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Reflections on the *History and Historians* of the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves: Enslaved Women and Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

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Abstract:

Taking as points of inspiration Peter Parish's 1989 book, *Slavery: History and Historians*, and Angela Davis's seminal 1971 article, "Reflections on the black woman's role in the community of slaves," this probes both historiographically and methodologically some of the challenges faced by historians writing about the lives of enslaved women through a case study of intimate partner violence among enslaved people in the antebellum South. Because rape and sexual assault have been defined in the past as non-consensual sexual acts supported by surviving legal evidence (generally testimony from court trials), it is hard for historians to research rape and sexual violence under slavery (especially marital rape) as there was no legal standing for the rape of enslaved women or the rape of any woman within marriage. This article suggests enslaved women recognized that black men could both be perpetrators of sexual violence *and* simultaneously be victims of the system of slavery. It also argues women stoically tolerated being forced into intimate relationships, sometimes even staying with "husbands" imposed upon them after emancipation.

Keywords: Slavery, rape, women, marriage, sexual violence

Interviewed by a Works Progress Administration (WPA) employee in 1938, Mary Gaffney recalled her enslaved childhood and youth in Mississippi and Texas. Gaffney's master wanted to "get rich" in Texas, and even though Gaffney's mother had lived in a cross-plantation marriage in Mississippi, where her husband visited her at weekends, this profit-hungry slaveholder "put another negro man" with Gaffney's mother after their move to Texas. Gaffney then recalled that he then "put one [an enslaved man] with me," assuming

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they would live as man and wife and hopefully bear valuable children. But Mary Gaffney did not make it easy for her slaveholder to achieve profit through reproduction. As she said, "I just hated the man I married but it was what Master said do….I would not let him touch me and he told Master, and Master gave me a real good whipping, so that night I let that that negro have his way."[1]

Gaffney's husband, Paul, believed it was his right to impose himself on his new wife, and Gaffney herself also seemed sadly resigned to the fact that she, as a wife, had to submit to him sexually. Typically patriarchal ideas about entitlement to sexual activity and control over women thus ensured Gaffney suffered a dual oppression of being forced into an intimate relationship, as well as being sexually available to her husband. But Gaffney did not give up her fight to deny her owner profits through her own children. She then attempted to control her fertility by chewing cotton-root, believed by many enslaved women to have contraceptive properties.[2] And she was successful in her aims: Gaffney only gave birth to a child *after* emancipation, when she and Paul raised five children together.

Enslaved women's attempts to use their reproductive abilities to control their fertility has been well-documented by historians, but this article probes Gaffney's life (as well as those of other enslaved women forced into intimate relationships against their will) from a different angle: namely, it questions why women such as Gaffney chose not to leave, but instead to stay with the husbands their slaveholders selected for them through the era of emancipation and into post-slavery times.[3] Gaffney's actions in remaining with her formerly enslaved spouse Paul to raise their family together, are typical of many freedwomen who seem wearily to have accepted husbands chosen for them, not by them. Some women, too, seemingly even grew to feel love and affection for "husbands" they themselves had no agency in "selecting."[4]

Mary Gaffney was well aware of the way in which the brutality of enslavement had shaped the everyday contours of her life, and she lamented the fact that she had been denied her liberty: "I'se kept hearing about our race back there in Africa, how free they was and how they did not have to work like we did here. I'se believe if I'se could get free I'se be like my grandparents back there in Africa, I'se could roam the woods get our living out of the woods, and sleep where night overtook us and live with the man I wanted to."[5] So she hinted to her interviewer that, as well as being fully aware that her family had once lived their lives free from bondage, there might possibly have been another man in her life, a man whom she would have chosen to marry if Paul had not been imposed upon her.

Like other limited, fragmentary primary sources about enslaved and formerly enslaved women's lives, Mary Gaffney's testimony raises as many questions as it answers. This article uses this rare, often fleeting evidence about intimate aspects of women's lives as a means of probing -- both historiographically and methodologically -- some of the challenges faced by historians writing about the lives of enslaved women by considering what we do (and do not) know about intimate partner violence and women's opinions of men "chosen" for them rather than by them in the longer term. It is particularly inspired by the work of two rather different but very important authors of key texts on antebellum slavery, Peter Parish and Angela Davis. In 1989, Parish published *Slavery: History and Historians*, an important historiographical summary of contemporary works about slavery in the antebellum South.[6] With his exemplary – and often very witty – powers of synthesis this book soon became indispensable for many historians who teach slavery, and it is highly regrettable that Parish was not around long enough to write a second edition. One of his many strengths was his ability to see historiographical patterns and trends, and this sort of skillful summarizing of other *historians'* views is sometimes lacking from recent work – in the UK context probably

because everything has to be "measured" in REF terms with its emphasis on archival research. Yet historians should all be able to evaluate and synthesize each other's findings just they all consider very carefully their primary evidential base.

Angela Davis's 1971 article, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" is a very different piece of work than Parish's book.[7] Of article rather than book-length, it was published 18 years before *Slavery: History and Historians*. Indeed, it was written so long ago that Davis uses the singular rather than plural in describing the experiences of enslaved women, as well as the communities in which they live, in contrast to more recent authors. But, just as Peter Parish's work offers historians a way to reflect on the historiography of slavery (and, specifically that of enslaved women), so Angela Davis's article allows historians to contemplate the nature and significance of history itself. Davis is, of course, primarily an activist, and in January 2017, at the Women's March in Washington DC, she proclaimed, "We recognize that we are collective agents of history and that history cannot be deleted like web pages…The freedom struggles of black people that have shaped the very nature of this country's history cannot be deleted with the sweep of a hand."[8] This was a typically and understandably impassioned response to the new Trump administration, and the role that history needs to play in informing the present in dangerous and difficult times.

