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Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

West, E. (2019) The union of enslaved couples during the disunion of the nation: love, discord and separations in US slavery and thereafter. In: Grey, D. and Gregory, J. (eds.) Union and Disunion in the Nineteenth Century. Routledge, London. ISBN 9781138354302 Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/77948/>

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Publisher: Routledge

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**The Union of Enslaved Couples during the Disunion of the Nation: Love,
Discord, and Separations in US slavery and thereafter**

Emily West

Unions and disunions worked on many different levels in the nineteenth century. The US Civil War of 1861-5 wrenched the whole country apart and the American Union survived only because of the Northern (Unionist) victory, after which the defeated Southern states lost their dream of a new *Confederate* United States. They subsequently endured being forced back into a Union they had wanted to leave because of their desire for continued slaveholding and increased states' rights. Such meta-narratives of Union and disunion are well known, but this chapter takes a different approach in pursuing the meanings of union and disunion through people's intimate lives at a time of national upheaval.

Focusing on enslaved people in the US South, mostly those from South Carolina, who experienced the war first hand, this chapter explores the way in which enslaved people in the Southern states of the USA negotiated their marriages in late antebellum times and during the era of the Civil War and emancipation. It is difficult for historians to probe these more intimate lives of enslaved people, so often lacking in written testimony and hard to decipher from surviving evidence. Significantly, as non-citizens of the US, the law did not recognise enslaved people's marriages as valid, but tradition, custom, and predominantly Christian religious practice meant that wider Southern society recognised that enslaved people should (and did) enter wedlock. Profit-hungry enslavers had every reason to encourage these marriages since every child born to enslaved women they owned added to their wealth. So slaveholders

frequently became involved in their enslaved people's intimate relationships, their interventions ranging from arranging religious services and celebrations at marriage ceremonies (whether wanted or not), to more coercive attempts to persuade, cajole, and sometimes even to force, their enslaved people into wedlock. Slaves challenged this involvement. Rebecca Fraser has uncovered the ways in which enslaved people fought for the ability to engage in courtship on their own terms in North Carolina. Even wedding ceremonies themselves, where couples often jumped over a broom, were contested events between the enslaved and slaveholders according to research by Thomas Will and Tyler Parry.¹

The institution of slavery unsurprisingly caused problems for enslaved people's marriages and meant that a state of union could easily tip over unto disunion. Issues facing enslaved couples included their relative lack of control over visiting arrangements when their marriages crossed farms or plantations, the ultimate authority of enslavers to physically control people (and sexually assault enslaved women), and the impact of sale and separations upon an institution allegedly sacred under God. Moreover, the Civil War and emancipation brought a new range of problems for couples seeking to preserve their matrimonial unions. The thirteenth Constitutional Amendment of 1865, which legally abolished slavery in the USA, presented freedpeople with more issues around their marriages' legitimacy and even their desirability, within an already complicated context of wedlock.

Despite all the complications that entering the union of matrimony under bondage might cause, enslaved people undoubtedly wanted to marry because wedlock provided a bulwark against the oppression of slavery and enabled intimate partners

with the ability to support one another in difficult times. Prioritizing the evidence of enslaved and formerly enslaved people themselves, this chapter explores the changing nature of friction between enslaved and free couples from antebellum times through the Civil War and emancipation. It suggests that clearly defined gendered roles constituted the main source of tension between enslaved spouses in the antebellum era. While both partners worked together with their wider familial networks to survive the regime, a failure to fulfil one's gendered domestic chores often resulted in significant marital strife. Intimate partner abuse also caused marital upsets, although most enslaved people cajoled into wedlock grew to love their spouses over time.

Negotiating marriages under slavery was hard enough, but the Civil War years presented enslaved couples with new sources of tensions, especially for those families seeking refuge behind Union army lines. Army officials often had expectations of gendered roles that did not fit the typical familial dynamics of enslaved people. War understandably exacerbated spousal antagonisms and conflicts, as well as providing men and women with different routes to freedom. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the ways in which emancipation in 1865 affected the marital relationships of formerly enslaved people. The majority chose to validate their marriages under American law as they could now legally do so, while others linked personal freedom with the wider process of emancipation and chose to leave those to whom they were unhappily wed. Individual manifestations of union and disunion hence replicated in microcosm the broader upheavals endured by the USA as a whole.

