was also a member of the Central Republican Club of Duval County, a club that was created in 1917 to bring together African American members of the party and begin voter registration campaigns. Meetings were held in churches, and during one meeting soon after the club’s creation, White spoke about women’s suffrage at the Mount Zion African Methodist Church, the church that Nickerson also attended.⁶⁸ Evidently, then, White’s activism centred on helping Jacksonville’s poor Black community and influencing local politics, meaning that she had significant contact with formerly enslaved people in the locality.

While White’s activism focused on helping Jacksonville’s working-class community, she was also involved with the NACW and the club movement. She was a member of the

NACW, as well as of the Florida State Federation of Colored Women, which brought together clubs from across the state. Her beliefs and ideologies relating to how activism should be undertaken mirrored those of the leaders of these groups, including Terrell. According to historian Maxine Jones, White adhered to some of the racial ideologies espoused by Booker T. Washington and was in the audience in 1912 when he spoke in Jacksonville. These ideologies were mirrored in her character. She was hugely active within local and state politics, speaking publicly at meetings, yet Jones argues that she “was not outspoken and did not vocally challenge the system.” Indeed, a family friend, in an interview with Jones, described White as “not overly assertive,” a similar emotional characteristic to Terrell.⁶⁹ Though White did not discuss why she adopted this pattern of emotional expression, it is clear that she, too, had to walk a tightrope between challenging the system, being assertive, and expressing anger, ensuring that she continued to gain financial support from white people to establish her many initiatives.

Though the formerly enslaved women discussed in this article were not prominent local or national public figures, Nickerson, Brown, and Butler likewise spoke openly, in a public space, about their experiences of racial violence. The clear connection that Nickerson made between her diminished feelings of malice and her decision to not lie about her experiences highlights that, like Terrell and White, her decision-making surrounding speaking openly about racial violence also involved reflecting on her feelings of anger. Middle-class considerations of “respectable” emotional expression may not have shaped the decision-making processes of formerly enslaved women to the same extent as it did those of Terrell and White, as these women were not prominent activists in need of white financial support for their activities. Yet gendered considerations of the need for “good manners” and emotional restraint, and of maintaining what Hine labels their own “psychic space” in the context of an overarching set of racial emotional standards likely entered the formerly enslaved women’s thought processes, as interviewees were well aware that their interviews might be seen by a white audience. Local activists like Eartha White also had contact with formerly enslaved interviewees during their work, and thus White’s ideologies relating to Black women’s uplift and her “not overly assertive” emotional character may well have presented a model to which Black women in the community looked. Thus, probing Nickerson, Brown, and Butler’s thought processes relating to expressing anger and frankly discussing their experiences in their interviews, it appears likely that, before speaking openly, they considered the overarching emotional standards that had shaped white–black interactions since slavery, alongside gendered considerations of respectability, “good manners,” and the threat of white violence. It is important, therefore, that we acknowledge the complex array of factors, not only relating to “truth-telling,” but also concerning constraints on Black female rage, that Nickerson, Brown, and Butler had to consider before they discussed their experiences of slavery openly during their interviews.

In 1981, over 40 years after Nickerson, Butler and Brown gave their testimony, Black feminist Audre Lorde gave a speech considering the role of Black women’s anger in responding to racism in society:

Women responding to racism means women responding to anger; anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation.⁷⁰

Within this speech, Lorde was discussing her anger at the long-term legacies of slavery and segregation that still existed in the 1980s, and still exist today; the silence against racial violence, stereotyping of Black women, and unquestioned white privilege. It is scarcely surprising, then, considering the extreme violence and oppression formerly enslaved women experienced during slavery and the Jim Crow era, that responding to their experiences of slavery and racism also meant responding to their feelings of bitterness and rage. Unlike Lorde, and earlier activists such as Terrell and White, Nickerson, Brown, and Butler did not describe their emotions, aside from directing hatred and bitterness at white plantation owners, or the decision-making processes behind expressing this emotion. Yet these women were angry, or had been angry, about their experiences of slavery and continued racial violence, and thus it is clear that to discuss their experiences of racial violence more honestly with interviewers meant also considering whether to express these emotions. Through a close reading of Nickerson, Brown, and Butler's testimony, the risk of expressing their rage appears to be one of many factors that formerly enslaved women had to consider before discussing, or keeping quiet, about slavery's violence.