But, unusually, Davis is not right here. History is a process rather than static and primary sources can of course be deleted or otherwise destroyed, especially those of a sensitive nature, for example those relating to forms of intimate partner sexual abuse under enslavement, as will later be shown. As Peter Parish's book reminds us, history is frequently re-written. Some history is also speculative. Angela Davis wrote her "reflections" article while in solitary confinement in a prison cell where she was being held for her alleged and

rather complicated involvement of the shooting of a California judge – a charge of which she was later found not guilty. In prison, Davis had access to only a few resources, and obviously no archival evidence to consult at all. Instead she drew on some key theoretical, political and historical texts, especially Herbert Aptheker, and published slave autobiographies such as those of Frederick Douglass and Moses Gandy. Angela Davis's article hence raises interesting questions about some of the issues that historians of subaltern people are pondering more recently, including so-called "archival silences," silences I believe need to be the beginning, rather than the end of a story, as well as the use of speculation, empathy, and imagination in history. The latter, of course, was urged by Stephanie Camp in her 2004 book *Closer to Freedom* and has gained increasingly credence among recent years among historians of enslaved women. So Angela Davis was well ahead of her time.[9]

Angela Davis also pioneered the notion of rape as being a form of institutional terrorism designed to subjugate women rather than as individualized spontaneous acts of violence. Her work hence allows historians to consider the nature of rape more widely as well as some of the methodological challenges of researching rape under slavery. This article will explore a specific type of sexual exploitation under enslavement that is plagued by methodological and archival challenges, namely the sexual violence inflicted on enslaved women by black men deemed to be their partners in wedlock, as experienced by Mary Gaffney and others. It probes this topic both historiographically – in the spirit of Peter Parish, and methodologically – to echo the findings Angela Davis.

Because enslaved women left relatively few written sources for historians to use, those interested in exploring their lives from their own perspective sometimes need to think differently and deeply about available surviving evidence, and sometimes historians need to speculate about how women might have felt in the past and to use sometimes challenging

primary sources that others often find terribly easy to critique. For this reason historians need passionately to defend WPA (Works Progress Administration) interviews with formerly enslaved people undertaken in the 1930s, and their reminiscences about the everyday lives of enslaved people, what Michael Tadman has referred to as "rank and file" slaves.[10] These are people worthy of history, and for historians who focus on enslaved people's perspectives, rather than white accounts of enslaved people's experiences, without the WPA evidence we are left with only more atypical, less everyday testimonies, and, as interesting as they are (I'm thinking especially of Harriet Jacobs' 1861 autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*), this is not always the most useful evidence for historians of the everyday.[11]

As a historian of women and gender, it is galling to sit on a panel and present research alongside other historians of enslaved women, only to be told, during questions, that the WPA narratives are methodologically problematic – even though most of us teach to our students the various limitations *and* advantages of all sorts of primary sources -- including WPA interviews. Referring back to the work of C Vann Woodward, Ed Baptist recently noted that "sources generated by the white or the powerful or the free are no more inherently immune from internal conflict or conscious performance than the WPA narratives".[12] So WPA testimony is indeed easy to critique, but it is also unique and important. There is always something new to be found in WPA testimony.

While Angela Davis's article offers useful insights into some of the methodological challenges associated with exploring the lives of enslaved women, Peter Parish's *History and Historians*, speaks more to the evolution of historiographical paradigms, and raises questions about how historians of slavery might attempt to synthesize subsequent writing about antebellum slavery after 1989. Parish's book included no thematic chapter on gender or enslaved women (the two are, of course, different), and it would be unfair to critique him for

this as the book is a product of its time. Parish did include a brief discussion in chapter four – "the business of slavery" -- on how childbearing increased the value of enslaved women, because owners encouraged large families. Unsurprisingly, too, enslaved women crop up in the book's fifth chapter, entitled "the lives of slaves". Here Parish refers to the health risks associated with pregnancy, childbearing, and child rearing. He also discusses family formations and sexual assaults by white men. Pre-empting (as he did so often) subsequent writers, Parish saw the enslaved family as both a victim of adversity, but also a positive response to it in a characteristically nuanced way.[13] Significantly, both Parish and Davis referred to the history of women and family in the singular, rather than the plural, whereas subsequent historians now the stress diversity of women's experiences and the multiplicity of family forms. In his chapter on slavery and white society, Parish also summarized Deborah White's pioneering work on female slave camaraderie, but fails to mention the some of the already published key work on white southern women including Anne Firor Scott and, later, Catherine Clinton,.[14]

Instead, the strengths of *History and Historians* lie in other areas, especially in Parish's analysis of the "edges" of the regime, the margins between slavery and freedom that he rightly argued served to highlight the whole. These included urban and industrial slavery, hiring out, and free people of color.[15] Finally, Parish also provided a helpful chronological framing of slavery historiography in *History and Historians*. After briefly mentioning the older works of authors such as U. B. Phillips, Kenneth Stampp, and Stanley Elkins, he focused on the key revisionist monographs of the 1970s. Parish referred to the 1970s as the era of the "grand synoptic overview" of slavery, while the 1980s he characterized as the era of the in-depth, more localized, or regional study. As he eloquently put it, "the telescope has given way to the microscope."[16]

So Parish missed out on an important historiographical turn of the 1980s when many historians followed the lead of Angela Davis and began to prioritize the lives of enslaved women in their writing, including, for example, enslaved women's relationships with white slaveholding women and the structure and nature of enslaved families.[17] In the late 1990s and early twenty-first century historians also began to question "high revisionism" and probe the extent of enslaved people's agency and resistance -- mindful of the complexities of defining these terms -- and to instead explore conflict and antagonisms within enslaved communities.[18] The singular moved to the plural as historians increasingly engaged with the complexities of the regime. So there has also been, for example, an increasing interest in non-plantation slavery and the diversity of enslaved people's experiences.[19] Historians of gender and sexuality have used the conceptual framework of women's history to probe what enslavement meant for men through their understanding and manifestations of masculinity.[20] In the twenty-first century (history never fits neatly into chronological decades), we have also seen a whole raft of books and articles revisiting the role of slavery in the development of modern capitalism, an issue first highlighted by Eric Williams back in 1944. Men wrote most of these new works, and they wrote largely, though not exclusively, about men.[21] Most downplayed the significance of the law of partus sequitur ventrem, first passed in Virginia in 1662, which rendered the child of any enslaved woman a slave themselves. But this is important because similar laws soon spread across the southern colonies, becoming entrenched by the revolutionary era, and they gave slave-hungry masters every incentive to sexually assault their enslaved women who might then bear them valuable children. Slaveholders increasingly began to regard their female slaves as both laborers *and* reproducers.[22]