Historiographical context

Historians have thankfully now moved away from ‘matriarchy versus patriarchy’ debates about whether men or women dominated enslaved people’s households largely based upon their own preconceptions and white paradigms about household structure.² But until fairly recently, the nature of the intimate unions between enslaved spouses was relatively neglected. Most previous research on enslaved people’s community lives focused on camaraderie and support networks along, rather than across, gendered lines because spousal relationships have proven rather more difficult to probe and questions about the nature of enslaved people’s intimacies under the regime remain.³ For example, it is now accepted that the majority of enslaved people appear to have settled into heterosexual marital relationships and spent a good deal of time with their spouses once work for slaveholders had been completed. However, a lack of primary evidence means same-sex intimate relationships are likely to remain something for historians to speculate on.⁴

Historians such as Larry Hudson, and John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, have drawn parallels between wedlock under slavery and in pre-capitalist agricultural communities elsewhere in the world. Romantic love in marriage unions came secondary to practical and pragmatic considerations that facilitated survival, including physical strength, health, and technical and mental ability.⁵ Conversely, I have argued elsewhere that enslaved people were early pioneers in marrying for romantic love because they had nothing to gain or lose materially.⁶ Tera Hunter’s recent book on nineteenth-century African-American marriage argues enslaved marriage was ultimately tautological – neither prohibited nor legally possible. She argues marriages during – and after slavery too – complicated forms, and has brought depth and nuance to understandings of enslaved couples’ heterosexual relationships.⁷

Spousal hostilities, sexual or domestic abuse and adultery within slave marriage have been rather neglected in historical analysis until fairly recently. Jeff Forret's *Slave Against Slave* claims that disputes and violence within enslaved communities often revolved around notions of honour and constructions of masculinity and femininity that displayed parallels with those of white society. It is harder still to find evidence about sexual assaults within enslaved communities rather than those inflicted by white slaveholders although some historians are tackling black-on-black sexual violence within the context of wider patriarchal structures. This research draws upon the pioneering theoretical works of Susan Brownmiller on rape and Darlene Clark Hine's 'culture of dissemblance' whereby women's reluctance to divulge details of black-on-black sexual violence meant many cases of domestic sexual violence simply never made it to the historical record.⁸

Because evidence is missing from historical records it does not necessarily correlate that it did not happen. This chapter therefore assesses disunion within marriage from the antebellum era of slavery through to the early days of freedom, especially using Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviews with formerly enslaved people from the late 1930s and published autobiographies written before emancipation. It also uses various kinds of evidence from slaveholders when they became involved in their slaves' domestic relationships, including plantation rulebooks, letters and diaries. But the chapter also offers some speculations about feelings and emotions in the past – highly relevant sentiments when considering romantic relationships and their changing nature over time. The historian Stephanie Camp writes:

documentation does not indicate significance; indeed many social truths are unspoken and therefore undocumented ... we [historians] can also employ the imagination, closely reading our documents in their context and speculating about their meaning.

Hence the idea that archives have 'silences' that historians should address has increasingly gained credence, especially among historians of subaltern women, for whom few written sources remain.⁹

Antebellum-era marriages and gendered expectations

Most antebellum-era enslaved couples found their marriages a place of refuge and a mechanism of support under adversity but their partnerships were also subject to complex issues of discord. These included the tiredness caused by performing hard labour for slaveholders as well as working on behalf of their families; the stresses caused by trying to raise children within an institution of bondage; the everyday threat of sale and separation; the loneliness suffered by those living within cross-plantation families (most of whom only saw their spouse once or twice a week unless they risked 'illicit' visits without a written pass); and sexual assault upon enslaved women by white men.¹⁰