Nickerson, Brown, and Butler each dealt with their emotion in relation to white oppression differently. Nickerson chose to avoid speaking openly about her experiences of slavery until her feelings of malice had diminished, (but still acknowledged she had felt this emotion) while Brown exposed her rage in her words and tone, and Butler explicitly described feeling "mad" about her experiences. Their differing interview dynamics, contemporary situations, memories of slavery, and individual personalities can all perhaps explain this difference. Yet their "truth-telling" comments suggest that, before giving their testimony, they all had to consider constraints placed not only on speaking openly – a factor that has been regularly acknowledged by historians – but also on expressing anger. Interlocking considerations involving restrictive emotional standards, white violence, and the gendered politics of respectability, alongside personal decisions and feelings, all factored into Black women's decision-making surrounding speaking candidly at their interviews. Nickerson's choice to discuss her experiences of violence only because her feelings of malice had diminished, in particular, highlights the fact that she had already considered such constraints on expressing her emotions when speaking openly about her experiences. While other formerly enslaved women's testimonies do not provide the same access to their thought processes during their interviews, making any analysis of the representativeness of their experiences challenging, it does appear likely that many other formerly enslaved women also had to consider these emotional constraints when giving their testimony. The fact that formerly enslaved women in WPA testimony rarely explicitly expressed anger towards white people, in comparison to emotions such as fear, sadness and grief, can be seen in part as a response to these constraining emotional standards, and the power that they had in this era. Indeed, considering the emotional standards that shaped formerly enslaved women's testimony in the 1930s alongside Elizabeth Barnes' article in this issue, which highlights the different decisions freedwomen made about how to navigate patriarchal structures and testify about sexual violence in the immediate post-Civil War era, reveals the many different factors that shaped and constrained formerly enslaved women's testimony about racial and sexual violence throughout their lives. Ultimately, in both eras, formerly enslaved women had to make difficult and considered decisions about whether to adhere to, or break, overarching racialized and gendered standards.

The complexity of the decisions that formerly enslaved women had to undertake when considering whether to speak honestly about their experiences, considering emotional

constraints alongside racial politics and violence, thus also serves as an example of why historians must acknowledge the resistance that formerly enslaved women undertook when they even began to speak openly about slavery or hinted at their feelings of anger, hatred, rage, or bitterness. Scholars rightfully position Mary Church Terrell as a trail-blazing activist who resisted racial oppression by making evidence of racial violence public. Yet, through discussing their enslaver's violence and expressing anger, Nickerson, Butler, and Brown were engaged in similar actions; they made public the racial violence that occurred from slavery through to the 1930s. Considering the important histories contained within many of the WPA interviews, Gregory Smithers argues that these testimonies highlight enslaved people's resistance during slavery, but also their "intellectual agency" when they spoke candidly about their experiences of sexual violence.⁷¹ These women used the opportunity that the WPA interviews provided and made the difficult choice, as this article has demonstrated, to present their own narrative of slavery that countered the dominant, white-centric account of a benevolent and benign institution. In addition to acknowledging this intellectual agency, it is also essential to recognize that, when Nickerson, Butler, and Brown expressed their anger, their interviews also bear witness to their emotional resistance and their considered decisions to resist emotional standards. The WPA interviews have often been used to explore enslaved women's resistance and survival under slavery, but historians are much more sporadic in their acknowledgment of the action of giving testimony as a method of emotional, personal, and political resistance in and of itself. Recognizing the complex decision-making that was required of formerly enslaved women before they spoke about their experiences of slavery thus leads to a more humane, nuanced, and layered understanding of the importance of this testimony.