Recently, some historians of enslaved women have taken issue with the recent work on slavery and capitalism. An AHRC-funded network, "Mothering Slaves," and its associated two journal special editions, sought to highlight enslaved motherhood across the Atlantic world as a process that involved exploitative reproductive labor for slaveholders' benefit. [23] The authors, myself included, focused on the perspectives of enslaved women themselves, how they negotiated their dual exploitation as laborers and reproducers, in contrast to, for example, Walter Johnson, who in *River of Dark Dreams* -- in a line obviously intended to shock -- describes reproduction in terms of slaveholders converting their own semen into capital.[24] As such, our "mothering slaves" research echoes Angela Davis's 1971 article which also stressed the multiple forms of exploitation endured by enslaved women and critiqued previous conceptualizations of slave communities as "matriarchal." She writes, "The designation of the black woman as a matriarch is a cruel misnomer...because it implies stable kinship structures within which the mother exercises decisive authority. It is cruel because it ignores the profound traumas the black woman must have experienced when she had to surrender her child-bearing to alien and predatory economic interests."[25] As these brief sentences reveal, then, some people have been writing about slavery and capitalism for a considerable time.

Matriarchy itself became a term so loaded with negative connotations that Deborah Grey White later suggested we replace it with the slightly different term "matrifocal" -- female centered rather than female dominated.[26] But Davis herself rightly focused on the *lack* of power for enslaved women. "Released" from contemporary ideals of femininity and integrated into a productive workforce *in addition* to performing reproductive labor, and the great majority of dull, boring, monotonous domestic chores that have characterized the lives of so many women across time and space, enslaved women were sometimes so oppressed

that even their breast milk became a commodity to be taken by slaveholders, sometimes at the expense of their own infants.[27]

In addition to refuting this myth of matriarchy, Davis's other main contribution to the field was to highlight rape as a form of institutional terrorism under bondage. Her claims have been borne out by other studies of women's rape in conflict zones across time and space and by subsequent historians of enslaved women.[28] Most research on the rape of enslaved women has rightly focused on this systematic abuse inflicted by white men -- their rape culture under slavery -- a methodologically challenging topic even considering that some men recorded their abuse of women, and WPA respondents likewise vocalized their memories of abuse, either of themselves or their female relatives. Historians also have the benefit of published books such as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and the tragic tale of *Celia, a slave.*[29] But exploring rape under slavery is methodologically and conceptually problematic because, according to Estelle B. Freedman, rape's meaning is fluid, not transhistorical or static.[30] Its definition is shaped and reshaped by specific social relations and legal and political contexts.

Put bluntly, because the rape of enslaved women had no legal standing their "rape" in legal terms simply did not exist. Moreover, exploring rape and sexual violence perpetrated by black men -- enslaved or otherwise -- is harder still. Women's reluctance to divulge details of black-on-black sexual violence -- what Darlene Clark Hine termed the culture of dissemblance -- meant many cases of domestic sexual violence simply never made it to the historical record.[31] And without a historical record historians do not have the evidence to explore a topic. But that does not mean something did not happen. So historians need to think laterally about the limited, fragmentary surviving evidence that does exist, as well as sometimes to speculate about these women's reactions, motivations, and feelings in order to

gain a fuller picture of their experiences.[32] Research into these private, intimate, and violent areas of life thus exposes the malleability and fluidity of terms such as "rape" and "marriage" across time and space. Enslaved people's marriages held no legal standing, yet people entered wedlock and commonly formed life-long partnerships when they could.[33] Likewise, the rape of enslaved women was not legally recognized, and hence not a crime, since slaves were not legal citizens, and the idea of rape within marriage is also, (at least from a legal perspective), a more recent phenomenon. US states only legislated against rape within marriage in the second half of the twentieth century. By 1993 marital rape was deemed a crime in all 50 states.[34]

Men have raped and sexually assaulted their wives for many reasons, including the belief that they are "entitled" to sex with their wife, the idea that rape can be a form of punishment for women's so-called "unacceptable" behavior, and simply because rape is a means by which men can increase their power and control over women.[35] The idea that women became the property of their husbands (rather than their fathers) upon marriage stretches back to Roman times, and legislators framed early rape laws in terms of property rights whereby one man could be punished for defiling another's property. The rape of one's wife was a legal impossibility, because wedlock implied consent to sex with women serving as sexual property. Essentially, husbands could not legally be sanctioned for raping their wives because their spouses were also their property.[36] And this, of course, has some parallels with white men's rape of their property -- namely enslaved women -- under the regime. Sharon Block's work on rape and sexual power in early America tracks the evolution of the punishment of rape. The development of race-based slavery then led to the "racialization" of rape laws, initially based upon British ones, and a two-tier system for blacks and whites, where black men, enslaved or free, could be tried for the rape of white women, but, legally at

least, no man could rape a slave woman.[37] In the words of Joanna Bourke, enslaved women were thus both "incapable of consent" and "inherently rapable."[38]