Enslaved couples' disputes often revolved around onerous domestic responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, fishing, hunting, washing, making and repairing clothes or utensils; making goods that could be sold to supplement the family's income; raising children and sometimes tending animals. The separation of these tasks reveals marked gender divisions. Men fished and hunted, were more often able to leave their

plantations, and to acquire the skills needed to make and sell supplementary goods to support their families.¹¹ Husbands and enslavers expected women to raise the children, cook, clean, wash, and repair.¹² So women lived in a more restricted and geographically contained domestic space than their male partners. However, the most common exception to manifestations of these gendered roles was found within the South Carolina and Georgia lowcountry coastal regions, where enslavers made use of a ‘gang’ labour system to grow cotton and rice that permitted enslaved people a small amount of time to themselves at the end of the day when all their ‘tasks’ had been completed. The task system hence differed from the more common ‘gang’ system of labour utilized elsewhere in the slave South, where people simply laboured from ‘sundown to sunup’ under the watchful eye of an overseer or driver. Importantly, the task system enabled enslaved people to tend their own small plots of land known as ‘patches’ where men, women and children all worked together in a collective enterprise growing provisions and supplementing their meagre and monotonous diets.¹³

Life was undoubtedly hard for all enslaved people whether they worked under the task or gang system, but all women had extra burdens placed upon them because they were expected to bear and raise valuable children in *addition* to performing work for slaveholders and household chores for their families, increased their levels of exhaustion, and contributed to friction between spouses. Female slaves worked a ‘double day’ before other women in American society, a point that puts the notion of African-American households as America’s first ‘modern’ families in a rather more negative light.¹⁴ WPA interviews with formerly enslaved people supports this assertion of a ‘double day’ of labour. Chana Littlejohn recalled that slaveholders

excused sick women from fieldwork but had to do domestic chores instead.¹⁵

Benjamin Russell described enslaved mothers devoting Saturday afternoons to domestic work such as washing. Enslavers thus granted female fieldworkers with children ‘time off’ on a Saturday afternoon, but only to ‘wash’ and care for their children, and owners revoked this ‘freedom’ at busy times of year such as during the annual harvest.¹⁶

Enslaved communities did not tolerate any perceived ‘laziness’ among women or men when it came to domestic responsibilities. The autobiographer Charles Ball related the story of an enslaved woman, Lydia, who was married to a man who ‘maintained ... a kind of lazy dignity at home’. He also beat his wife.¹⁷ Ball attributed the behaviour of Lydia’s husband to his unusual background; apparently he was an African prince. Ball’s comments therefore implicitly suggest that the norm among most American-born slaves was towards spousal support; conflict and disunion only ensued when a partner ‘failed’ in their household responsibilities. Ball hence drew a distinction between himself, American born and virtuous, and the African born man, who was not, a tactic he no doubt hoped would endear him to his largely abolitionist, Northern readership.

Enslaved people placed a great deal of emphasis on these gendered roles because the system of bondage worked to undermine them. Slaveholders, not husbands, provided food, shelter and clothing for families. Likewise, enslavers dually exploited enslaved women as labourers and reproducers – expecting them to engage in hard physical labour as well as bear and rear valuable children – and their labour undermined contemporary notions of femininity within wider white society that emphasized piety,

purity, submissiveness and domesticity.¹⁸ In short, enslaved women's work enabled white women, especially those who lived on wealthy plantations with many enslaved people, to use their race-based privilege to live lives full of leisure and luxury, albeit within a narrowly defined sphere of 'ladylike' femininity. Writing to her sister-in law, Maria, Amelia Lines (known as 'Jennie') wrote that without 'help': 'I could never look nice myself, keep my baby or my house clean.'¹⁹ Consequently then, the use of traditional 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles among enslaved people therefore served as an indirect means of resistance because couples worked together in their attempts to strengthen wider gender conventions that the institution of slavery constantly undermined.

In more intimate realms of life, marital disharmony sometimes arose as a consequence of white men's sexual assaults upon enslaved women, although enslaved men commonly responded to such violence by attempting to help or protect abused women, again operating within a prism of more conventional gendered norms.²⁰ But sometimes men rejected women when they felt they had engaged in 'voluntary' sexual relations with white men rather than simply being victims of white men's sexual violence. Henry Bibb described in his autobiography how he believed his wife, Malinda, had consensual sex with her master. He wrote: 'She has ever since been regarded as theoretically and practically dead to me as a wife.'²¹ Significantly, Bibb did not mention the extent to which his wife may have been forced into such a relationship, and that women's responses to white men's sexual violence can be placed on a spectrum. Obviously, the power dynamic involved in women's relationships with their enslavers meant that their sexual relationships could never be purely loving and consensual.