Notes

1. The Negro Writers' Unit worked separately from the white WPA staff. At its peak, the writers' unit had ten members of staff, but the number of workers quickly decreased. For more information on this unit, see Mormino, "Florida Slave Narratives," 319–419; McDonogh, *The Florida Negro*; Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*. For information on a similar unit in Louisiana see Redding, "The Dillard Project," 47–62.
2. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3, Florida*, Federal Writers' Project, United States Works Projects Administration Collection (Online), Manuscript Division Library of Congress, (hereafter USAWPA) 252–3. As this article is based on a critical and close analysis of the language within the interviews, I have often chosen to use the language recorded by the interviewer, rather than paraphrase their words. In this case, for example, the specific phrasing that Nickerson is recorded to have used demonstrates her emphasis on "lying," which can only be fully comprehended through exploring the language of the interview itself.
3. I use the term "truth-telling" phrases to describe both the explicit and implicit statements made by Nickerson, Brown, and Butler – "tain't no use to lie"; "may as well tell the truth"; "Ice not ashamed" – used to signal that they were speaking openly about their experiences in the interview.
4. Turner's project was a linguistic study designed to highlight African retentions in the Gullah dialect. Though the interviews were not focused on slavery, to get the informants talking in their regular style he would ask them about their lives during slavery. Unlike the WPA interviewers, Turner recorded these short interviews, to which scholars now have access. See Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. For more on his life and works see Wade-Lewis, *Lorenzo Dow Turner*.

5. Diana Brown, interviewed by L.D Turner, American Dialect Society Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, (hereafter ADS Collection) AFS 25763-25764 ADS 1402-1403.
6. "Interview with Ex-Slave Henrietta Butler", Louisiana Works Progress Administration Digital Collection, State Library of Louisiana, 1.
7. For recent studies that utilise WPA interviews to explore enslaved women's experiences, see Fett, *Working Cures*; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*; Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe*; West and Knight, "Mother's Milk," 37–68.
8. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 473–92; Yetman, "The Background to the Slave Narrative Collection," 534–53.
9. Musher, "The Other Slave Narratives"; Musher, "Contesting 'The Way the Almighty Wants It,'" 1–31; Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*.
10. Stearns and Stearns, "Emotionology," 813.
11. Stearns and Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History*.
12. For an interesting discussion of Black women's adherence to the "politics of respectability" in the Black Baptist church in the early twentieth century, see Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.
13. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 487–8.
14. I have called the WPA interviews narratives, as the written documents were not verbatim accounts of the interviews themselves. The written sources were shaped by the interviewer's memories of the interview and the editor's decisions. For more on the editing process, see Musher, "The Other Slave Narratives."
15. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3*, USAWPA, 252.
16. "1850 U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules," *Ancestry*, accessed November 10, 2020.
17. Campbell, "Children and Slavery in the New World," 265.
18. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3*, USAWPA, 252.
19. Williams, *Self-Taught*, 7.
20. *Ibid.*, 18.
21. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3*, USAWPA, 253.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 5.
24. Baptist, *Creating an Old South*, 2.
25. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3*, USAWPA, 251. For more on "slave-stealing" and women's roles in this practice, see Laura Sandy's article in this issue.
26. *Ibid.*, 253. For further analysis of the emotional consequences of sale see Williams, *Help Me to Find My People*.
27. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3*, USAWPA, 252–4.
28. Allen, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*.
29. "The Lighthouse," *Christian Recorder*, July 14, 1866; "The Sin of Lying," February 15, 1877; "Lying," January 13, 1876.
30. "Interview with Ex-Slave Henrietta Butler," 1.
31. For more information on "slave breeding," see Smithers, *Slave Breeding*; on intimate partner violence, see West, "Reflections on the *History and Historians*," 1–21; On rape by enslavers, see Livesey, "Conceived in Violence," 373–91.
32. Smithers, *Slave Breeding*, ch.5.
33. "Interview with Ex-Slave Henrietta Butler," 1.
34. Turner, "Problems Confronting the Investigator of Gullah," 82.
35. Cooper, *Making Gullah*, 85.
36. Wade-Lewis, *Lorenzo Dow Turner*, 81. For a discussion of the methodologies that researchers have used in more recent years to gain the trust of Gullah Islanders see Beoku-Betts, "We Got Our Way of Cooking Things," 535–55.
37. Lorenzo Dow Turner Appointment Book 1932, Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, Anacostia Community Museum Archive, Washington, DC.
38. Spencer, *Edisto Island 1861 to 2005*.
39. Diana Brown, interviewed by L.D Turner, ADS Collection.

40. Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 65.
41. Diana Brown, interviewed by L.D Turner, ADS Collection.
42. Hobbs, *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home*, 25–6.
43. Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.*, 216–17.
44. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 482.
45. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, 12.
46. Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 18, 141–2.
47. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3*, USAWPA, 252.
48. Painter, *Southern History Across the Color Line*, 24.
49. Dwyer, "Mastering Emotions," 31.
50. Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 18, 134.
51. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 2.
52. *Ibid.*, 37.
53. Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.*, 216–7.
54. Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow*, 99.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Schechter, "'All the Intensity of My Nature'," 50.
57. *Ibid.*
58. hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 55. For more information on stereotypes of Black women, see Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*; Hale, *Making Whiteness*; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*
59. Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women," 915.
60. *Ibid.*, 917.
61. For more on Black clubwomen see Berry and Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States*, 109.
62. Terrell quoted in Schechter, "'All the Intensity of My Nature'," 60.
63. *Ibid.*, 60–1.
64. Parker, "'The Picture of Health,'" 179.
65. Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 425.
66. Jones, "'Without Compromise or Fear,'" 484–6.
67. Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narrative Project Vol. 3*, USAWPA, 71; 210.
68. Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 179.
69. Jones, "'Without Compromise or Fear,'" 487.
70. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 128.
71. Smithers, *Slave Breeding*, ch.5. There has been considerable debate over the use of the term "agency" when describing the actions of enslaved people. Walter Johnson, for example, critiqued a growing trend in historiography by which historians purported to "give slaves back their agency," which he argued unwittingly bolstered a false dichotomy, initiated by white supremacist arguments about a lack of Black humanity, that enslaved people either did or did not have agency. This, he argues, diminishes the complexity of enslaved people's actions and the ways in which their lives were "powerfully conditioned by, though not reducible, to their slavery." Using the term "intellectual agency" to describe formerly enslaved women's actions *after* slavery, however, does not serve to reproduce this dichotomy, as it highlights a specific instance in which these women used the opportunities that freedom gave them, and navigated the constraints of the Jim Crow system, to fashion their own narratives of slavery. Emphasising their intellectual agency in the WPA interviews serves to remind historians of the importance of this testimony in and of itself. For more on agency, see Johnson, "On Agency," and William Dusinger, "Power and Agency in Antebellum Slavery."

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Stephen Kenny and Nick Bubak for feedback on early drafts of this article. She would also like to thank the editors of the collection, Laura Sandy and Marie Molloy, for invaluable comments and suggestions in developing this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Beth R. Wilson is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in the History Department at the University of Reading and is funded to work on her book project exploring enslaved women's emotional lives. She gained her PhD from the University of Liverpool in 2019.