More specifically, black-on-black sexual violence has a thorny historiography, largely due to the sensitivities associated with drawing attention to sexism and sexual violence directed against black women by black men. After the publication of her pioneering book on rape, *Against Our Will* in 1975, Susan Brownmiller faced attacks for the way in which she described the role of black male privilege in violence against women and for not placing enough emphasis on institutional racism in the US.[39] Also controversial is that any analysis of black-on-black rape and sexual assault during the antebellum era raises the broader issue of so-called "slave breeding." Did slaveholders deliberately force enslaved people into intimate relations with a view to increasing their supply of chattel? While the idea of systematic breeding on so-called "stud farms" was a common abolitionist trope, it is also true that owners permitted a variety of family formations and intimate relationships among their enslaved people, including sometimes permitting multiple, flexible marriages, as well as cross-plantation relationships in the hope that their actions would lead to more infant slaves.[40] They cajoled and persuaded their enslaved women in a variety of ways to bear valuable children.[41]

Gregory Smithers attributes the discourse of breeding within WPA evidence -- with their common references to "bucks, studs, and wenches" -- to the popular racial language of the 1930s, imbued with social Darwinism and eugenics; to vestiges of abolitionist rhetoric; and to the chauvinism of black nationalism in this era. WPA respondents portrayed their experiences of sexual violence in this way because it was the only way they knew how to conceptualize these occurrences to their white interviewers.[42] It is also significant that the respondents also used the language of agriculture and animal husbandry to convey white

slaveholder attitudes towards reproduction, as will be shown.[43] Thomas Foster's recent work on the sexual abuse of black men under slavery reminds us that the coercion of people into sexual relationships had a detrimental effect on enslaved men, including the denial of their role as fathers, and a fostering of broader feelings of resentment and rejection. Levels of victimhood were hence multi-layered.[44]

The testimony of female WPA respondents who mentioned black-on-black sexual assault supports this idea of multi-layered victims of sexual violence because women were capable of recognizing dualities. Formerly enslaved women were well aware that black men could be both perpetrators of sexual violence *and* simultaneously be victims of the racist system of enslavement. There was no need for an either/or binary. Moreover, enslaved women did not always characterize intimate spousal abuse as unacceptable or even unusual, and their evidence instead suggests a weary and stoic acceptance of this violence and its consequences. Like those sexually exploited by white men, enslaved women in abusive relationships with slave men had few choices when it came to improving their situation, and most appear to have attempted to reconcile themselves to their lot, to learn to live with those who sexually abused them – in an attempt merely to survive. However, in the longer term some used the opportunities provided by emancipation to flee unhappy relationships and seek new lives for themselves. They linked general emancipation with individual notions of liberty.

Formerly enslaved people interviewed by the WPA commonly made use of the black oral tradition of "signifying" when speaking to their interviewers, argues Catherine A. Stewart. They used indirect speech that referred to no person in particular.[45] This technique of signifying meant that women were more likely to describe sexual assaults at the hands of anonymous black drivers than named individuals, especially intimate partners. Moreover, the

fact that marital rape was not legally recognized when the interviews took place in the 1930s makes it more likely that female respondents did not regard their abuse as "rape" and so were less likely to mention it. Hine's culture of dissemblance hence explains the signifying tactics of female WPA respondents, and this culture also served as a "survival strategy" for black women seeking to survive or even resist some of the consequences of sexual assault, by avoiding disclosure of their inner lives.[46] By not mentioning it, they felt they were claiming something back for themselves.

Cathy McDaniels-Wilson has recently written about the parallels between Hine's dissemblance and the modern-day psychological diagnosis of dissociation. The two are similar, although she believes dissociation -- a process of detachment -- is a more unconscious process than dissemblance. The psychological after effects of sexual victimization also reveal a distinction between resilience – the capacity to sustain oneself – and healing – a process of self-regeneration.[47] While historians have only limited evidence of the psychological consequences and long-term implications of rape and sexual assaults on enslaved women, McDaniels-Wilson's points have relevance in terms of the conceptualization of complicated manifestations of "survival," "agency," and "resistance" -- all very important and highly debated terms in the historiography of slavery especially in the years since the publication of Peter Parish's book. Evidence suggest that while enslaved women managed to survive their sexual assaults by intimate partners, they had little "agency" until emancipation and found "resistance" near impossible. Instead, ideas about women seeking simply to preserve their sense of self -- to keep going in the face of attempts to dehumanize – are extremely helpful here.[48] Also within a more modern context, Joanne Belknap has highlighted four categories of partner violence – physical battering, sexual battering, psychological battering, and the destruction of pets or property.[49] Of course,

enslaved women could be subjected to all these forms of violence, but the historical context is important, because enslaved women rarely had any "property" or even possessions to call their own beyond the basics needed for subsistence. Instead, they were defined as property themselves. So their abuse relates ore to the first three categories of violence -- physical, sexual, and psychological.

Surviving primary evidence about black-on-black sexual assaults is admittedly scant. Susan Brownmiller drew attention to enslaved men's rape through an 1828 Maryland advertisement which described a runaway man as a rapist of an enslaved woman.[50] No doubt this wording was designed to encourage white citizens to find and catch the man in question. Other historians have noted cases of black-on-black rape under slavery through legal documentation.[51] Some cases came to court because the perpetrators raped slave girls rather than women. While there is no universal age at which "childhood" ends, antebellum southerners generally defined children as being under 10 years of age or in a more relative pre-adolescent way. The 1859 case of *George vs. the State* (of Mississippi) overturned a conviction of a slave sentenced to death for the rape of a slave girl under the age of 10 on the grounds that there was no legal provision that made the rape of slave women or girls an offense.[52]

Likewise, Wilma King describes at length the 1859 hanging of an enslaved man named Ned in Virginia for raping a six year old enslaved girl and a nine year old white girl. Although the enslaved girl (unlike the white girl) was not protected by law, in this instance the court heard the cases together as *Commonwealth v. Ned*.[53] Similarly, Jeff Forret has recently explored the horrific rape of an enslaved girl named Harriet by a white man and an enslaved man in Virginia.[54] He also considers scattered court evidence about enslaved men raping slave women in Virginia, writing, "The circumstances through which these isolated

cases appeared…are murky," and he believes these cases only made it to the courts because the parties involved belonged to different masters who then sought financial redress.[55]