Conforming to wider nineteenth-century behavioural norms, slaveholders sanctioned enslaved men's use of violence to control their wives, sometimes in an official capacity, but otherwise more informally. For example, the rulebook of John Miller's Cornhill plantation contained the entry: 'No man must whip his wife without my permission.'²² Miller's recording of such a rule suggests that he expected at least some level of domestic violence among his enslaved people. The South Carolinian slaveholder Emily Wharton Sinkler briefly alluded to marital disharmony in a letter to her mother when she said that her enslaved man, Mollo, had complained that his wife was continually 'fighting and scratching' him.²³ John Springs, of York County, South Carolina, believed one of his enslaved men took his own life because his wife was a 'merciless woman'.²⁴

A case of alleged domestic abuse by her slave Jim, upon his wife, Maria, caused great concern for Elizabeth Franklin Perry of Greenville, South Carolina. In a letter to her husband, she wrote that Jim had apparently beaten Maria. Elizabeth then went to their cabin, where she found Maria with 'everything about her filthy, the floor not even swept, the beds, pails etc ... all dirty ... I talked to her and gave her some good advice about doing better.' Jim admitted he had struck Maria 'about three blows,' that she was 'obstinate ... and lazy and dirty, that she will not clean the house, wash his clothes or mend them, or even wash hers.' Mrs Perry thus told her husband: 'I want her sold to the first trader who passes ... Now I have done with Maria ... I have never liked her.'²⁵ The violence towards Maria was seen as justifiable because she was not adept in her role as homemaker and Elizabeth had no empathy for her.²⁶

Sexual violence and enslaved people's marriages

Violence and discord within enslaved people's marriages sometimes took sexual forms.²⁷ So nineteenth-century patriarchal power structures within which societies had a more general acceptance of husbands' right to use violence to control their wives and ensure their own sexual satisfaction meant that some enslaved women endured years of sexual violence within wedlock, although evidence on these sensitive, intimate themes is understandably scant. Only in the second half of the twentieth century was rape within marriage recognised in the US, meaning the phenomenon is hard for historians to locate in surviving sources. If one adds to this the archival challenges present when researching slavery this makes the topic harder still to investigate.²⁸

However, a careful reading of available testimony throws up some instances of enslaved marriages characterised by men's sexual violence towards women, and slaveholders often enabled these abusive relationships through forcing women into forms of 'wedlock' with men they did not love, men who then forced themselves upon their new 'wives'. Enslavers had a vested interest in encouraging sexual relationships among their chattel (even if not consensual) as part of their pronatalist policies designed to increase their number of enslaved children, because children grew into valuable adults. For example, Mary Gaffney told her WPA interviewer she hated the man that her enslaver forced her to marry: 'I would not let him touch me and he told Master, and Master gave me a real good whipping, so that night I let him have his way'.²⁹ Perhaps Gaffney's husband believed it was his right to impose

himself on his new wife. Gaffney herself also seemed resigned to the fact that she would have to submit to him.

Similarly, in an often-quoted example of sexual violence within wedlock, Rose Williams, of Texas, explained how her master, Hawkins, told her, at just sixteen, how she had to set up home with a man named Rufus. Rose assumed, naively, but understandably considering her youth, that Hawkins expected her to perform domestic work for Rufus, but the reality was more chilling. Rose only realised Rufus's intentions when he climbed into her bed at night; she then fought him off with a poker. However, Hawkins subsequently threatened Rose with a whipping if she did not relent. Rose henceforward allowed Rufus to have sex with her so she would not be punished, and her heartbreaking dilemma reveals something of the anguish of enslaved women forced to make horrendous pragmatic choices in life when all their options were undesirable. Rufus's voice is also lacking here. No doubt he felt his expectation of sexual relations with a woman deemed to be his wife were reasonable, in this sense of course both were victims of the power of slaveholders, a point made more broadly by the historian Thomas Foster.³⁰

Enslaved marriages during the Civil War

Moving chronologically from antebellum times to the Civil War and era of emancipation, the great conflict that wrenched the USA in two undoubtedly made enslaved men's and women's lives more complicated and more different to each others. As men departed for the battlefield, slave women often remained alone with white women on plantations and farms on what Laura Edwards has described as the

‘second home front’.³¹ Unions and disunions in the nation as a whole hence again played out in microcosm within white and black southern homes and communities.