Bibliography

- Allen, Richard. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Philadelphia, 1817. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/ame/ame.html>.
- Baptist, Edward. *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Beoku-Betts, Josephine A. "We Got Our Way of Cooking Things: Women: Food, and Preservation of Cultural Identity among the Gullah." *Gender and Society* 9, no. 5 (1995): 535–555.
- Berry, Daina Ramey. *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Berry, Daina Ramey, and Kali Nicole Gross. *A Black Women's History of the United States*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2020.
- Blassingame, John. "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems." *Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 4 (1975): 473–492.
- Camp, Stephanie. *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Campbell, Gwyn. "Children and Slavery in the New World: A Review." *Slavery and Abolition* 27, no. 2 (2006): 261–285.
- Cooper, Melissa L. *Making Gullah: A History of Sapelo Islanders, Race, and the American Imagination*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017.
- Dusinberre, William. "Power and Agency in Antebellum Slavery." *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no. 2 (2011): 139–148.
- Dwyer, Erin. "Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Politics of Slavery." PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2012.
- Fett, Sharla. *Working Cures: Healing, Health and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Old South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South 1890–1940*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Hobbs, Tameka. *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home: Racial Violence in Florida*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. London: South End Press, 1981.
- Jones, Maxine. "'Without Compromise or Fear': Florida's African American Female Activists." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (1999): 475–502.
- Johnson, Walter. "On Agency." *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 113–124.
- Kennedy, Stetson. *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A: The Laws, Customs and Etiquette Governing the Conduct of Nonwhites and Other Minorities as Second-Class Citizens*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011.
- Livesey, Andrea. "Conceived in Violence: Enslaved Mothers and Children Born of Rape in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana." *Slavery and Abolition* 38, no. 2 (2017): 373–391.

- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crown Publishing, 1984.
- McDonogh, Gary. *The Florida Negro: A Federal Writers' Project Legacy*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993.
- Mormino, Gary. "Florida Slave Narratives." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1988): 319–419.
- Musher, Sharon Ann. "Contesting 'The Way the Almighty Wants It': Crafting Memories of Ex-Slaves in the Slave Narrative Collection." *American Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2001): 1–31.
- Musher, Sharon Ann. "The Other Slave Narratives: The Works Progress Administration Interviews." In *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by John Ernest, 101–118. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Ortiz, Paul. *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *Southern History Across the Color Line*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Parker, Alison. "'The Picture of Health': The Public Life and Private Ailments of Mary Church Terrell." *Journal of Historical Biography* 13 (2013): 164–207.
- Portelli, Alessandro. "What Makes Oral History Different." In *The Oral History Reader* 3rd ed, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 48–58. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Rawick, George. *The American Slave, a Composite Autobiography Vol 18, Unwritten History of Slavery*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972.
- Redding, Joan. "The Dillard Project: The Black Unit of the Louisiana Writers' Project." *Louisiana History* 32, no. 1 (1991): 47–62.
- Ritterhouse, Jennifer. *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Schechter, Patricia. "'All the Intensity of My Nature': Ida B. Wells, Anger and Politics." *Radical History Review* 70 (1998): 48–77.
- Schwartz, Marie Jenkins. *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Scott, James. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Smithers, Gregory. *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013.
- Spencer, Charles. *Edisto Island 1861 to 2005: Ruin, Recovery and Rebirth*. Charleston: History Press, 2008.
- Stearns, Carol, and Peter Stearns. *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Stearns, Peter, and Carol Stearns. "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards." *American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813–836.
- Stewart, Catherine. *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.
- Tadman, Michael. *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Terrell, Mary Church. *A Colored Woman in a White World*. New York: G. K. Hall, 1996.
- Turner, Lorenzo Dow. *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1949. Reprinted by Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.
- Turner, Lorenzo Dow. "Problems Confronting the Investigator of Gullah." *Publication of the American Dialect Society* 9, no. 1 (November 1947): 74–84.
- Wade-Lewis, Margret. *Lorenzo Dow Turner: Father of Gullah Studies*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007.
- West, Emily. "Reflections on the *History and Historians* of the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves: Enslaved Women and Intimate Partner Sexual Violence." *American Nineteenth Century History* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1–21.
- West, Emily, and R. J. Knight. "Mother's Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South." *Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 1 (2017): 37–68.
- White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1985.

Williams, Heather Andrea. *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Williams, Heather Andrea. *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Yetman, Norman. "The Background to the Slave Narrative Collection." *American Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1967): 534–553.