So we return, then, to money, and the profits to be made from enslaved property. Keen to maximize financial returns through "encouraging" their enslaved women to bear valuable infants, and also influenced by discourses about "breeding" drawn from agricultural realms, some slaveholders forced female slaves into forms of wedlock with men they did not love, men who then forcibly imposed themselves upon these women. Indeed, the lack of legality for enslaved people's marriages meant that individual conceptions of what constituted a "husband" or "wife" varied, and consequently slaveholder and slave understandings of these terms were sometimes at odds. A combination of patriarchal power structures and a more general acceptance of male violence meant some enslaved women endured years of repeated rapes within intimate relationships. Their experiences allow for the situation of rape within a broad spectrum of long-term violent exploitation of women. Enforced, violent, penetrative sexual intercourse sat at one end of this spectrum that encompassed a range of different forms of physical and psychological abuse with varying degrees of severity.

Despite all these conceptual and methodological difficulties, a detailed reading of available WPA testimony about sexual assaults by black men under slavery makes it possible to reach some conclusions about how women involved remembered rape. Some respondents forced into marriage by their owners against their will echo the language of slaveholders about "breeding." These interviewees also drew a distinction between the idea of love as an act of freedom and their situation as enslaved people where wedlock could be imposed upon them, as the opening vignette from Mary Gaffney conveys.[56] Gaffney's experiences hence support Angela Davis's ideas about "myth of matriarchy" and she was not alone in facing

intimate sexual exploitation or in her conceptualization of it. When other female WPA respondents recalled violent and abusive husbands, they commonly blamed slaveholders for forcing or otherwise cajoling them into marriages with men they did not love, rather than blaming the enslaved men, because they recognized men as fellow victims of bondage. But because the majority of enslaved people fought to marry for love and romance was important to enslaved communities, slaveholders' attempts at "breeding" were highly galling to say the least.[57]

For example, in Texas, Rose Williams's slaveholder, Hawkins, told her when she was just 16 to go and live with a man named Rufus. Naively, Rose thought that Hawkins intended her to perform domestic work for this man, but when he climbed into her bed at night, she realized his intentions and protected herself from his advances with a poker. Rose then attempted to free herself from the situation by approaching Mrs Hawkins for help, but this came to nothing – and the indifference of Rose's mistress harks recent anti-essentialist historiography about white women's support of the regime.[58] Rose's master then told her to raise children with Rufus or risk a whipping. She said, "I thinks about master buying me off the block and saving me from being separated from my folks, and about being whipped at the stake….What am I to do? So I decides to do as the master wish and so I yields."[59]

Rose's heartbreaking dilemma reveals the anguish of enslaved women being forced to make pragmatic "choices" in life when all their options were extremely undesirable. This tactic of placating violent or potentially violent husbands has been used by wives in both historic and more modern contexts, but Rose had to placate both husband and master.[60] Rufus's voice is also lacking here. No doubt he felt his expectation of sexual relations with a woman deemed to be his wife was reasonable, and in this sense both Rufus and Rose were victims of slaveholders' power, as Thomas Foster has noted.[61] But Rose also disliked Rufus

and was fully aware of his ability, as a man, to impose himself on her. Their relationship did not survive through emancipation (unlike Mary Gaffney's), and Rose left Rufus shortly thereafter. However, his sexual assaults upon her resulted in her bearing two children to him, ultimately what her slaveholder wanted all along.[62]

Speaking in a more generalized, even a signifying way, Sam and Louisa Everett told their WPA interviewer that their master, "Big Jim," forced men and women into sexual relations if he thought they might have "strong, healthy offspring" regardless of whether they were married to other people. Their shocked interviewer, Pearl Randolph, described how Big Jim sometimes forced slaves to consummate relationships in his presence. She described these events as "orgies" where Big Jim and his acquaintances sometimes became sexually involved with the enslaved women present and forced the "unhappy husbands and lovers of their victims" to watch. Louisa then added that she and Sam had to quote "do it" in Big Jim's presence, after which Jim considered them man and wife. Their copulation hence seemed to have served as some sort of horrific wedding ceremony watched by voyeuristic white men.[63]

Well aware of her own (and her children's) financial value, Louisa poignantly noted, "Me and Sam was a healthy pair and had fine, big babies, so I never had another man forced on me, thank God. Sam was kind to me and *I learnt to love him* [italics added]."[64] After emancipation the couple then sharecropped in Georgia for a number of years before managing to buy a farm. However, in their old age they moved to Florida to live with one of their sons.[65] That Louisa resigned herself to developing feelings of affection over time is incredibly important. She, along with other enslaved women, grew to love the man "selected" for her without her consent or approval, and in this sense some slaves' relationships might have resembled more contemporary arranged marriages as well as European pre-modern unions where issues of pragmatism and property dictated family wedlock choices more than

"modern" notions of romantic love. Enslaved people were, of course, early pioneers in the latter since they lacked property themselves.[66]

While the Everetts' interview reveals something of how Pearl Randolph wanted to present slavery (she was, unusually, an African American WPA interviewer), it is significant that Louisa appears grateful to have never had another man "forced on her."[67] Enslaved women resigned themselves to their dual sexual exploitation by white and black men, even as they also recognized enslaved men as fellow victims. These women showed nuance, understanding, and pragmatism. Sometimes forced by white men to enter intimate relationships with men they did not love, women accepted that they were powerless to change their situation, so instead they tolerated men's sexual advances, and some hoped they might be able to develop romantic or at least more affectionate feelings towards their "husbands" over time, just as Mary Gaffney and Louisa Everett (but not Rose Williams) did.