War separated married couples both black and white. The Confederate army first attempted to enforce enslaved men into the military at state level, followed by the Confederate Impressment Law in 1863. Left alone with white women on farms and plantations, women had to support themselves both practically and emotionally.

Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 which freed all enslaved people in states that had seceded from the Union also led, unsurprisingly, to a rush by formerly enslaved men to join the Union forces, just as Lincoln hoped it would.

Couples not separated by men’s departure to the battlefield sometimes fled slavery together, seeking the relative safety of Union forces within their makeshift camps.

Behind Union lines, black couples found their relationships challenged in new ways.

The Union forces provided black men with work, and expected them to provide for their families. But this was both unfamiliar and simply impossible for black men who had previously lived under slavery. Couples ended up confined within overcrowded and unsanitary refugee camps where they lacked adequate food, clothing and shelter in conditions sometimes materially worse than slavery itself.³²

Moreover, black women in Union camps were not treated as subjects in their own right and were perceived only as the *wives* of contraband men. Union attitudes were inherently ironic because no slave women had been fully dependent, in a material sense, upon their husbands. But Union policy was based upon free white middle-class notions of female dependency.³³ So black women in camps, displaying the same sense of initiative as they had during antebellum days, relied on their enterprising spirits, for

example by selling or bartering their own produce. For example WPA respondent Ellen Campbell, again conveying typically gendered roles, recalled women travelling from the camp to rivers to wash the troops' clothes in return for money or produce.³⁴ Such additional work undoubtedly added to the marital strains couples already faced.

Susie King Taylor, an African American nurse in the Civil War who later (and uniquely) published her memoirs, likewise remembered black women's enterprising spirit in using gendered expectations to find new forms of work to support their families after Union forces occupied the South Carolina lowcountry area from 1861 onwards:

There were about six hundred men, women and children on St. Simon's, the women and children being in the majority....The first colored troops did not receive any pay for eighteen months, and the men had to depend wholly on what they received from the commissary, established by General Saxton. A great many of these men had large families, and as they had no money to support them, their wives were obliged to support themselves and children by washing for the officers of the gunboats and the soldiers, and making cakes and pies which they sold to the boys in camp.³⁵

Aside from creating a situation where enslaved couples in camps were unable to provide for themselves, Union forces also rather naively saw legal marriage as a solution to this problem. Legal wedlock proved to be a contentious issue for Union authorities, and black responses to their policies also varied. The Union army saw marriage as a solution to the alleged 'dependency' of black women within their

camps. Legal wedlock would render black women reliant upon their husbands, they mistakenly believed, *not* Union troops. But black women had their own views and acted on their own initiative. Some *wanted* to partake in the legal marriage ceremonies conducted by Union army clergymen. Enslaved wedlock had been illegal under American law, but *not* custom and practice, so some regarded the legal legitimization of their marriages as very important. Other women, however, questioned why this was necessary. Former slaves who had undergone wedding ceremonies conducted by a religious leader simply felt their marriages were already legal in the eyes of God. Historian Stephanie McCurry hence argues that regardless of whether they lived in Union or Confederate territory, enslaved men and women took very different paths to emancipation. The route of men was mostly military, but women's road was marital.³⁶ Furthermore, as persuasively argued by Tera Hunter, marriage served as an instrument of war as policy-makers grappled with the roles of black men and women within marriages that had no legal standing under enslavement.³⁷

Emancipation and thereafter

The Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment of 1865 ended slavery in the USA and this had important ramifications for previously enslaved couples, some of whom linked emancipation in a legal, universal sense, with a more personal sense of what freedom meant. Legal practice varied across the South. Some states required formerly enslaved couples to register their relationships but others did not, and not all couples chose to go down this route anyway.³⁸ While one meta-narrative of emancipation related to formerly enslaved couples using Union army clergymen and others to formalize their marriages, another strand of this journey into freedom relates to formerly enslaved

women who used emancipation to *escape* unhappy wedlock. Leslie Schwalm has detailed the experiences of women who complained to the Freedmen's Bureau (set up after the war to assist freedpeople in their new lives) about abusive husbands from whom they wished to separate. She notes that couples in disunion separated for a variety of reasons, including ill treatment and a failure to grant support for spouses and children.³⁹ Freedwomen increasingly expected husbands to provide.

Lucy Skipwith also used freedom's opportunities to leave her unsatisfactory marriage in Alabama. Unusual in that she wrote letters to her master during slavery and after, Skipwith described in 1865 how she had lived a 'life of trouble' with her enslaved spouse, Armistead, possibly including physical and or sexual abuse:

Hopewell, [Alabama,] December 7 1865

My dear Master:

I received your letter a few days ago. I was truly glad to see that you were still alive & not gone the way to all the Earth. I was sorry that I had to part with Armistead but I have lived a life of trouble with him, & a white man has ever had to Judge between us, & now to be turned loose from under a master, I know that I could not live with him in peace, therefore I left him. If you have any hard feelings against me on the subject, I hope that you will forgive me for Jesus sake.⁴⁰

Similarly, the formerly enslaved Texan woman Rose Williams left her 'spouse', Rufus, after the war. She told her WPA interviewer she never married, conveying

how she never really accepted her relationship with him as legitimate because her slaveholder forced her into an intimate relationship with Rufus.⁴¹

In contrast, most formerly enslaved couples who had been forced or otherwise cajoled into forms of wedlock by their enslavers more commonly tended to find that their relationships moved in the reverse direction: what was once disunion became more solidly a sense of union and continuities were more significant than changes for these couples. WPA testimony suggests formerly couples simply grew to accept (and sometimes even to feel affection for) each other, and they remained together after emancipation, raising their families in pragmatic fashion. This conveys a clear awareness of the impact of the slave regime upon intimate relationships because couples blamed their former slaveholders for forcing them together rather than each other. In this sense, they recognised their spouses as fellow victims of white enslavers' power and privilege to abuse. These views also subsequently 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 white men were so endemic and systemic.

Mary Gaffney therefore chose to stay with Paul through emancipation and the couple raised five children together.⁴² Lizzie Grant, also interviewed by the WPA about her life while enslaved in Virginia, described her wedlock as follows:

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.

Lizzie and her husband had nine children together and their marriage survived emancipation and her husband's subsequent death at the end of the nineteenth century. She never 'married' again.⁴³

Conclusions

The majority of enslaved marriages were characterized by great affection, with wedlock serving as a bulwark against the oppression of the regime, and marital relationships were supportive. However, it is also true that marriages were subject to significant tensions, some of which have affected all couples in intimate relationships across time and space while others were specific to slavery itself. Marriage could and did sometimes erupt into violence, or lead spouses to seek solace elsewhere.

Enslavement added a unique set of burdens and pressures to the lives of people seeking to make a shared life together despite the arduous nature of their work, the threat of sale and or separation, and the fear of violence – sexual or otherwise.

Moreover, tracking the changing dynamics of marriage from slavery through the Civil War to the era of freedom exposes how these burdens and pressures changed, but did not necessarily lessen. New forms of racial subjugation brought new challenges.

Despite some diverse experiences, this is essentially a story about continuities of racial oppression for black couples from the antebellum era to the time of Reconstruction despite their attempts to seek intimate unions on their own terms.

Notes

¹ For more on enslaved courtship and weddings, see R. Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 2007); E. West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004); T. E. Will, 'Weddings on Contested Grounds: Slave Marriage in the Antebellum South', *The Historian* 62 (Fall 1999), pp.99-117; T.D. Parry, 'Married in Slavery Time: Jumping the Broom in Atlantic Perspective', *Journal of Southern History* 81: 2 (2015), pp.273-312. The best overview of nineteenth-century black marriage is Tera Hunter's recent book, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017).