From a male perspective, Willie McCullough conveyed similar sentiments about the ability of enslaved women to develop emotional attachments to men chosen by slaveholders to be their husbands. Although born in South Carolina after emancipation, McCullough conveyed in some detail the stories his mother had passed on to him as a child. McCullough claimed neither his mother nor his grandmother could choose their husbands while enslaved, and when his mother reached sixteen years of age:

> …her master [Billy Cannon] went to a slave owner nearby and got a six-foot nigger man, almost an entire stranger to her, and told her she must marry him. Her master read a paper to them, told them they were man and wife and told this negro he could take her to a certain cabin and go to bed. This was done without getting her consent or even asking her about it. Grandmother said that several different men were put to her just about the same as if she had been a cow or sow.

But he later added that his mother "loved" his father, and they wed before American law immediately after emancipation.[68] McCullough also probably used agricultural language which likened enslaved women to breeding animals in order to convey the callousness of slaveholders' policies. Likewise, Henry Wright described a lack of female agency when entering wedlock. Men on his North Carolina plantation simply asked for their master's consent to marry any woman they chose. While sometimes the woman in question had to agree to the marriage, if she was a "prolific breeder" and the man a "strong, healthy individual," then the woman "was forced to take him as a husband whether she wanted to or not."[69]

Similarly, Mary Ingram recalled how women were denied agency in choosing marital partners. That task fell instead to their masters, especially if the women were "portly and well-formed".[70] Ingram said her mother went through this experience (although she elaborated no more on her father other than to say that he belonged to a different slaveholder), and she also hinted that she herself had been "selected" for an enforced sexual relationship as well. Her interviewer, Sheldon F. Gauthier, then seemingly asked Ingram why the women involved did not reject such advances. He received a tart response:

> W'y don' weuns refus? Shucks, man! Yous don' know w'at yous says. De rawhide whup keeps you f'om refusin'. I's know 'cause I'se see de young girls cryin', an' deys gits whupped 'cause deys stubbo'n. De ol' nigger women 'vise de girls dat 'twarnt no use to refuse. Dat it mjus' makes it wo'se fo' dem. Dat deys git de whuppin' an' have to do de same. Now, warnt dat awful to treat humans dat way?[71]

So despite their best efforts, more senior women were unable to protect younger females from sexual assault, instead they sought only to advise about how best to survive sexual violence. Indeed, an acceptance of their lot in an attempt at self-preservation – merely survival -- was hence the only available option to many women, women who mostly hoped to

develop some emotional attachment to the spouses selected for them over the longer term, so that their future might be more tolerable than their present.

Finally, Lizzie Grant also remarked that her slaveholder forced her into a marriage so that she would bear him valuable children. She described her wedding while enslaved in Virginia as follows:

> I had on a plain white dress trimmed with some cloth dyed from poke root berries. No shoes as I was barefooted the day I was married to that boy and Master made me marry him as we were going to raise him more slaves. Master said it was cheaper to raise slaves than it was to buy them….I was about 17 years old when I was given to my young Master, me and the man that I called my husband. So our young Master put us to live together to raise from just like you would stock today. They never thought anything about it either. They never cared or thought of our feelings in the matter, of course we got used to one another and never thought anything about the way they put us to live.[72]

Lizzie and her husband had nine children together, but in her 17 transcribed pages of testimony she never once revealed his name, mentioning only "my man" or "my husband" whenever she referred to him, a man who had died some 30 years prior to her WPA interview. Historians have to speculate about Lizzie Grant's feelings. Perhaps she was still smarting from the indignity of having no input into whom she could wed? Maybe she never really reconciled herself to the idea of this man as her "husband," at least in a romantic sense? Significantly, the couple do not appear to have legalized their marriage after emancipation. However, Grant noted that she had never married "again" after his death.[73] So while her views are opaque, they suggest that women accepted intimate relationships under enslavement took various forms, and can be situated on a spectrum where issues of consent and acceptance differed among women and over time.

The Emancipation Act of 1865 had important ramifications for previously enslaved women who had been victims of rape and domestic abuse within marriage. Women linked

emancipation in a legal, more universal sense, with the personal desire for individual liberty to choose one's spouse for romantic love. Freedom enabled escape from the hardships inflicted by slavery and one's gender. So while the meta-narrative of freedom stresses the importance of enslaved couples utilizing Union army clergymen or others to formalize their marriages under American law, another strand of this journey into freedom relates to formerly enslaved women who used emancipation to escape unhappy spousal relationships in which they had been victims of sexual abuse.[74]

Rose Williams left her "husband" after the war. She told her WPA interviewer she never married, conveying how she never really accepted her relationship with Rufus as a legitimate -- albeit extra-legal -- form of wedlock despite having children with him. "After what I does for de massa, I's never wants no truck with any man," she proclaimed.[75] Likewise, Leslie Schwalm has detailed how other formerly enslaved women complained to Freedmen's Bureau officials about abusive husbands, and even though this kind of evidence speaks to physical rather than sexual abuse, they may have suffered sexual violence at the hands of their spouses since wife rape is more common in marriages characterized by physical violence, as contemporary research has shown.[76] WPA testimony also reveals an example of a man leaving a woman when Ephom Banks described how his father, having been brought to Mississippi by his slaveholder was "put" in a house with a woman he "didn't like or want." He later married another woman who gave birth to Ephom sometime after emancipation.[77]

For women involved in problematic relationships, freedom brought continuities rather than changes. WPA testimony suggests formerly enslaved women simply grew to accept (and sometimes even to feel affection for) the "husbands" chosen for them by slaveholders, and they remained with these men after emancipation, raising their families together in pragmatic

fashion. The relative lack of evidence about black-on-black rape and sexual violence means that historians have to think differently about how sexual abuse affected enslaved people. Women who commented on sexual assaults within intimate relationships attributed this, at least in part, to the nature of the regime. They blamed both individual slaveholders and the unrelenting need of slavery for more valuable children for the violence they endured. These women ultimately believed whiteness, rather than gender, granted the power and privilege to abuse. And these views then fed into a more collective memory of sexual assault under slavery that minimized the violence women received at the hands of black men precisely because the rapes they endured by whites were so systematic and endemic. More modern psychological theories such as that of dissociation also provide a way of seeing how enslaved women might have attempted to negotiate and survive rape and sexual violence. They sought, simply, to block out their experiences and not to remember them. Women detached themselves in an attempt to preserve their sense of self.

In a recent article on disability among enslaved people, Jeff Forret argues that differences in disability by gender were minimal, writing, "That twice as many female 'idiots' as male lived in the sample sugar parishes of Louisiana in 1860, or that all of the 'deaf and dumb' slaves in the Mississippi counties were female, can best be chalked up to coincidence."[78] But why do the females outnumber the males in both examples? Might some, or even just one, of the women slaveholders labelled as "deaf and dumb" or "idiotic" have been victims of sexual violence (probably inflicted by white men)? Might they have only been "deaf and dumb" or "idiotic" in the presence of whites?[79] Historians should be at liberty to speculate, even in the absence of evidence, that this was a possibility. Some enslaved women might, wittingly or unwittingly, have lived a life of silence in an attempt to forget the violent and intimate

violations of their bodies. In more modern times Maya Angelou described how she rendered herself mute after suffering sexual violence as a child by her mother's partner who was subsequently murdered. As she put it, "I had to stop talking."[80] Moreover, there is no reason why enslaved women might not have behaved in the same way. Contemporary research has shown how victims of marital rape suffer additional feelings of betrayal, isolation, entrapment and an inability to trust when compared with rape victims of men other than their partners.[81] Surely the same held true for enslaved women, the ultimate victims of patriarchal violence and men's desire for power.

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[1] Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, 1453.

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[2] See Perrin, "Resisting Reproduction," 255-74; West and Shearer, "Fertility Control, Shared Nurturing, and Dual Exploitation."

[3] Perrin "Resisting Reproduction," 274. Likewise, Nicole Rousseau frames women's efforts to control their fertility though a paradigm of resistance. In denying slaveholders their children, enslaved women effectively disrupted the regime. See *Black Woman's Burden,* 67. Other historians who have written about women's ability to resist their enslavement through

their reproductive capacities include Bauer and Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," and Fox-Genovese, "Strategies and Forms of Resistance." Farrell Brodie writes more generally about the US in *Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America*, 52-54. Paton questions the extent to which enslaved women used reproduction as a means of resistance in "Maternal struggles and the Politics of Childlessness," 260-62.

[4] Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, 1453.

[5] Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, 1453-4.

[6] Parish, *Slavery: History and Historians*.

[7] Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role."

[8] Quoted in the *Guardian*, 22nd January 2017: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/22/angela-davis-womens-march-speech-countrys-history-cannot-be-deleted

[9] Davis gives her account of this experience in *An Autobiography*. See also Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 95; Connolly and Fuentes, "From Archives of Slavery to Liberated Futures"; and Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

[10] Tadman, "The Persistent Myth of Paternalism," 8-9. .

[11] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

[12] Baptist, "The Response," 193.

[13] Parish, *History and Historians*, 88.

[14] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?;* Scott, *The Southern Lady*; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*.

[15] Parish, *History and Historians*, chapter six.

[16] Ibid., x.

[17] This literature is extensive. See, for example, Berry, *Swing the Sickle*; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*; Malone, *Sweet Chariot;* Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We;* Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*; West, *Enslaved Women in America;* Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves.*

[18] See, for example, Baptist and Camp, *New Studies*, especially the introduction; Dunaway, *The African-American Family*, especially the introduction; Dusinberre, "Power and Agency"; Forret, *Slave Against Slave*; Johnson, "On Agency," especially 116; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 148-49; Patterson, *Rituals of Blood*, chapter one.

[19] See, for example, Burke, *On Slavery's Border;* Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South;* Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields;* Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*.

[20] See, for example, Lussana, *My Brother Slaves*; Friend and Glover, *Southern Manhood*; Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men."

[21] There is a plethora of recent literature on slavery and the development of modern capitalism. See, for example, Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; Guterl, "Slavery and Capitalism: A Review Essay"; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Nelson, "Who Put Their Capitalism in My Slavery"; Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*; Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism*. Amy Dru Stanley critiques some of these authors for their neglect of gender in "Histories of Capitalism and Sex Difference."

[22] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 72; West, *Enslaved Women in America*, chapter two.

[23] The AHRC-funded network, "Mothering Slaves: Motherhood, Childlessness and the Care of Children in Atlantic Slave Societies" (AH/L015501/1) resulted in two journal special editions: *Slavery and Abolition* 38, no. 2 (2017) and the *Women's History Review* (forthcoming, 2018).

[24] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 196.

[25] Davis, "Reflections," 5.

[26] White, "Female Slaves," 256.

[27] West with Knight, "Mothers' Milk."

[28] See, for example, Bourke, *Rape*, Painter, *Southern History*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, especially chapter three; Jennings, "Us Colored Women"; King, "Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things"; Livesey, "Conceived in Violence."

[29] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl;* McLaurin, *Celia.*

[30] Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 3. Rape is defined in this piece as non-consensual penetrative sex, but it is also used here in conjunction with the terms "sexual assault" and "sexual violence" in order to encompass a fuller range of sexual violence against women. For more on slavery and the law in the US, particularly in relation to black-on-black rape, see Getman, "Sexual Control in the Slaveholding South," 144.

[31] As argued by Elsa Barkley Brown, black women have learned to cover up and hide their sexuality, concerned their accounts of sexual abuse will not be believed because of racist stereotyping of black women and black men as "promiscuous" and governed by an innate and rampant sexuality, so cases of intimate domestic violence within wedlock simply never make it to the historical record. See "What Has Happened here?" 305-06; Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives."

[32] See Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 95. This article does not consider in any depth sexual assaults by black men in positions of power and authority such as slave drivers in order to focus upon intimate partner sexual violence, partly to highlight the methodological challenges this topic poses, but also because, as a historian of enslaved marriage, I'm interested in the meanings of intimate partnerships -- marriage or otherwise --under slavery. Issues of discord

within these relationships further reveal much about expected norms within enslaved communities.