² Writing in the 1950s, Kenneth Stampp stressed the emasculation of enslaved fathers, unable to 'protect and provide' for their wives and families. Writers of the 1970s, notably Herbert Gutman, reacted against this 'myth of matriarchy' and stressed the strong role played by enslaved men as heads of households. In reaction, Deborah White questioned how far the pendulum should swing in favour of patriarchy. She also suggested that the loaded term 'matriarchy' be replaced with 'matrifocal' -- mother centred rather than mother-dominated. However, more than a decade before this, Angela Davis had demolished the entire matriarchy thesis when she noted how enslaved women's 'release' from contemporary ideals of femininity and integration into a productive workforce *in addition* to performing reproductive labour simply meant more work for them to perform outside the usual sphere of dull, boring monotonous domestic chores that have characterized the lives of so many women

across time and space. See K.M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York: Knopf, 1956); H.G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); D.G. White, 'Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South', *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983), pp.248-261, especially p.249 and p.256; A. Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves', *The Black Scholar* 3:4 (1971), pp.2-15.

³ Some historians have used the conceptual tools of historians of enslaved women to probe notions of masculinity under the regime, including the homosocial worlds of enslaved men, and also the impact sexual abuse had upon them. See S. Lussana, *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016); D. Doddington, *'Are You Men?': Contesting Manhood in the Slave South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); T.A. Foster, 'The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20: 3 (2011), pp.445-464.

⁴ Recent emphasis on overcoming archival silences offers exciting opportunities to explore same-sex desire under bondage. Orlando Patterson notes that since homosexuality has existed in other societies across time and space, the same would have been true of US slavery. See O. Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1998), p.289. See also A. I. Abdur-Rahrman, "'The Strangest Freaks of Despotism": Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives', *African American Review* 40:2 (2006), pp.223-237.

⁵ See L.E. Hudson Jr., *To Have and To Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), pp.157-158. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman have also claimed that, in their marriage

patterns, slave communities resembled certain preindustrial and peasant societies. See J. D’Emilio and E.B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.97. See also D. G. White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1985), p.150.

⁶ West, *Chains of Love*, p. 25.

⁷ Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock*, chapters one and two, especially p.77.

⁸ J. Forret, *Slave Against Slave: Plantation Violence in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); E. West, ‘Tensions, Tempers and Temptations: Marital Discord among Slaves in Antebellum South Carolina’, *American Nineteenth Century History* 5:2 (2004), pp.1-18; and ‘Reflections on the *History and Historians* of the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves: Enslaved Women and Intimate Partner Violence’, *American Nineteenth Century History*, 19:1 (2018), pp.1-21; D. Doddington, ‘Manhood, Sex, and Power in Antebellum Slave Communities’ in *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas* ed. by L. Harris and D. R. Berry (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2018), pp.145-158; S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1975), especially pp.153-173; D. C. Hine, ‘Rape and their inner lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thought on the Culture of Dissemblance’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14:4 (1989), pp.912-920.

⁹ S. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p.95. See also B. Connolly and M. Fuentes, ‘Introduction: From Archives of Slavery to

Liberated Futures?', *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 6:2 (2016), pp.106-116; S.V. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe* 12:2 (2008), pp.1-14.

¹⁰ For more on cross-plantation marriages, see West, *Chains of Love*, chapter two.

¹¹ For example, Charles Ball made wooden trays and bowls that he sold in order to support financially the family he lodged with. See *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York: Dover Publications, [1859], 1970), p.134. The ways in which men could acquire skills more easily than women is also considered in West, *Chains of Love*, p.92.

¹² On female roles within the slave home, see West, *Chains of Love*, pp.100-101.

¹³ Tending gardens or patches of land had become common in South Carolina from the 1820s onwards among slaves on both large and smallholdings. See Hudson, *To Have and To Hold*, p.10, pp.32-33; D. A. Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2010); J. Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.7; B. Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p.41.

¹⁴ Leslie Schwalm has warned historians against romanticizing the family life of enslaved women, writing that their 'social and reproductive' labour should be examined as critically as the work they performed for their owners. See L. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p.47. Deborah White noted how the absence of 'ownership' among enslaved men contributed to women's independence from them, meaning enslaved families were 'unusually egalitarian'. See *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, p.153, p.158.