[33] West, *Chains of Love*, chapter one.

[34] Bergen, *Wife Rape*, 4; Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 282; Purdy, "Marital Rape."

[35] For more on men's reasons for marital rape in a more modern context, see Bergen, *Wife Rape*, 19-24.

[36] Ibid., 2-3.

[37] Ibid., 127-28.

[38] Bourke, *Rape*, 76.

[39] For example, Brownmiller argued Eldridge Cleaver embraced myth of black rapist and that Emmett Till tried to exercise male privilege when he whistled at white woman. See *Against Our Will*, 247-248. Bettina Aptheker and Angela Davis questioned the "racist dimensions" of her book. See Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 280.

[40] For more on abolitionist tropes about "slave breeding," see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 121-4; Bell, "The Great Jugular Vein of Slavery," 1153-4.

[41] For more on slaveholders' attempts to influence the fertility of their enslaved women, see Barclay, "Bad Breeders and Monstrosities," especially 289-290; Paton, "Maternal Struggles"; West with Shearer, "Fertility Control."

[42] Smithers, *Slave Breeding*, chapter five.

[43] Anthony S. Parent and Susan Brown Wallace argue that slaveholders' attempts to "breed" their slaves using the language of domestic animals and market value was not lost on enslaved children, aware of their own value and also of their future value as reproducers. See "Childhood and Sexual Identity," especially 386-9.

[44] Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men," 457. Forret also argues that male violence in the quarters served as a means of constructing a masculine identity within a society that denied their manhood. See *Slave Against Slave*, 293. This nuanced view contrasts with that of bell hooks, who, writing in the 1980s, suggested black men held in bondage merely mimicked white men when sexually assaulting slave women. See *Ain't I a Woman,* 15, 35. She later addressed a lack of evidence and citations in her writing by claiming it was important for her to write for the widest possible audience. See "A Class Sister Act."

[45] Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 4.

[46] Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women."

[47] McDaniels-Wilson, "The Psychological Aftereffects," 193.

[48] See Harris, *From Mammies to Militants*.

[49] Belknap, *The Invisible Woman*, 269.

[50] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 153-173.

[51] For example, Forret, *Slave Against Slave*, especially 344-356.

[52] For more on this case, see Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household*, 67; Forret, *Slave Against Slave*, 354-55; Sommerville, *Rape and Race*, 65. Bardaglio notes that in 1860 Mississippi made it a crime for black men to rape or attempt to rape any girl under 12. See *Reconstructing the Household*, 68. Sommerville claims only children nine and under were protected from sexual predators in the US in "I was very much wounded," 136-37.

[53] See King, "Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things," 181-84.

[54] Forret, *Slave Against Slave*, 352-354.

[55] Ibid., 349.

[56] For more on the juxtaposition between free love (the antithesis of slave breeding) and slavery, see Stanley, "Slave Breeding and Free Love," 139-143. See also Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, 1453.

[57] West, *Chains of Love*, chapter one.

[58] Thavolia Glymph instead presents white women as "co-masters," complicit in the regime. See *Out of the House of Bondage*, 5 and 123. See also Knight, "Mistresses, Motherhood."

[59] WPA Slave Narrative Project: *Texas Narratives, Vol. 16, Part 4*, 176-78.

[60] Bergen, *Wife Rape*, 29.

[61] This point is made more broadly by Foster in "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men" 457.

[62] WPA Slave Narrative Project, *Texas Narratives, Vol. 16, Part 4*, 174. The two cases of Mary Gaffney and Rose Williams are often cited by historians. See West with Shearer, "Fertility Control."

[63] This evidence is highly unusual. Most formerly enslaved people interviewed by the WPA had wedding ceremonies. See West, *Chains of Love*, 30-34.

[64] WPA Slave Narrative Project: *Florida Narratives, Vol. 3*, 127-8.

[65] Ibid., 130-131.

[66] West, *Chains of Love*, chapter one.

[67] Randolph noted that the elderly couple found it difficult to convey the horrendous details of their sexual exploitation under enslavement. See WPA Slave Narrative Project, *Florida Narratives, Vol. 3*, 131; Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 180. For more on the racial background of the WPA interviewers, see Yetman, "An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives."

[68] WPA Slave Narrative Project, *North Carolina Narratives, Vol. 11, Part 2*, 78. See also Doddington, "Manhood, Sex, and Power."

[69] WPA Slave Narrative Project, *Georgia Narratives, Vol. 4, Part 4,* 201. For more on the values of enslaved women revered as "good breeders," see Berry, *Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, chapter one.

[70] Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, 1848.

[71] Ibid., 1848.

[72] Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, 1555-56.

[73] Ibid., 1553-67.

[74] Herbert Gutman details the extensive efforts of formerly enslaved people to marry under US law in *The Black Family*, chapter nine.

[75] WPA Slave Narrative Project, *Texas Narratives, Vol. 16, Part 4,* 178.

[76] In more modern contexts, wife rape is more likely to occur in marriages characterized by physical violence, see Bergen, *Wife Rape*, 16; Hasday, "Contest and Consent," 1498. Leslie Schwalm gives examples of women complaining to Freedmen's Bureau officials about abusive husbands in *A Hard Fight for We*, 234, 260-66.

[77] Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 1*, Vol. 6, Part 1, Mississippi Narratives, 103.

[78] Forret, "Deaf & Dumb," 514-15.

[79] This of course evokes an older historiography when John Blassingame considered the ways in which stereotypes of enslaved people such as "Sambo" reflected slaveholders' views more than those of the enslaved. See *The Slave Community*, chapter eight; Parish, *History and Historians*, 69.

[80] Angelou's experiences are discussed in King, "Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things," 187. See also Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 93.

[81] Russell, *Rape in Marriage*, 192-93; Hasday, "Contest and Consent," 1496-97.