¹⁵ WPA Slave Narrative Project, North Carolina Narratives, Vol. 11, Pt 2, p.57.

Federal Writers Project, United States Work Projects Administration; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

¹⁶ WPA Slave Narrative Project, South Carolina Narratives, Vol. 14, Pt 4, p.52; WPA Slave Narrative Project, North Carolina Narratives, Vol. 11, Pt 2, p.114 and p.179.

¹⁷ Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, p.197.

¹⁸ See B. Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,' in *Major Problems in American Women's History* ed. by M. B. Norton and R. Alexander (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1996), p.115. For more on the polarity between ideologies of black and white womanhood under slavery, see H. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), chapter two, and E. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp.50-51; Davis, 'Reflections', p.7.

¹⁹ Letter from Jennie to Maria, December 2nd, 1862, in A. A. Lines, *To Raise Myself a Little: The Diaries and Letters of Jennie, a Georgia Teacher, 1951-1886*, ed. Thomas Dyer (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1982), p.193.

²⁰ The systematic sexual abuse of enslaved women by white men has been well documented by historians. Angela Davis defined the rape of black women by white men under slavery as a form of 'institutional terrorism' as early as 1971. See 'Reflections'. Other key literature on the sexual assaults of enslaved women by white men includes S. Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Hine, 'Rape and The Inner Lives of Black Women'; W. King, "'Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things": The Sexual Abuse of African American Girls and Young Women in Slavery and Freedom', *Journal of*

African American History 99: 3 (2014), pp.173-196; D. M. Sommerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth Century South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

²¹ Bibb did however later explain that ‘I bring no charge of guilt against her, for I know not all the circumstances connected with the case’. See *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (New York, published by the author, 1849), pp.162-163.

²² ‘Negro Rules for Government’, Cornhill Plantation Book, 1827-1873, [Plantation of John B. Miller], McDonald-Furman Papers, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

²³ Emily Wharton Sinkler, letter to her mother, 11 December 1843, Emily Wharton Sinkler letters, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia South Carolina.

²⁴ John Springs, Letter to John Blackstone, 13 November 1845, Springs Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

²⁵ Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry, 11 May 1846, Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

²⁶ Thavolia Glymph argues persuasively that white women were ‘co-masters’ who were complicit in the regime. See T. Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.5, p.123.

²⁷ Some of these arguments appear in West, ‘Reflections on the *History and Historians*’.

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- ²⁸ By 1993 rape within marriage was deemed a crime in all 50 US states. It became illegal in England and Wales in 1991. See R. K. Bergen, *Wife Rape: Understanding the Response of Survivors and Service Providers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), p.4. See also E. B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p.282; Block, *Rape and Sexual Power*, pp.78-79.
- ²⁹ G.P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A composite Autobiography, Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press 1979), p.1453.
- ³⁰ WPA Slave Narrative Project: *Texas Narratives, Vol. 16, Part 4*, pp.176-78; Foster, 'The Sexual Abuse of Black Men', p.457 and *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019).
- ³¹ See L. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 'Introduction'.
- ³² J. Downs, 'The Other Side of Freedom: Destitution, Disease and Dependency among Freedwomen and Their Children during and after the Civil War' in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* ed. by C. Clinton and Nina Silber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.79.
- ³³ S. McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.273.
- ³⁴ WPA Slave Narrative Project: Georgia Narratives, Vol. 4, Part 4, p.225.
- ³⁵ S. K. Taylor, *Reminiscences of my Life in Camp: An African American Woman's Civil War Memoir* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, [1902], 2006), pp.14-16.
- ³⁶ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, p. 9, p.266.
- ³⁷ Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock*, chapter five, especially p.166.

³⁸ Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock*, p.213.

³⁹ Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We*, p.234, pp.260-66

⁴⁰ Letter from Lucy Skipwith to her master, quoted in Dorothy Sterling (ed.), *We are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984, 1997), p.310.

⁴¹ WPA Slave Narrative Project: Texas Narratives, Vol. 16, Part 4, p.174.

⁴² Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, p.1453.

⁴³ Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, Texas Narratives, pp.1553-1567.

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